

Genetically Modified Crops—What's the Problem?

— by *Shaun Daniel, Organizer*

Twelve years - that's how long it's been since the introduction of genetically modified (GM) crops in the United States - twelve years, in which the list of grievances grows against GM crops .

The most prevalent GM crop is Roundup Ready, meaning it is biologically engineered to survive applications of Monsanto's popular weed killer Roundup, generically known as glyphosate. Billed by powerful agri-technology corporations like Monsanto as a way for farmers to use less herbicides and increase their yields, the facts seem to speak otherwise. Since 1996, pesticide use on Roundup Ready crops has increased by 138 million pounds. With the introduction of herbicide-tolerant crops, Roundup use alone has increased by 700%. For example, while only 17% of alfalfa planted in the U.S is treated with herbicides, GM alfalfa encourages the use of herbicides where none was needed before.

The increase in herbicide use can also be attributed to the rise of Roundup-resistant weeds due to cross-pollination between common weed varieties and GM

crops. Such Roundup-resistant weeds thereby encourage the application of costlier and more toxic herbicides. Moreover, cross-pollinating crops like alfalfa and wheat increase the risk of contamination by GM varieties, which is a significant problem for farmers not wishing to grow GM crops.

The risks of GM crops are many for both producers and consumers.

For the farmer, there is the problem of genetic contamination because there are no laws requiring buffer zones between fields with GM crops and fields owned by farmers wishing to remain GM-free; there is the issue of unfair liability as farmers are forced to sign agreements that release Monsanto from liability for accidental contamination and farmers themselves are responsible for protecting their farms from contamination; there is increased pesticide use and the rise of Roundup Resistance;

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New sections!

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GM Crops Informational Tour

In late April, Oregon Rural Action, in partnership with Idaho Resource Council, the Western Organization of Resource Councils, and the Center for Food Safety, will host a series of public meetings on the potential economic harm to producers and consumers from the adverse effects of genetically modified alfalfa, wheat, and other crops. The first will be an evening presentation in Pendleton on April 21, followed by media work in La Grande and Baker City and another evening presentation on April 22 in Ontario. From there the tour will continue into Idaho for several more informational events.

Exact times and venues were still to be determined as the newsletter went to press, but confirmed speakers include Kevin Golden – an attorney with the Center for Food Safety – and Phil Geertson – an alfalfa seed producer from Greenleaf, Idaho, and lead plaintiff in a federal lawsuit that stopped the sale and planting of GM alfalfa until the USDA conducts an Environmental Impact Statement . Other speakers have been invited from Horizon Organics (White Wave Foods) and Eckenberry Farms, the largest alfalfa exporter in the U.S.

Call the Oregon Rural Action office for more information at (541) 975-2411 or email info@oraction.org.

Letter from the Director

Andrea Malmberg



The Radical Center

Over the last few decades, civic engagement based on animosity has consumed much of the time and energy of people who care about Oregon. Whether the issue was endangered species, public land grazing, preservation of open space, health care, or funding for schools, the combatants have fought long and hard.

What are the results of these efforts? Are our communities more prosperous? Have we slowed down environmental degradation and the decline of biological diversity? Are our public lands healthier? Are local businesses more profitable? Do we have better, more accessible health care? Are our food and energy systems more secure? As one Oregon Rural Action member pointed out, "It seems we have only scattered our energy to the winds."

The concept of the radical center, an idea that focuses on achieving goals by growing the center, gives me hope. Could we accomplish more if we identify shared values, realize that diversity means resiliency and work together to concentrate our energy instead of fighting the "other side"?

To avoid wasting time on things I cannot change, I use the marginal reaction test in many of my daily decisions. I ask myself, "Which action provides the greatest return for the energy spent?"

As I test the tactics of divisiveness and acrimony dominating civic and political life during the last few decades, I have come to the conclusion that they yielded little but hard feelings. In rural Oregon there are simply not enough of us to divide our communities and alienate our neighbors. We must create political mass. It all comes down to: "What action gives us the best marginal reaction? Will this action grow the energy center of our commonality?"

