

Going Local in a Globalized Economy

Trade Policy and Food Systems in Oregon's Southern Willamette Valley



Part of the Oregon Fair Trade Campaign's
Oregon Stories Project



About this Report

Going Local in a Globalized Economy: Trade Policy and Food Systems in Oregon's Southern Willamette Valley was published in Summer 2011 by the Oregon Fair Trade Campaign (ORFTC), with the generous support of the McKenzie River Gathering Foundation and individual donors.

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About the Oregon Fair Trade Campaign

The Oregon Fair Trade Campaign is a statewide coalition of labor, environmental and human rights organizations fighting for trade policies that:

- prioritize quality jobs in communities across the state;
- improve living standards at home and abroad;
- enforce consistent standards for labor and the environment across borders;
- allow local producers to compete on a level playing field.

For more information, please visit: www.oregonfairtrade.org.

Introduction

A recent public opinion poll conducted by the *Wall Street Journal* and NBC found that only 17% of Americans believe that Free Trade Agreements have helped our economy. Most Americans understand that existing trade policies are responsible for offshoring manufacturing jobs. Less well understood is how trade policies influence the food we eat, including where and how it is produced.

Modern trade agreements severely limit nations' and communities' rights to make their own decisions regarding how they will maintain or expand their ability to produce healthy, sustainable food supplies for their people and protect the livelihoods of those involved in food production.

For this report, the Oregon Fair Trade Campaign (ORFTC) interviewed fourteen farmers and others involved in food production, marketing and distribution in the Southern Willamette Valley. Most of those interviewed run small- to mid-sized operations, and are actively engaged in promoting local foods and developing a local food system.

As part of our broader "Oregon Stories Project," which has involved hundreds of one-on-one interviews to document the effects of international trade policies on people across the state, ORFTC previously inquired with much larger-scale growers, processing center workers and farmworkers about how Free Trade Agreements have affected their livelihoods.

In 2010, aided by generous support from the McKenzie River Gathering Foundation, we expanded the Stories Project into exploring community-based attempts to rebuild local economies in the face of global pressures. That shift led us first to speak with farmers involved with the groundbreaking Southern Willamette Valley Bean & Grain Project and then others featured in this report.

Key findings of our initial interviews under this new lens include that:

- U.S. trade policy has had enormous negative impacts on farming, food processing and food consumption patterns in Oregon's Southern Willamette Valley. Trade agreements have created

unfair competition and lead to wild food price fluctuations, factors that have subsequently affected local food system infrastructure and consumer expectations.

- Those interviewed believe that "going local" will create long-term economic benefits for area farmers and the wider community. Some also believe that a locally-controlled food system would be inherently safer and more environmentally sound, as well as provide greater short- and long-term food security for their communities.
- Nonetheless, significant obstacles exist to recreating a local food system in the Southern Willamette Valley — several of which are again tied back to U.S. trade policy and the effects of the global food commodity system.
- A variety of path-breaking efforts are underway in the Southern Willamette Valley involving farmers, food security advocates and community members working together to rebuild a local food system.

It's worth noting at the outset that the definition of "local" and strategies for rebuilding a local food system vary from group to group and person to person. A number of individuals whose comments are featured here sell grains and other commodities on the international market.

It's also worth noting that most of the people featured in this report are involved in the farming, processing and distribution of beans and grains, as opposed to vegetables. There are significant differences between grain production and vegetable production in terms of acreage required, labor required, processing required and price. Put simply, the strategies that have helped to improve consumer access to sustainably-produced local produce, while also providing community support for small-scale vegetable farms, are not always directly transferable to beans and grains, which serve as staples in most people's diets.

Without figuring out how to sustainably produce, process and distribute beans and grains for local consumption, communities will have difficulty achieving true food sovereignty and food security.

Impacts of U.S. Trade Policy on Southern Willamette Valley Farmers

U.S. trade policy has had enormous impacts on farms, food processing and food consumption patterns in Oregon's Southern Willamette Valley. Farmers and others interviewed frequently cited trade agreements' role in creating unfair competition and wild food price fluctuations, as well as subsequent declines in local food system infrastructure and changes in consumer expectations.

Unfair Competition

The global market in food commodities, as encouraged by existing U.S. trade policy, has created an extremely uneven playing field for regional farmers and farmworkers. Put simply, cheap imports abound from countries where weak labor, environmental and food safety standards create an unfair cost advantage.

