



The Furrow

Newsletter of Oregon Rural Action

Sowing Seeds of Change

June, 2004

Volume 3 Number 2

Calendar

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

Blue Mountain Chapter will not be meeting over the summer months; we are re-organizing the structure, writing by-laws and planning a celebration for September!!

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
Laramie, WY August 21-24

Notice Board Nominations

We are looking for a few good men and women!! At our Annual Convention we will be electing three new Board members, including the Board Secretary position. If you or someone you know is interested give Jane a call at 975-2411.

VENDORS WANTED:

Would you like to become a vendor at the La Grande Farmers Market? Call Julie at 975-2411

Come to the **La Grande Farmers Market**

Saturdays 9-noon Max Square

Enjoy the music and support locally grown, fresh fruits and vegetables

OTEC to Collaborate on Green Power

Erin Wolford & Judy Talley

The Green Power campaign is discussing OTEC's recent decision to discuss a local green power program with Oregon Rural Action. Apparently, OTEC's survey of its customers regarding a local green power program indicated customers are interested in supporting such a program, encouraging OTEC to pursue investigating our recommendations further.

At our last meeting, the Team voted to recommend that OTEC adopt a program such as Chelan, Washington Public Utility's SNAP – or Sustainable Natural Alternative Power.

Benefits of adopting SNAP would be: access to SNAP's promotional materials, assistance from Washington State University in designing the program to meet local needs, and voluntary Green Power contributions from OTEC customers going into a fund to be distributed among the program's local participants.

Local participants will build small-scale renewable energy systems and the SNAP fund will help reimburse them for their investment. Currently OTEC purchases "green power" through Bonneville Power Administration, supporting large-scale, corporate power generation. A local green power program would put that money back into our community.

The Green Power campaign's members are excited about the possibility of discussing this unique program with OTEC. Our next meeting will be at the Forestry & Range Sciences Lab in La Grande on June 29 from 6:15 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. Oregon Rural Action members interested in renewable energy issues are welcome to attend.

The Energy Team is also gearing up for the **SolWest Renewable Energy Fair** at the Grant County Fairgrounds in John Day, July 23-25. ORA Organizer, Judy Talley, will join ORA Board member and Energy Team member, Chuck Koch, at his booth to help inform participants about our renewable energy activities.

The 2004 **Oregon Tour of Solar Homes** is being planned as we speak; the deadline for being included in the beautiful, full-color magazine as a tour site is July 20. Any member who is interested in assisting with this project or knows someone who's home should be included in the tour, please contact Judy at the Oregon Rural Action office. We would like to add homes to the tour this year that weren't in last year's magazine.

Making Ontario Water More Affordable and Fair

Ulee Yanok

The Snake River Chapter of Oregon Rural Action has a campaign to get more rational treatment for people in Ontario who have problems keeping their water turned on. We hope to change the City of Ontario's policies and practices to provide bills that clearly show all charges, fixed fees for late payments, availability of Spanish language notices and information, lower rates for low-income seniors and people with disability, and the availability of payment plans for deposits, back bills, and turn-on fees.

We are holding extra meetings as we get our campaign organized. New members Dorreen Jones, Betsy Tripi, and Debra Brown have jumped right in, gathering information and doing research to share with the whole group. For most of us, there has been a real learning curve on how to develop an effective strategy for achieving our objectives, but the techniques and tools we learned at POCO (Principles of Community Organizing) trainings keep leading us on to the next steps. While we are still early in the process, we can see the time for reaching out to our allies and the decision-makers is coming up real soon.

Last month, Loretta Spenser, Susan Summers, and Nancy Gledhill all helped staff a table for our chapter at the local Cinco de Mayo celebration at the Treasure Valley Community College. Offering free, thimble-sized cups of water to attract attention and highlight recent water-rate hikes, members conducted an informal survey of concerns about water in Ontario.

Dorreen and Ulee are working on chapter by-laws that will be considered for adoption at this summer's anniversary meeting. On Monday, August 9th, the Snake River Chapter will celebrate its third year of activity in Malheur County and the neighboring western Idaho area. In addition to adopting by-laws, members will also elect new officers for the coming year. Members from other Oregon Rural Action chapters are invited to attend—contact the office in La Grande for details.

The 2004 Oregon Rural Action Annual Convention will be held on Saturday, October 23rd. Watch for details in the September newsletter.

Umatilla County Organizing Drive

Judy Talley, Organizer

A key decision for Oregon Rural Action was made at the Strategic Planning Retreat to establish a new Chapter in Umatilla County in 2004. Judy Talley, who is based in Pendleton, has interviewed over 50 County residents; Umatilla County's large Latino and Native American populations are providing an opportunity to investigate ways Oregon Rural Action can expand the cultural and ethnic diversity of our membership base while bringing grassroots organizing skills to more East Oregonians.