Through our conversations, I sense that you, too, want to engage differently. There is a feeling that positive, regenerative change can and will happen. There is a realization that we must mobilize the radical center so that we can find strength in our diversity and unity in our common values. The love of land and the rural way of life is pervasive here. That alone should give us plenty to work with.

What does growing the radical center look like? For one, we will turn away from the politics of bickering and division and work out a new politics - a politics of creative problem solving.

More specifically, the mobilization of the radical center has the potential to show:

- Environmentalists working constructively with the people who use natural resources to make a living and helping them overcome their challenges because they know that the health of our communities depends on sustainable land use.
- Those who make their living from the land proudly implementing progressively higher standards of stewardship because they know that the people who buy their products value ecological health and are willing to pay for it.
- Federal, state and local agencies focusing on tangible results rather than defending procedure because they have developed relationships based on trust with the community members they serve.
- Public officials sharing both authority and responsibility because it makes their work more efficient and effective.

(Continued on next page)

Oregon Rural Action

The Furrow is published four times each year by Oregon Rural Action. Oregon Rural Action supports and encourages community organizing around locally identified issues. Our members work together to promote healthy and sustainable rural communities and to ensure that all people have a voice in the decisions, policies, and systems that affect their lives.

Board of Directors: Cori Brewster, Nancy Gledhill, Randy Joseph, Ramon Lara and Rich Minogue

Local Chapters: Baker County, Blue Mountain and Snake River

Staff: Andrea Malmberg, Director; Shaun Daniel, Organizer; and Karen Wagner, Statewide Farmers' Market Promotion

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Member Spotlight

Chuck Koch

Chuck Koch was born and raised on a family farm in Mandan, North Dakota. After going to college and earning his bachelor's degree in psychology, Chuck moved back and forth between North Dakota and Oregon, returning several times to live in the Portland area. Midst his cross-country ramblings, he studied philosophy for a few years in Missouri. Inspired by the writings of Erich Fromm – who suggested that a psychologically balanced society is achieved through the individual's connection to the community – Chuck became interested in social change work. He got a job as a school psychologist near The Dalles, and at different points in time he worked as a social worker and also as a community organizer for the Community Action Team of Columbia County, which focused on such issues as housing rehabilitation and weatherization for low-income people and seniors.

After retiring, Chuck and his wife Kathleen were drawn to northeastern Oregon because of the terrain. Once settled, Chuck resumed his social involvement. Having previously been involved in such efforts, he was attracted to the vision and approach of Oregon Rural Action. He was a member of the steering committee that helped to launch the organization in 2001 and he served on the Board of Directors until this past winter. During his tenure he worked on food issues, renewable energy and fundraising, working to see Oregon Rural Action through tough financial times.

On the side, Chuck helped to form the Union County Renewable Energy Committee in 2006 and served as its Chair.

At present he continues to work with the Renewable Energy Committee, which he says is busy drafting policies for local, small-scale wind turbines and solar panels. He plans to volunteer some of his time, no doubt for social change work. He is writing a book and pursuing other ventures, including keeping up to date on Venezuelan politics and U.S.-Venezuelan relations.

Reflecting, he says that he has now lived outside of Elgin for as long as he lived in his childhood home, though he suggests that he may one day have to leave Eastern Oregon due to a lack of access to adequate health care. He asserts that this issue is of particular concern to rural areas like Union County, and he says he would be interested in seeing Oregon Rural Action address it. One thing is for sure, though – wherever you find Chuck, he is likely to be engaged in some sort of work for social change. Long may he keep at it.

Thank you, Chuck, for your time and support for Oregon Rural Action through the years.