Willow Coberly of Stalford Seed Farms says, "It's really, really, really hard to compete. You take food crops that are produced in Argentina or in China where labor is cheap, and even in Europe where they have giant government subsidies... It's cheaper for these guys to grow it in these countries, pay the fuel to ship it over here and then we as consumers buy it because it's cheap."

Harry MacCormack of Sunbow Farm says, "FTAs [Free Trade Agreements] don't start with parity at the farm gates. If they did, then they would not be as much of a problem. But the mindset is to make as much as possible for investors, and farmers are the last priority. As long as you are ... dealing with economies with lower labor costs, they bring stuff here cheap."

Low-priced imports make it difficult for farmers to compete on a price basis, even with buyers that value locally-produced foods. Clint Lindsey of A2R Farm says, "Even when we sell to local markets, buyers still want to set the price rather than letting the farmer set it based on costs plus profit. They balk at that. They say it won't compete with prices of product from afar."

As a result, farmers sometimes shift their

crops, not to take advantage of what grows best on their land, but to find a short-term niche in which they won't be crushed by global competition. According to MacCormack, "This year [2010], everyone shifted from ryegrass to white wheat because the ryegrass market tanked... The international market controls them... because the guys who run the market, like Cargill, run it like a yo-yo."

Lindsey agrees, "You gotta find a niche and market to that niche, otherwise you'll get gobbled up." As of their interview in 2010, A2R had not exported any grains that year; it was the first year they hadn't done so.

Price Volatility

Trade policies that treat food primarily as a commodity have likewise led to speculation and market concentration that can cause wild fluctuations in food prices. As a result, crop prices are no longer based on farmers' cost of production. This can be devastating to family farms when prices are low.



Clint Lindsey (with daughter) and Mike Robinson at A2R Farm

Nutritious food, locally-produced or otherwise, can be beyond reach for poor and working-class consumers when prices are high.

Lindsey explains, "In most businesses you add costs plus profits to get the price. Not so with farms. The farmer also has insurance, takes all of the risks, there's fuel cost fluctuation. The farmer pays for all of that, and then someone else comes and tells us what they'll pay instead of the farmer setting the price. It's kind of a backwards way of doing business. I would say, no, we've never gotten a fair price. No one around here is making a good living, they're just getting by. No wonder that small and medium farms are dropping like flies."

Charlie Tilt of Hummingbird Wholesale says, "It's not a fair playing field. Trade policy has not allowed regional economic vitality. It's not had the health of the community in mind. The goals of the commodity system are not those of a robust local food system. Seven years ago, the price changed, but then it was constant for the rest of the season. Now, we see huge fluctuations occur all the time that have nothing to do with the value of the crop itself, but rather commodity scarcities and futures speculation. Consumers see the effects of



*Sarah Kleeger and Andrew Still
at Open Oak Farm*

this financial marketplace which has nothing to do with the cost growing the crop or transport, and that's a problem."

Paradoxically, price volatility is one reason that some area farmers sell in the export market. According to Tom Hunton of Hunttons' Farm, "The reason that the export wheat market is viable and has some benefits is that there are risk management options that are available that we don't have with the local grains. That being crop insurance and the futures markets. Hedging opportunities. There's a price for it every day that I can market the next three years' crops when I find it profitable. The price is very volatile... But if you're a good marketer, and you put crop revenue insurance in place, and understand marketing, there are opportunities that you can hand off a good portion of that risk and lock in a profit ahead of time and let the hedge funds or somebody else, as much as I hate them, take that risk."

Structural Impacts

Just as factories across Oregon and the United States have been shipped overseas under free trade agreements, so, too, have they affected much of the physical capital of the region's local food system. Coberly of Stalford Seed Farms says, "There used to be grain areas — grain storage areas, grain mills — all up-and-down the I-5 corridor and Route 99. They've all been torn down, and it's really sad."

The food processing, distribution and storage infrastructure that once existed to literally feed regional markets have all but disappeared. According to Tom Hunton of Hunttons' Farm, "We don't have canneries here much any more for processing vegetables. It's very hard to duplicate that." On the grain front, Lindsey of A2R Farm says, "We have some storage, but not clean, rodent-proof, climate-controlled storage. There are no grain silos around... We can't let it sit in the shed all winter."

