



The Furrow

Newsletter of Oregon Rural Action

Sowing Seeds of Change

March, 2004

Volume 3 Number 1

Calendar

Baker County Grassroots Alliance meets the first Tuesday of the month at the Baker Country Library, 7:00 PM

Blue Mountain Chapter meets the first Tuesday of the month at the Forestry & Range Sciences Lab, 1401 Gekeler 7:00 PM

Snake River Chapter meets the second Monday of the month at the AFSCME Union Hall, 463 S. Park Blvd, Ontario, 6:30 PM

Principles of Community Organizing Training
Fargo, ND April 24-27
Laramie, WY August 21-24

Notice Board

Members wanted to serve on Board Committees including Personnel, Fundraising, and the upcoming Convention Committee. Let us know if you are interested.

VENDORS WANTED:

Would you like to become a vendor at the La Grande Farmers Market?

Vendor Meeting

March 18th 7:00 PM
1001 4th Street
La Grande

A BIG WELCOME TO JUDY TALLEY

The new addition to our staff from Pendleton who is working on a organizing drive in Umatilla County.

La Grande Farmers Market Begins New Season

Julie Keniry, Steering Committee, LGFM

The snow may be falling outside but lots of planning is happening inside for the La Grande Farmers' Market (LGFM). Do you remember coming to the market last summer and finding happy crowds of your friends and neighbors? There was an abundance of fresh, healthy foods for sale and even live music some weeks. In response to last summer's success, the LGFM Advisory Committee is continuing toward its' goal of expanding the market and supporting this vibrant community event. We have received many positive comments about the new location at

Max Square and the general feeling of community spirit that the market creates.

Exciting changes planned for the upcoming season include extending the hours of the market and the length of the season as well as the addition of a Tuesday evening market!

Another task set before the advisory committee this winter has been to come up

with new funding sources. Although the vendors are required to pay a fee to participate each week, it is difficult to fund the market solely on this revenue. The LGFM is currently being operated with the support of Oregon Rural Action. It is the goal of both groups that the market become independent by the end of this year. To reach this end, ORA has applied for a grant which would allow the market to hire a person to act as the manager and establish the structure for the market to exist as its' own non-profit organization. But even with this possibility afoot, we must also look to our community for support. In order to see the market grow and prosper, we must make long-term changes to our budget which will allow us to advertise and provide a small salary for the market manager to compensate for the increased responsibilities. We can minimize the amount of paid work by finding volunteers committed to participating in planning events and preparing for each new season. We would also like to establish a group of local supporters called **Friends of the Market** who would either donate \$50 or volunteer to help at two market days during the season. (Continued on Page 2)



Committee on Positive Community Growth

Rich Minogue

The Blue Mountain Chapter's Committee on Positive Community Growth had to spring into action in 2003 when WalMart submitted a proposal to include parts of the Becker property (across Island City Avenue from their present location) within the Urban Growth Boundaries (UGB) of La Grande and Island City. They proposed 74 apartments on 6.7 acres of residential land in La Grande, 14 acres of open space in Island City, a 183,922 square foot retail store (Supercenter) and 53,700 square feet of goods and services on 11 acres of commercial land in Island City and 18 acres of commercial land in La Grande, along with 267,400 square feet of business park on 15 acres in Island City. The original proposals were deemed incomplete by both cities and further action by the Committee is pending.

In January the La Grande Planning Commission opened public hearings (as part of a plan to update the City of La Grande's Comprehensive Plan) to take into account new population growth projections adopted by the County, after a successful Oregon Rural Action LUBA appeal to downsize those numbers. The City Planning Department's Staff Report evaluated the commercial property available within the UGB and deemed some of it "unsuitable". Using growth in the number of employees as projected by the Oregon Employment Division, they determined a specific increase in the number of employed individuals in La Grande. They then calculated the number of acres of commercial land needed in La Grande based on a per employee figure, assuming that this figure should be the same as national averages (sources not supplied). They propose that the city "needs" 18.8 acres more commercial land now and over 200 more acres of commercial and industrial land by year 2020. The implementation of this Comprehensive Plan Amendment would clear the way for expansion of the Urban Growth Boundary and allow the WalMart proposal to proceed smoothly.

The City Staff Report on this Plan change was only made available one week prior to the meeting at which the Planning Commission was going to make its decision. It was a lengthy report and we were not able to adequately analyze their report and consequently submit our comments prior to the close of the public testimony phase. On February 9th & 10th, David Whitson presented his 39-page "analysis" of the City's Staff Report and the Committee on Positive Community Growth submitted a 8-page letter with their concerns. In light of these submissions, at the February 10th meeting, the Planning Commission voted 4-1 to re-opened the public testimony process. After considering the public input, their recommendation will go to the City Council for final determination.

We think the City's lengthy proposal has multiple technical flaws, is based on faulty logic and is in conflict with statewide planning goals and the City's Comprehensive Plan. The next meeting of the La Grande Planning Department will be Tuesday, March 9th at 6:00 PM.