Farmers' Market Schedules:

Baker City (Saturdays) Geiser-Pollman Park, 10am to noon (June-September) • **Enterprise (Thursdays)** In front of the Courthouse on Main Street, 4pm to 7pm (June-September) • **Halfway (Saturdays)** Downtown Halfway, 8am to 11am (June-September) • **Joseph (Saturdays)** In front of To Zion at Main and Joseph Street, 9am to 1pm (June-October) • **La Grande (Saturdays)** Max Square on corner of 4th and Adams 9am to noon (May-October) • **La Grande (Tuesdays)** Max Square on corner of 4th and Adams, 4pm to 6pm (July and August) • **Pendleton (Fridays)** On Main between Emigrant and Frazer, 4pm to dusk (May-October)

(The Radical Center, Continued from previous page)

- All of us making food choices that strengthen the bonds between our health, the health of the land and the health of local agriculturalists because we know that all of this is intimately connected.
- Citizens seeking common ground with City Hall and supporting local businesses because we know we are all in it together.

Oregon Rural Action is in a unique position to achieve all of this. We are an organization comprised of people who know the power of building commu-

nity. The community-organizing model opens the door for us to grow the radical center rather than deplete our ranks through partisan politics. In the spirit of community we know how to focus on addressing the causes of problems rather than dwelling on the problems themselves. We can take back our rural communities from the decades of acrimony that jeopardize much of what we all love and value. By reaching across lines of divisiveness, learning from our differences, and taking the radical step of building the center we will move our communities forward to restore ecological, social, political, and economic health.

Oregon Rural Action News

POCO Training in Billings

In late February Organizer Shaun Daniel flew to Billings to attend the four-day Principles of Community Organizing (POCO) training. Each year the training is put on by the Western Organization of Resource Councils (WORC), of which Oregon Rural Action is one of seven member groups. In attendance were over twenty-five people from within the WORC network and its allied organizations, all come together for several days of intensive training on the essentials of community organizing.

The topics of the sessions ranged from organizing theory to campaign strategy, and from how to hold good meetings to the importance of incorporating fundraising into all aspects of one's work. The session facilitators were all experienced community organizers from within the WORC network. They kept the participants busy with a variety of individual and small-group work, brain-storming sessions, and role plays. They even led a sing-along during a session on the importance of celebrating successes.



The participants were also treated to a tour of “Home on the Range,” the Platinum-ranked LEED-certified green building that WORC had refurbished as a headquarters, complete with native plant xeriscaping, composting toilets, sunflower seed countertops, and crushed glass parking lot – one of the most environmentally-sensitive buildings in the United States.

Beyond the classroom participants also had time to talk, share ideas and bond. This social aspect culminated on the night before the training ended when a group dinner was held at a delicious local Thai restaurant where organizing tips and political opinions were shared. This portion of the training further under-

scored the need to have fun as we work for social change.

At the close of the training, tired but satisfied, each of the participants voiced his or her appreciation and thoughts on the training. Of his experience, Shaun Daniel said, “I’ve been to several trainings on social change work and this has by far been the best, in part because the material is so essential and so fundamental, and because of the great people who were here.”

Now back in Oregon, Shaun is excited to put his knowledge to use, especially in the organizing of a new chapter of Oregon Rural Action in Umatilla County, which will require every one of the skills taught at the training. When it is established, this chapter will be the newest member of a large family of inspiring people – all busy working for change, but not afraid to play sometimes, too.

WORC conducts its training on the Principles of Community Organizing annually. If you are interested in attending a POCO training, contact Andrea Malmberg at (541) 975-2411 or email andrea@oraction.org.

Members Visit Local Walden Office

On March 25th two Oregon Rural Action members visited the local La Grande office of Congressman Greg Walden to express concern over the Congressman's recent vote against H.R. 5351 which would extend renewable energy tax incentives. They also urged him to support future legislation on renewable energy development and asked how Oregon Rural Action might play a role in that effort.