According to Lindsey, the lack of local storage options sometimes forces farmers to sell their crops at a price below their cost of production: "Sometimes we have to take deals we don't want to... We've been struggling to get by for several years. It's better now, but we need to get a fair price, or we won't make it. We're definitely struggling, the stakes are really high, the clock is ticking, grain is sitting in the barn,

and it needs to sell.”

The loss of infrastructure has extended to other areas, as well. Coberly notes that even farm equipment manufacturing has dwindled: “Very little equipment is made in the U.S. to service a medium-sized farm. Either you’re home-and-yard [scale], or you are giant, mega-farm [scale].”

As local food has been displaced by imports, the equipment needed to simply prepare fresh meals is also disappearing. Hunton says, “It’s terrible that now the schools don’t have the infrastructure to produce meals on site... What’s in the kitchens are warming ovens. So you can take fish sticks and tater tots out of the freezer and warm them.”

According to MacCormack, “Some [farmers] say they’re selling to Japan because there is not a large enough consumer base here, but 97% of food here is brought in from outside Oregon. No one has set up a food system.”

Consumer Expectations

The globalized food system has not only influenced the way that area farms operate, but also consumers’ expectations regarding food prices, availability and quality. According to many farmers, most consumers have come to expect



Harry MacCormack at Sunbow Farm

unreasonably low food prices and to accept unreasonably low food quality.

Andrew Still of Open Oak Farm says, “I worry about people’s expectations, especially those who live in an urban environment who do not ... have a close relationship with a crop or know whether their food is organic or where it was grown or know the qualities they like about it and love getting that. Not many people have a relationship like that with local food or local farmers. So when someone drops the price on something to the commodity price level, it really sets the expectation that food should be cheap.”

Lynn Fessenden, Executive Director of the Willamette Farm and Food Coalition, points out that many consumers have even lost awareness of the seasons when it comes to their diets: “Some people have always been able to walk into a grocery store and get whatever they want and have barely felt a seasonal limit.”

Still argues, “When you create food that’s as cheap as possible, it’s as low-quality as possible without killing people outright... The whole concept of cheap food is completely corrupt. Everyone should be able to afford food, but no one should have to eat cheap food, because that’s where all of our health problems come from [and] where farm economy problems come from.”

Of course, how to raise the prices paid to farmers and make nutritious, locally-grown food more accessible to the poor and working class is a real issue.

Mary Ann Jasper, marketing manager with Stalford Seed Farms, shared a related anecdote: “We donated some flour to schools, and the kids like it and talk to their parents about it, but can parents afford it?” She says a program designed to get local food into the school system wouldn’t pay more than 20-cents per pound for flour. “We looked at the cost breakdown, and we had to walk away.”

The Effects on Family Farmers Are Inescapable

Food prices have been up in recent years, but on the whole, America’s family farms haven’t seen many benefits from it. Approximately two-thirds of America’s 2,191,853 farms are what the U.S. Department of Agriculture derisively labels

“lifestyle” farms. These small farms generate less than \$100,000 a year in revenue, and the farmers rely heavily on outside sources of income to survive. Many have to make regular lease payments on the land, which they could never have afforded to buy outright. According to government data, the average “lifestyle” farmer actually lost money on farming in 2009. Harry MacCormack of Sunbow Farm says, “It’s impossible to make a living off a [small] farm... If you want to stay small, you need another income.”

There are many reasons that family farmers are struggling, but clearly, even small farms who view themselves as entirely outside of the global commodities market have been adversely affected by the ways in which trade policies influence market competition and consumer expectations regarding food prices.

Andrew Still, whose small farm had only been in production for one year at the time of his interview, says, “We feel that we get a fair price when we demand a fair price and find consumers who want to pay it... But I sometimes worry about commodity crops we grow, like wheat and rye, as our neighbors down the road might cut their price. They have 10,000 acres of soft white wheat and may decide to sell it for 50-cents per pound, while we ask for three dollars per pound, which is what we think quality is worth.”



Southern Willamette Valley Bean & Grain Project's Fall 2010 Farmer Report

Trade Policy Impacts on Farmers Abroad

As damaging as Free Trade Agreements have been to family farmers in the United States, they have been even more devastating to farmers abroad. Subsidized grains from the U.S. are often sold on the international market for less than what it costs farmers here to grow them. The result has been the displacement of millions of farmers from their land in places like Mexico and beyond.