Judy is on the lookout for potential candidates for an Organizing Committee of 8-15 new members, which she hopes will begin bi-monthly meetings by the end of this summer, to work out the nuts and bolts of the new chapter and plan the chapter's kick-off meeting by year's end. In the meantime, two new members have committed to the POCO training for the end of August in Laramie, Wyoming.

Umatilla County residents interested in supporting this work are encouraged to contact Oregon Rural Action at our office in La Grande, or they can contact Judy at her cell number (541)310-3333.

Managing solid waste for the future in Baker County

Carolyn Kulog

Baker County Grassroots Alliance (BCGA) has worked diligently in pursuit of its goal to get Baker City/County to adopt an Update to the County's Solid Waste Management Plan that establishes a responsible, long-term approach for dealing with garbage. The chapter recommended several changes to the first draft of the Plan Update, including the introduction of one particular alternative for waste disposal: PEF or Process Engineered Fuel. In addition to ongoing discussion and education within the group about the PEF alternative, various members have attended and testified at one Baker City Council meeting and two public hearings with the County Commissioners to advocate for a closer examination of this new technology. At the second Commission meeting on June 9th, the Plan Update was adopted with the recommended changes, representing an initial victory in this ongoing campaign.

PEF is a new approach that removes recyclables and toxic items from the waste-stream and converts what remains (mostly food and fiber waste, with light plastic film) into a pellet that can be burned for energy in place of coal. One of the big questions regarding the PEF alternative is what existing entity would be most appropriate to evaluate and pursue the funding and development of such a facility. At the moment, the entire Baker County economic development infrastructure is in tremendous flux, raising serious questions about who or even what agency has the relevant powers and responsibilities.

At the same time, another committee has been meeting to consider what steps might be taken in the more immediate future to increase recycling in the community. At our June meeting, this sub-group presented a number of potential objectives and gathered feedback from the larger chapter regarding priorities. The leading idea is to update the recycling pamphlet provided local garbage hauler (Baker Sanitary Service) and coordinate it to match the labels on the bins at the recycling depot. Another is to explore the possibilities of Baker Sanitary providing choices of garbage container size and/or frequency of pickup, creating a cost-based incentive to recycle. A third has to do with looking into grant opportunities for any actions that would promote reductions in the waste stream, including subsidizing the price of backyard compost makers.

In addition to the major focus on the solid waste management issue, the chapter has been addressing the matter of writing and adopting by-laws. The May and June meetings included vigorous discussion of the first drafts, with members' comments and suggestions being factored in the revised by-laws that will be considered for adoption at the July meeting. Attendance at meetings has been fairly small but consistent, with members demonstrating a strong commitment to working together.

Join the efforts of Oregon Rural Action

- 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 Oregon Rural Action

Name: _____ Email: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

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

\$15 Living Lightly Membership

\$30 Individual Membership

\$40 Family Membership

\$60 Business

\$100 Sponsor

\$200 - \$1,000 Major Donor

Oregon Rural Action is a long term, multi-ethnic organization whose mission is to support and encourage community organizing around locally-identified issues, with a shared vision of creating a healthy, democratic, and just society. ORA's members and community groups work to promote social justice, agricultural and economic sustainability, and stewardship of the region's land, air and water.

Chair: Alice Lentz

Vice-Chair: Ulee Yanok

Secretary: Cori Brewster

Treasurer: Tim Keneipp

BCGA Representative: Michael Braymen

BMC Representative: Elizabeth Borets

SRC Representative: Nancy Gledhill

At-large Memngers: Chuck Koch, Davis Bishop

Strategic Planning Session a Success

Jane Sabin-Davis

On a bright and sunny April morning, the Board and staff of Oregon Rural Action met at the Cove Ascension School for a two-day Strategic Planning Session facilitated by Gary Sandusky from the Center for Community Change in Boise. Gary had been working with the Strategic Planning Team, attended a Board meeting in January, and conducted a survey of staff and Board members in order to get the “big picture”, enabling him to help us define our path for the next three to five years.

Gary defined three areas for grassroots organizational planning: program (issues, organizing, constituency), organizational (funding, board workings, policy, staffing issues, structure), and emotional climate (how people feel about the organization, morale, conflict, community and trust). He found in his survey that our young, maturing organization had some clear triumphs and accomplishments and also some problems that needed addressing. He asked us: What could Oregon Rural Action look like in 5-10 years? Where do we want to develop new Chapters? How many? Who will be the leaders in those chapters and who will be the constituency? What will be the issues?