Accompanied by Oregon Rural Action staff member Shaun Daniel, they met with Colby Marshall, Director of the Eastern Oregon Office for Congressman Walden. The group asked that the Congressman clearly and publicly explain why he voted against the bill and urged him to make renewable energy a priority.

The office visit took place in conjunction with a multi-faceted effort to express support for renewable energy in Eastern Oregon.

Chapter Updates

While there have been changes in Oregon Rural Action recently, with staff leaving and arriving, the new year brought with it renewed activity on the part of our three chapters.

The **Blue Mountain Chapter** has begun its regular monthly meetings again on the first Wednesday of each month at 11:45 am at Mamacita's Restaurant in La Grande. There is major interest in both local foods and renewable energy. Issue committees will be meeting separately in the Oregon Rural Action office to further determine campaign strategy: Local Foods on April 14 at 5:30 pm and Renewable Energy on April 17 at 5:30 pm.

The **Baker County Chapter** has continued to meet regularly in the home of one of the chapter's members where they meet every second Monday of the month at 7 pm. They have chosen a local foods campaign as their primary focus for the year and will continue their supportive work on renewable energy. Currently they are planning for a showing of "King Corn" in Baker City in April and will soon fine-tune the specifics of their local foods campaign at their next meeting on April 14.

In Malheur County, Oregon Rural Action staff have begun to reconnect with the members of the **Snake River Chapter**. Together they are working to strengthen the chapter and begin regular meetings again after a period of inactivity.

The **Umatilla County Chapter Organizing Drive** is progressing steadily. Organizer Shaun Daniel has been meeting with community members in Umatilla County to determine issues around which to organize the new chapter and also to identify potential members. The next step will be to form an organizing committee that will ultimately oversee the official formation of the new chapter.

We hope to see you at the next meeting!



Farmers' Market Promotion Project

Oregon Rural Action's Farmers' Market Promotion Project has shown great success in strengthening farmers' markets throughout Oregon. Karen Wagner, the Project Manager, has developed an extensive network of farmers and market managers, which has resulted in the recruitment of a strong and diverse new Board for the Oregon Farmers' Market Association. It also led to the three-year strategic plan that will support both the Association and its future programming as well as services for farmers' markets.

The next phase in the strengthening of our northeast Oregon food system will be the securing of funding to conduct a community foods assessment that will support not only farmers' markets but the development of a local foods cooperative (grocery store) and other farm-direct and community-based food projects.

New Members since December 2007

Christine Kelly, La Grande
Amanda Daniel, La Grande
Cheryl Simpson-Whitaker & Bill Whitaker, La Grande
Liang Ho, La Grande
Liberty Merrill, La Grande
Patricia Todd, Baker City
Tony Malmberg, Cove
Nancy and Ken Gummer, Hermiston

Thanks for Your Extra Effort!

Mary McCracken, Margaret Mead, Amanda Daniel, Chris Perry, Steve Bartell, Carolyn Giles, Cori Brewster, Rich Minogue, Randy Joseph, Nancy Gledhill, Ramon Lara.



Why I am a community organizer

I believe in people. I grew up in a tiny town in a rural county of northeastern Washington. I know how important community can be to daily life and how vital it is for people to work together to accomplish great tasks. Many hands make light work, they say, and this is true both for mundane labor – like chopping wood – and working for the common good.

That's why I came to work for Oregon Rural Action – because it's an organization that knows the value of rural communities and understands the power of the common person.

For a number of years I have been involved in social change work. I've utilized other methods of social change, such as service work, advocacy, education, and protest. But it was community organizing that spoke to me and struck me as the most all-around effective means of improving our communities, not only because it gets things accomplished, but because it brings people together in the process.