According to Dagoberto Morales, the founder and director of UNETE, an immigrant and farmworker rights advocacy organization based in Medford, “Many of the immigrants living and working in ... Oregon risked their lives crossing the border only after losing their livelihoods in Mexico due to the unfair trade practices imposed by NAFTA. Trade deals like NAFTA are extremely harmful for working people on both sides of the border, and we need to show unity in opposing them.”

The Benefits of a Local Food System

The farmers and others interviewed for this report are involved in efforts to recreate a viable local food system in the face of global pressures. They believe that doing so will create long-term economic benefits for farmers and community alike, and serve as a model for others. Some also believe that a locally-controlled food system would be inherently safer, more environmentally sound and provide greater long-term food security for the region.

Cutting Out the Middlemen

Krishna Khalsa, a member of the Lane County Food Policy Council, argues that a local food system by its very nature benefits both farmers and consumers, when compared to the typical global system: "Let's say you sell wheat to the Oregon Grain Exchange up in Portland, and then it's resold by somebody who has contracts that they want to place over in Korea, and then it's shipped over there and people are handling it and handling it and you've got brokers who sell to brokers who are

specialized in different markets and so everyone's taking a piece of the action. And nobody is in touch with the actual source of where it came from."

"It's this infinite loop of people spinning it around and around, and people are making money off of, just by the transactions. They're not adding value to the food. It's not more nutritious. It becomes less nutritious with everything they do with it," Khalsa says. "And then it starts going into the processing chain, and processors sell to wholesalers. And wholesalers sell to food manufacturers who make a finished product who package it and it goes out to a large distributor and then it goes out to a regional distributor and then it goes to the store. Then the customer finally comes and buys it. All of that stuff in between is a huge drag to the reality that it grew in the Earth; that somebody worked really hard and really carefully in order to make that happen, and then never really got rewarded for that."

According to Willow Coberly of Stafford Seed Farms, there can be a 40% mark-up for each middleman, so the fewer links in the chain, the better for both farmers and consumers. A local food system removes many of the steps from this chain. Khalsa says, "The whole thing that we're creating in a regional food system is that we want the farmers... and the local processors and distributors and consumers to really have a relationship. So there might be one or two processes in the chain. The farmer might send it to Hummingbird [a local wholesale company], and Hummingbird might send it to Grizzlies Granola and then it ends up in the store. That's a really short cycle."

In addition to just cutting out the middlemen, many involved in the local food system have also witnessed some consumers willing to pay more in support of quality food and local farmers. Tom Hunton of Hunttons' Farm says, "We're blessed in western Oregon — and not just in Oregon, from Ashland to Seattle — to have an educated consumer that's willing to pay a premium for local."



Krishna Khalsa

Re-Circulating Dollars in the Local Economy

It's not just family farms that benefit from focusing consumer dollars on local food. According to Coberly, "If you spend a dollar in the community, a dollar will be spent back at you... That keeps everyone employed."

Money spent on locally-produced food obviously helps to keep local farmers and farmworkers employed, enabling them to pay taxes that support local services. It also puts money in their pockets that can be spent at other local businesses, thus employing additional local people, and continuing the chain.

Advocates of local food are often particularly conscious about patronizing local suppliers and other businesses. Hunton, whose farming operations employ 30 people fulltime, says, "We tend to be very connected to the community. We don't view Wal-Mart as a friend. We strive, in everything that we do, as much as we can, to work with local businesses... We are a small business ourselves."

Many farmers actively seek out new partnerships that would benefit the local economy. For instance, Coberly says, "I'd really like to see some sort of medium-sized equipment manufacturing for, you know, medium-sized seed cleaning, medium-sized tractor work, that kind of stuff. We'd put our money into them, and hopefully they could turn around and put their money back into the community."

Accountability to One's Neighbors

Many of the farmers interviewed for this report pride themselves on being more accountable to the community than others when it comes to environmental impact, labor practices and food safety.

Coberly says, "If you're growing food crops for China or they're growing for us, you're not really keeping an eye on what's being put on it. But if you're driving down the road and you smell somebody spraying something that smells horrible on a field, you're going to say, 'I wonder what farm that is, and maybe I ought not to buy from that farm.' I think that pressure can create an organic foodshed... If your neighbors have more input into what it is you're growing because they're eating it, then I think that



Fall 2010 "Fill Your Pantry" event at A2R Farm in Corvallis

more and more people will either go organic or just go pesticide-free or really limit it."