If the City Council passes the Comprehensive Plan Amendment, the Committee for Positive Community Growth will most likely file an appeal with the Land Use Board of Appeals. This action will require hiring an attorney to represent the Committee and the Blue Mountain Chapter; we are actively engaged in obtaining pledges for this effort. There are many ways to contribute: join or renew your membership, make a pledge, serve on the Committee (there are many aspects of this campaign), inform your friends and neighbors, or send in a donation today!! **Our Committee is not only pushing for family wage jobs and a strong downtown business district, but we want to assure that our elected officials establish well thought out, long range planning decisions.**

Join the efforts of the Committee for Positive Community Growth by sending in your donation to support this campaign

Use this form to join, renew, or donate. Or, if you know of someone who is interested in this campaign and/or joining Oregon Rural Action, -- please give it to your friends and neighbors!!--

- I would like to become a member of Oregon Rural Action
- I would like to RENEW my membership in Oregon Rural Action
- I would like to donate to the Committee for Positive Community Growth

Name: _____ Email: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Phone (Home): _____ Phone (Work): _____

Please make your check payable to Oregon Rural Action and send it to:

P.O.Box 1231, La Grande, Oregon, 97850

General donations are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by U.S. tax law.

- \$15 Living Lightly Membership
- \$30 Individual Membership
- \$40 Family Membership
- Business
- \$100 Sponsor
- \$200 - \$1,000 Major Donor

ACROSS THE FENCE

Alice Lentz, Board Chair

I have gained a “whole lot” more insight into our combined efforts as Oregon Rural Action since becoming Board Chair a couple of short months ago. We are truly fortunate to have such an exceptionally energetic, committed, and knowledgeable—not to mention upbeat- staff! We also have an impressively hard working Board: committed, caring, and inspiring, working for shared honesty in our shared promises. Change is inevitable and we have treasured Board members resigning and newly treasured members joining. I’m grateful for the opportunity to meet and work with all these people.

It also does my spirit vast good to know that there is an “us” out there and that our efforts are joined together: in our multiple-county (& growing), regional “neighborhood” who have commitments to our shared values. In 2001, I joined the organization and became a member of the Steering Committee because it was a grassroots, community way to both gain voice in addressing social justice issues and to explore and impact healthy stewardship of our natural resources. (I especially have concerns regarding herbicide and pesticide use.)

With all of this in mind, I would like to invite fellow members to make submissions to this column in the future. We can share concerns, ideas, successes, and stories: verse, prose, essay, letter, photograph, cartoon... a way of expressing ourselves and being a bit more in touch with our fellow, rural neighbors - across the fences so to speak.

Contact Jane at the Oregon Rural Action office for deadlines & details.
jsd@oraction.org
541-975-2411

Snake River Chapter News

Nadene Goldfoot Member SNRC

Since September 2003, the Snake River Chapter (SNRC) has focused its attention on two topics: safe food and a proposed bio-refinery.

The chapter’s discussion of food safety issues has centered on the cattle industry, primarily “Mad Cow” disease and irradiated meat. Both of these topics are of course very complicated and difficult to find a local handle for. We have talked about educating the public on the benefits of buying local and/or organic-certified beef, building on the organic workshops the chapter has sponsored in the past. Another idea is to develop a campaign to get local school cafeterias to stop serving irradiated meat or to get area groceries to label irradiated meat so that consumers can make an informed choice.

On another front, an outfit called “Treasure Valley Renewable Resources” (TVRR) has plans to build an industrial “bio-refinery” to process wheat, corn, and barley into a variety of nutritional food supplements and ethanol. The project is being promoted as one that would provide 60 family wage jobs and use local food crops, though a group of neighbors has come together (“Concerned Citizens of Malheur County” or CCMC) to raise concerns about the proposed site (one mile from town), potential environmental impacts, and questions about land use and public financing. The chapter held an advertised meeting in January 2004 with Steve Penn of CCMC as the invited speaker, followed by John Hamilton of TVRR at the February monthly meeting. Chapter members identified several critical questions about the bio-refinery and talked about creating a campaign around this issue focused on public safety.

These and other topics—water billing policies, public transportation, and others—will be the focus of discussion and decision-making at our March and April meetings, as the group moves ahead to develop an active issue campaign for 2004. SNRC is looking to expand and draw from the area’s diversity to bring in new members—farmers, Hispanics, folks living on low- or fixed incomes.

(Continued from Page 1: La Grande Farmers Market)

By continuing to expand, we hope to create a market that can be a reliable source of income for growers and artists as well as a reliable source of food and local art for customers. We feel this event is a regular gathering place for our community during the growing season and it is also our hope that a strong market near the core of downtown can increase weekend foot traffic and therefore be a positive presence for the business community. If you would like to donate your time or money to support the market, please contact Julie Keniry at 663-8040.

We hope to see all of you starting June 5th!