There is a classic analogy that illustrates the differences between the most common approaches to social change (all of which I should say are important and indeed necessary): Babies are turning up in the river, so the *service* organization rushes to pull them out and save them from drowning; the *advocacy* organization speaks on behalf of babies everywhere who have turned up in rivers, to seek just recompense; but the *community organizing* group heads upriver to get to the source of the problem, to figure out who the heck is throwing babies into the river, and to stop it by finding a solution. I want to be part of that latter effort. It is essential that we look both to the short-term and the long-term if we are to ever truly improve our communities for the better. I feel that community organizing best combines those elements.

At its most basic, community organizing is people working together to get things done. And at the core of this approach are these two beliefs: first, the people who are best able to solve a problem are those who are closest to and most affected by it, and second, in order to be effective they need a powerful, ongoing organization. Oregon Rural Action is such an organization, offering a strong, multi-issue platform from which

members can work together to improve their communities. As veteran Midwestern community organizers Dave Beckwith and Randy Stoeker proclaim, “The soul of organizing is people...[A]ll organizers believe...in the ability of regular folks to guide their lives, to speak for themselves, to learn the world and how to make it better.”

So many of us feel powerless to shape the forces that affect our lives. We are like little boats tossed upon raging seas. Even if we do try our hardest to push back, it's exhausting. But when we organize, when we work together to change our communities, it's as though we hammer our boats into a great ship that cannot be overturned.

I believe that anytime we feel powerless over the forces that affect our lives there is a problem: a lack of democracy and common power. The aim of community organizing is to empower, to give voice to those who feel powerless to affect their future. As American social reformer and public philosopher Jane Adams put it, “The cure for the ills of democracy is more democracy.”

I like that in a participatory group like Oregon Rural Action, members and staff share responsibility. This means we are accountable to one another and are stronger for our diffuse leadership. The goal is to have many people take on leadership responsibilities in a community organization. We share in the labor and like an old-fashioned barn-raising, we have some fun while we're at it. Furthermore, as on the old Oregon Trail, one's personal success is dependent upon the group's success, a reality that means transcending political, cultural, economic, and religious boundaries. Like Red Green says in his TV show, “I'm pulling for ya. We're all in this together.”

(continued on next page)

Do you have something to say to the Oregon Rural Action membership?

Call the office and ask about submitting an article for the next newsletter!

Working for social change takes guts; it can be intimidating, especially in a small town where “everyone knows everyone.” But much of that fear fades away when we stand together.

According to Lawrence Goodwyn, who studied extensively the historical moment when populism saw the common person reclaiming the political arena, “‘Individual self-respect’ and ‘collective self-confidence’ constitute, then, the cultural building blocks of mass democratic politics.” And it should be noted that this is the nonpartisan, small-*d* democracy that the Founding Fathers enshrined in the Declaration of Independence, the promise that all people are created equal and deserve a fair share of respect and opportunities. Oregon Rural Action puts this at the heart of its values: democracy, participation, leadership development, diversity and cooperation, justice, and stewardship.

When we organize, we join a long tradition of everyday folks creating the world they wish to live in. When we organize, we rise to meet that challenge. As Chicago-based community organizer Gabriel Thompson writes, “In every neighborhood across the United States there are promises yet to be fulfilled. There are leaders waiting to emerge who have never been told that they have the ability to lead; victories waiting to be had where fights seem hopeless and dreams nonexistent; latent power to be built in areas long abused.”

I am therefore excited and humbled to work among you as we seek to fulfill that democratic promise.



and there is a lack of information on the effects of GM crops on birds, insects and other organisms, including livestock. Further still, many farmers are concerned about markets that may be put at risk by GM crops and accidental contamination. In the case of GM alfalfa, such markets include honey and organic and natural foods, which could become scarcer and more expensive if GM contamination were to occur because certified organic food cannot be produced using agricultural biotechnology. Also, the export market is of concern to farmers, as over 99% of exported alfalfa is produced in the West – mostly in Washington, Oregon and California – and customers in the main importing countries are demanding GM-free feed.

For the consumer, there is the concern over whether the food one buys may have GM ingredients (there are no laws requiring labeling of GM foods). And there are concerns over the price and availability of organic and natural foods, especially honey, dairy, wheat products and organic meat.