Harry MacCormack explained that one reason for his excitement about a new mill located at A2R Farm that will process grain grown within a 150-mile radius is that it will be certified organic, which means that anyone could track the flour back to the field where the wheat was grown. This tracking, MacCormack notes, is both a major safety factor and a research tool.

Lynn Fessenden of the Willamette Farm and Food Coalition likewise makes the point that a local food system gives consumers access to a level of detail about how their food is produced that simply isn't possible in a typical globalized system. She argues, "Ideally, everyone would be organic, but a lot of smaller farms are farming organically but not certified because of the hassles and costs. In that case, we want to support them. Probably about a third of farms in our *Locally Grown* guide are certified organic. We ask farms to list certifications, and consumers can search those certified on the online guide. Farmers get to talk about biodynamic and other practices in their listing. Some farms are certified naturally grown rather than organic, and they still want to stand out, so WFFC is now specifically asking them to talk about their practices."

Increased Food Security

Producing and distributing food regionally also provides communities with a critical layer of security when global food prices spike due to causes as diverse as drought

and disease to market speculation. Many interviewed were also deeply concerned about the impact of peak oil on food prices in the near future.

Fessenden argues, "Grapes from Argentina at Costco won't be cheaper forever. We've been in this window right now where they're the status quo, but it'll creep up and up, and we're just not going to be able to ship food from all over. It's going to be way too expensive."

It's a sentiment echoed by Mary Ann Jasper of Stalford Seed Farms, who says, "This entire national and international system of shipping food all around the world is based on cheap energy. When cheap energy goes away, that system is going to collapse."



Dan Armstrong and Guadelupe Quinn at 2010 Forum on "Food Security, Forced Migration and 'Free Trade'"

What about Farmworkers?

Most of the farms featured in this report rely on family members, community volunteers and/or comparatively well-compensated employees for the majority of their labor. As bean and grain farms, seasonal labor tends to be focused on the operation of mechanized planting and harvesting equipment. That's atypical for the majority of workers at Oregon's farms, vineyards and nurseries, who are often very poorly compensated and perform demanding manual labor.

A 2010 study in the *Journal of Biosocial Science* found that among farmworkers surveyed in Woodburn, Oregon, the average annual per capita income was just \$3,230. The average three-bedroom apartment in Woodburn at the time cost around \$13,200 per year. Fifteen percent reported suffering periods of hunger in the past twelve months, and 44% reported having difficulty purchasing the foods they would prefer to eat.

While the average age of survey respondents was just 35 years-old, nearly a third already reported having pain that affected the types of work they could perform.

"Oregon is a state of small and family farms and, admittedly, there is a spectrum of conditions and practices, but the conditions for farmworkers are difficult, at best," said Roberto Jimenez, Executive Director of the Farmworker Housing Development Corporation, and one of the authors of the study. "I've heard that some small farm owners treat their labor force decently. That said, I've never met anyone who *wants* to be a farmworker. Chronic pain at the age of 40 is the reward for a lifetime as a farmworker."

Jimenez is skeptical of the notion that localized food systems would automatically lead to better labor standards on Oregon farms: "It presumes that there's a buyer of the farmer's product who would be actively working to hold the farmer accountable. I don't see that. Most people have no idea what conditions are like for farmworkers."

Jimenez was born and raised in a local farming community in the Willamette Valley, does much of his shopping at farmers' markets and says he wants to see farmers succeed and flourish. Nonetheless, he argues, "Most consumers are simply looking for the highest quality product at the lowest possible price. That's not a recipe for rising labor standards... Standards for accountability need to be explicit and not variable depending on local standards."

Obstacles to Localism

As beneficial as “going local” can be to both farmers and consumers, doing so in any large scale presents significant hurdles — several of which are again tied back to U.S. trade policy and the effects of the global food commodity system. The relatively small size of the local foods market, as well as a lack of consumer education and access to infrastructure, were issues that were raised again and again.

Market Saturation

While there never seems to be a shortage of hungry people, there are only so many consumers at present who are willing to pay a premium for locally-sourced food. For instance, MacCormack notes that, after 30 years of farmers’ markets and advocacy, still only about 2-3% of people in the Southern Willamette Valley are “eating locally.”