We made some key decisions for this organization: both the mission and value statement were re-confirmed; we will no longer use the acronym ORA but instead will use our full name, Oregon Rural Action, with the tag-line, Sowing Seeds of Change; the Board made a clear commitment to community organizing, defining it as a different approach from projects or advocacy; we will prioritize organizing ag producers, Latinos, low income individuals, and youth; we will continue with the organizing drive in Umatilla County and move on towards Wallowa County in 2005; energy issues are top priority for a long-term, Oregon Rural Action-wide issue.

In order to effectively use consensus as a decision-making tool, the Board was trained by Cliff Jones from Technical Assistance for Community Services in Portland. Our Board members and organizers will now be able to offer this training to our Chapters to assist them in using this very valuable and effective model.

We are very pleased with our progress: our membership is growing, we are becoming financially and organizationally stable and strong, and our chapters and issue teams are on the ground working hard to make our communities move livable for all.

Monsanto Drops Genetically Modified Wheat

John Smilie, Western Organization of Resource Councils

Add Roundup Ready wheat to the list of genetically modified food failures, after the Flavr-savr tomato, flax, and Roundup Ready potatoes. On May 10, Monsanto announced that it has deferred “all further efforts” to introduce Roundup Ready wheat. Monsanto said it would focus on development of new genetically engineered traits for corn, cotton, and soybeans, and discontinue all breeding and field-level research for its Roundup Ready genetically engineered wheat.

The company cited opposition by wheat farmers and foreign consumers as reasons for its decision.

“This underscores what we’ve been saying for years: There’s no consumer demand for genetically engineered wheat,” said Circle wheat farmer Helen Waller, a member of the Northern Plains Resource Council. “Our customers don’t want it, and we’re not interested in planting what we can’t sell.”

“Introduction of genetically modified wheat would have been a commercial disaster,” said Gail Wiley, a North Dakota farmer speaking for the Dakota Resource Council and the Western Organization of Resource Councils. “Monsanto’s announcement today is a victory for farmers in the United States and Canada and our consumers overseas. After five years of effort, we finally convinced Monsanto to face reality: our markets do not want Roundup Ready wheat.”

At issue is a strain of hard red spring wheat genetically engineered to be resistant to the herbicide Roundup, which is owned by Monsanto. Roughly 60% of hard red spring wheat from North Dakota, Montana, and South Dakota is exported, primarily to Asian buyers who have repeatedly indicated that they will not buy genetically engineered wheat.

Monsanto said it was shelving all development of GM wheat, at least until some other genetically modified wheat is accepted by consumers and farmers—a development the company said could take from four to eight years. Monsanto did not say what it would do with regulatory approvals now pending. In March, the company resubmitted its application to the United States Department of Agriculture for approval of Roundup Ready wheat.

“Monsanto’s decision to not introduce Roundup Ready wheat is wise and long overdue,” said Wayne Fisher, a Dickinson, North Dakota farmer and Chair of WORC’s Food Safety Campaign Team. “Now, we’re calling on Monsanto to withdraw its application to USDA to give our overseas customers 100% assurance that U.S. wheat will remain the high-quality, GM-free wheat they want.”

WORC and the Center for Food Safety filed a legal petition with USDA in March 2003 to prevent the regulatory approval of genetically engineered wheat until a complete economic and environmental analysis is prepared. Thirty organizations have signed on to the petition.

OUR VICTORIES

- ♦Nine members of Baker Country Grassroots Alliance presented a Chapter resolution to “support evaluation of the PEF alternative” in the Solid Waste Management Plan to Baker City Council.
- ♦The Committee on Positive Community Growth held the La Grande City Planning Commission accountable to the City’s policies on Urban Growth Boundary expansion during the incorporation of the amended population figures to the Comprehensive Plan. The Planning Department had originally recommended the inclusion of 18.8 acres of commercial land (about the size needed for a WalMart Supercenter); due to the vigilance of our members, this was removed from the Plan document, making it much more difficult for WalMart to leave the empty shell of their present store behind.
- ♦The Green Power Conversion team received welcomed news when the Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative’s Board of Directors made the decision at their annual meeting to cooperative with Oregon Rural Action in establishing a local green power program in their service area. Years of constant pressure and encouragement by the team finally paid off!! We will start meeting with them in the next few months.
- ♦The La Grande Farmers Market started it’s second season at Max Square -- music, an abundance of delicious home-grown vegetables, breakfast burritos at Mamacitas, and downtown store coupons highlighted this sunny June morning.



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Across the Fence

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.

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