The fallout from GM crops is already being experienced by American farmers. In Arkansas, rice growers lost billions of dollars on rice intended for shipment to Europe that was accidentally contaminated by an experimental GM variety. In 2003, Roundup-resistant horseweed first appeared, infesting over a half-million acres and requiring over \$500 million in inputs by farmers to confront the problem in 2005 alone. One Arkansas farmer with severe infestation saw a 50% reduction in his yields and an increase of over \$35,000 in input costs.

Closer to home, in California, Roundup-resistant common ragweed has been found that survives 10 times the normal application of glyphosate, the active ingredient in Roundup. Moreover, there is growing evidence for resistance in water hemp, velvet leaf, ivyleaf, morning glory, and lambsquarter. And even here, in Oregon, pollen from Roundup Ready creeping bentgrass, a genetically modified turfgrass developed by Monsanto with Scotts Company, traveled 13 miles from field trials in Jefferson County.

With an increasing number of grievances against GM crops from both producers and consumers, it would seem that the best course would be to err on the side of precaution. Environmental impact studies are needed to better understand the effects of GM crops, including their potential for accidental contamination, the creation of herbicide-resistant weeds, and the negative impacts on natural, organic and export markets. Better regulations are also needed to protect farmers who intend to remain GM-free. As Shakespeare wrote, “Wisely, and slow. They stumble that run fast.”

Your Voice is Needed—Participate in the Legislative Process!

We thought you would be interested in the work of Oregon Rural Action. Please consider becoming a member today by filling out the enclosed membership form.

Or make your donation online!

www.oraction.org

Be Part of Oregon Rural Action's Sustainer's Circle

You now have the opportunity to provide additional support to Oregon Rural Action by an automatic monthly donation from your checking account. Join the Sustainer's Circle and become part of our backbone of support!

Contact Andrea Malmberg
andrea@oraction.org
541-975-2411

General donations are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by US tax law

Farm Bill Update:


Some people might think that if they don't farm, they don't have to worry about the Farm Bill. However, a strong Farm Bill can increase access to healthy food for low income people, ensure that you know where your beef is coming from, help family farmers and ranchers be competitive in an increasingly corporate controlled market place, reduce barriers for Farm to School programs, strengthen local and regional food systems, and enable land owners to protect wildlife habitat and open space. Specifically, this year's Farm Bill could help Oregon Rural Action conduct local food assessments and its funding has helped us revitalize and support Oregon's Farmers' Markets.

The 2002 Farm bill was set to expire March 15, 2008. However, as expected, Congress has passed an extension until April 18th. What's the hold up? You guessed it, funding. The Agriculture Committees have been wrangling on whether to work on a Farm Bill with a baseline budget or to fund it with an addition \$10 billion increase over 10 years. Finally, they decided to work with the additional \$10 billion but now the Senate Finance Committee and House Ways and Means Committee are hashing out where to get the new funds.

During recess, House and Senate Agriculture committee leaders reached a "framework" of preliminary figures for allocation of money between the titles of a new farm bill. On the issues that we are watching, some things are looking hopeful – like \$5 billion in new funding for conservation programs. We are still waiting for more details about the Community Food Projects grants. Currently, this year's Community Food Projects grants are still pending on a Farm Bill resolution. If the 2002 Farm Bill is extended for another year, we are unsure if Community Food Projects will maintain current funding at \$5 million. If a new farm bill is passed, we support the Senate language requesting \$10 million in mandatory funding for this important program. In addition, we are waiting to find out what language changes will be put in place to help schools purchase from local farmers.

As always, we encourage you to be in touch with your legislators (www.leg.state.or.us/findlegsltr) and express your support for the Farm Bill provisions that support the issues you care about. If you want to know more or discuss some of the issues we are particularly concerned with, don't hesitate to stop by or give us a call.

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