Baker County Grassroots Alliance “Digs Into” Garbage Issues

Roxanna Swann, BCGA Secretary

Baker County Grassroots Alliance (BCGA)—the Baker Chapter of ORA—has had a busy winter looking at garbage from all sides. After deciding to take a closer look at the current and proposed solid waste management proposals for Baker County, the group embarked on a process of educating ourselves and the public on several of the issues involved. A video was shown at the September 2003 meeting to introduce some innovative ideas for solid waste disposal used around the world. At the October 2003 meeting, we heard from owners Loren Henry (Baker Sanitary Service) and Ron & Darin Larvik (City Garbage Service in Union County) about their waste disposal operations. They discussed recycling, landfill limits, industrial waste, composting, toxic waste, and the trucking of waste for disposal. This forum—titled “Talking Trash Across County Lines”—was open to the public and received good coverage in the Baker City Herald.

In November 2003, BCGA member Randy Joseph, who is also member of the Solid Waste Advisory Committee for the county, gave us an update on the process of revising the 1994 plan for solid waste management. We realized the difficulty of adequately comparing the costs of the two primary options for waste disposal: a new, lined landfill versus a transfer station. When Randy raised some of our questions at the next SWAC meeting, it became clear that further revision was needed, and adoption of the plan was delayed for up to six months (June 2004). The group was encouraged that our input had an effect on this committee’s decision.

Throughout the next two months, our meetings were focused on more clearly defining our current goals on the solid waste management issue. Members want an activity they can perform soon that will give us both visibility and a successful start as an ORA chapter. Since newspapers take up a lot of space in the landfill, it was decided to look into a newspaper recycling drive that could involve the elementary schools and give us some public recognition.

At the February 2004 meeting, Randy Joseph gave a presentation on RDF, or Refuse-Derived Fuel. This is a process in which most garbage can be turned fuel pellets after recyclable items are removed from the waste stream. The RDF idea could possibly work in this area, as we have small industries that could benefit by a ready and inexpensive source of fuel. It is an exciting alternative to explore as we continue to work towards our goal of long-range, responsible waste management policies for our area.

Characteristics of a Good Issue

When our Chapters are thinking about issues, here are some thoughts from our mentors at WORC.

A good issue:

- Has a clear solution, results in real change
- Is winnable
- Is simple, easy to explain
- Has clear target(s)/decision makers
- Has good timing
- Is strongly felt
- Affects and involves a lot of people
- Develops leaders
- Brings in new members
- Builds the organization
- Serves the organization’s broader goals
- Builds on the organization’s power, draws attention to the organization, and is not divisive within the organization.



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Blue Mountain Rural Action Energy Team

Judy Talley, Organizer

In January, ORA Board member, Chuck Koch, and staff member, Judy Talley attended the Harvesting Clean Energy Conference in Portland, a great networking opportunity. Later that same week, ORA members, Norm Cimon, Kay Firor, Howard Butts and Steve Wolfe, and staff members, Brett Kelter and Judy Talley, attended the Umatilla Electric Co-op's Wind Conference in Hermiston. The Umatilla conference was held in response to requests from area farmers on how wind power could add to their income. Many attendees came from outside UEC's area including employees from Oregon Trail Electric Co-op illustrating the growing interest in renewable energy in Union, Grant and Baker counties. Attendees left the conference with enough contacts and information to seriously ponder leasing land to a corporate wind project or collaborating with neighbors to build a locally-owned cooperative wind farm.

The Wind Co-op Steering Committee has set their Mission Statement. The next three meetings will focus on goals and objectives. Norm Cimon, Committee Leader, believes that with full participation they could be completed in two weeks. Meetings are set for March 4: Elgin High School Library, 5:30 to 7:00 p.m. and March 11: Grande Ronde Model Watershed Program, 10901 Island Ave., LaGrande, 5:30 to 7:00 p.m.

The Green Power Campaign continues with their goal of OTEC adopting a SNAP-type program to replace their current purchase of Green Power from Bonneville Power Administration when their contract is up for renewal September 30, 2004. A SNAP (Sustainable Natural Alternative Power) program would encourage development of small-scale (25 kWh or less) renewable clean energy systems. The Green Power money that OTEC's customers volunteer to pay would go to fund reimbursement to local folks for their systems instead of being sent to finance large-scale corporate renewable energy projects in other areas, such as State-Line or Wyoming. ORA believes a local Green Power option would increase the number of OTEC customers willing to purchase Green Power. To learn more about how a SNAP program works, see www.chelanpud.org/Snap/index.htm

Our Green Power Campaign is soliciting new Team members from Union, Baker and Grant Counties. If you are interested in renewable energy and helping this campaign reach its goal, please contact Organizer, Judy Talley at 975-2411 in La Grande, or by email judy@oraction.org

ORA will attend Oregon Wind Working Group's meeting on March 16 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at The Columbia Gorge Discovery Center in The Dalles. If you are interested in attending, send your name, organization, address, e-mail address, and phone number by March 10 to OWWG.register@state.or.us

Want to carpool? call Judy at 975-2411 in La Grande.