Lindsey says that prices on the international commodity market are “far below what we think we can get in the local market, but if too many growers try to sell, this floods the market, and no one can sell.”

MacCormack agrees, “You can flood a



Tom Hunton at Hunttons' Farm

local market really quickly, even in Corvallis and Eugene.” To put some numbers on it, Hunton says, “The volume that small, artisan bakers can handle here doesn’t exceed 30 acres of wheat at good yields — and last year I had 90 acres of bread-quality wheat.”

Hunton argues, “We have to find those markets. We’ve got small bakers buying from us every week, but I can’t keep even the smallest home mill busy just supplying that. It takes some other commercial bakers. With the acres that we produce on my farm — which is small, it’s a small percentage of bread flour acres compared to my total — we can supply the entire Eugene market that we see now and going forward.”

Unreasonable Price Expectations

Market size is largely a reflection of what individual, commercial and institutional consumers are willing to pay. As noted earlier, food prices even in the “local market” market are still often based more on global commodity prices than farmers’ actual costs. Julie Tilt of Hummingbird Wholesale says, “We need to educate people about the real cost of food. If everyone had that understanding, to really want to support farmers, it would make a huge difference. If everyone really knew what it takes to be a farmer.”

Convincing consumers to prioritize local, in-season foods is part of the equation, but many interviewed also acknowledged the difficulty many families face procuring even low-quality commodity foods, let alone high-quality, fairly-produced foods that are sold at a premium. Nonetheless, farmers and farmworkers alone should not be responsible for solving issues of poverty and hunger.

Jasper says, “We’d love to feed the poor, but to expect farmers to bear the brunt on their backs and risk losing the farm is unconscionable. We need to pay everyone a living wage such that everyone can buy good, healthy food.”

Lack of Infrastructure

The loss of community-based food processing and storage infrastructure reduces sales options for most farmers, but

few feel this disadvantage as readily as bean and grain growers interested in serving local markets. Drying in the case of beans and more extensive processing in the case of grains are necessary before their products can be sold to ordinary consumers. Even after drying or processing, if storage is not available, then the farmer is forced to sell immediately.

According to Mary Ann Jasper, the marketing manager for Stalford Seed Farms, approximately 95% of wheat is consumed only after it has been milled into flour. Without that infrastructure to process wheat locally, it is nearly impossible to sell it locally.

“The infrastructure part,” says Hunton, “is the missing link... Until we can turn it into flour, we can’t talk to the bakers and the chefs about it.”

Grain processing, says Lindsey, “Is a huge bottleneck in the Valley... We could grow hundreds of acres, but where will we grind it? It’s little by little right now.”

Lack of storage infrastructure also forces farmers to search for buyers who can handle purchasing entire crops soon after harvest. Most individual consumers, and even mid-sized buyers, like bakeries, are accustomed to buying things like flour or beans in relatively small batches throughout the year.

Acquiring processing and storage equipment can help, but it is expensive, and finding financing can be a real challenge. Those who have tried say that loans to pay for upfront capital costs have been difficult to come by.

Many banks require three years of records on a particular crop or activity before they’re willing to consider making a loan. According to MacCormack, “We’ve been working on getting an oat processing plant in the Southern Willamette Valley — a quarter-to-half-a-million-dollar project. But we haven’t been able to get money from the banks. They want to see a track record in order to finance, but there is no track record.”



Mary Ann Jasper

Rebuilding the Local Food System

While still a long way from achieving food sovereignty and security, there are many important efforts underway in the Southern Willamette Valley involving farmers, food security advocates and community members working together to rebuild a local food system. Some of these partnerships' objectives include:

- **Educating Consumers.** Many of the projects underway seek to educate consumers about the economic and health benefits of local foods; where to purchase them; and even how to use them. This work is happening continuously through venues such as farmers' markets, bulk food sales, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), the *Locally Grown* guide, outreach to schools and other institutions and better labeling. Still of Open Oak Farm says, "The CSA model is nice because it's an opportunity to introduce people to strange things and explain to them what they are... We can provide recipes with the CSA box, and when they make it successfully, they are really stoked." When asked, nearly everyone interviewed for this report said that the number one thing that they need help with is to educate a broader base of consumers.
- **Expanding Markets.** Expanding markets for local food often involves not only educating individual consumers, but beating on the doors of larger commercial and institutional buyers. A number of projects are underway that accomplish just that. Fessenden of Willamette Farm and Food Coalition says, "[It] feels like really hand-holding. But it's been amazing that between 2008 and 2009, institutional purchases of local produce doubled. It's really about creating relationships and networking."
- **Distributing Risk.** Another important way for family farmers to increase their financial security is by sharing the risk with distributors and the community. Various programs are helping to establish a predictable price for farmers, and even provide upfront revenue that's not entirely dependent upon yields. This

support is crucial to small farms without much cash flow and helps eliminates a major incentive for some growers to sell to internationally-focused middlemen.

- **Developing Infrastructure.** Vertical integration, which relies on restoring local infrastructure, is helping farmers to better connect with local buyers and sell their crops at a fairer price. Jasper of Stalford Seed Farms says, "The more equipment we get, the more rapidly we can move from harvest to processing, into sales. It's a quantum leap once you get a new piece of equipment and things get sold fast then... All of a sudden, we are really happy, because it's working. We thought there was a local market out there, but we didn't know the rapidity at which this market would respond to local grains and beans in processed form."
- **Increasing Accessibility.** To transition the local foods market from a niche to the mainstream requires honest assessments of accessibility, as well as the realization that local, sustainable and fairly-compensated food production outperforms globalized food commodities in areas other than price. Projects are underway to encourage the participation of more poor and hungry people in the recreation of local food systems.

Path Breaking Projects in the Southern Willamette Valley

A handful of the innovative projects we heard about that are working to rebuild local food systems in the face of global pressures include the following:

- The **Southern Willamette Valley Bean & Grain Project** aims to transition grass seed farms into staple food crop farms, also encouraging the transition from chemical-intensive agriculture to organic practices or other practices that prioritize soil quality. The farmers meet in the fall and spring to report to each other what worked and what didn't, as well as what resources they have or need. More recently they have exchanged ideas about marketing and labeling, which is necessary since they are competing as well as cooperating.

- One of the Bean & Grain Project's big successes has been the **Willamette Seed and Grain, LLC**, a partnership which markets processed grains to bakers and restaurants, enabling farmers to focus on farming. "A huge part of it is that WSG will be able to give a fair price when [a farm's] ready to sell, because storage is nil," says Lindsey of A2R. "[Our farm] won't have to be on the phone for weeks every fall trying to sell." WSG also coordinates crop rotation among the farms in order to meet customer demand while keeping fields fertile.
- Recently, WSG joined the **Domestic Fair Trade Association (DFTA)**, a collaboration of organizations representing farmers, farmworkers, food system workers, retailers, manufacturers, processors and non-governmental organizations to promote fair trade principles in the U.S. MacCormack of Sunbow Farm notes that joining the DFTA has given WSG "a way to talk about our collective values on both a local and a regional and national/international scale... Also, it is a way for us to have a wider organized presence as we battle GMO [genetically-modified organism] pollution about to hit us in wheat."
- Several member organizations in the DFTA founded the **Agricultural Justice Project**, which held a training for farmers in Benton County and a 3-day training, including two actual farm inspections, for farmworkers and certifiers in Lane County, in an effort to explore "Food Justice Certification." According to Richard Mandelbaum, Board President of DFTA, this label and certification program is an important educational tool for consumers, while enabling farmers and farm workers to form partnerships that benefit them both in non-traditional ways. While some who attended the training say it's too soon to evaluate this program, at least one attendee felt that the networking that occurred in the training was beneficial for certifiers and farmworker organizations alike.
- **Hummingbird Wholesale** is another business helping to connect area buyers with local farmers. It currently has about 35 natural food and co-op stores from San Francisco to Seattle as its primary customers and has recently been expanding its sales to individual consumers and groups of consumers who buy collectively. Among other



Lynn Fessenden (center left)

projects, Hummingbird developed a Distributor-Supported Agriculture (DSA) program that helps provide a steadier stream of income to bean and grain growers. Much like more commonly-known Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs that provide up-front income to small vegetable farmers, the DSA provides up-front payments to various farmers in exchange for a share of their crop, regardless of actual yields. The DSA at times also provides seeds to farmers.

- The **Willamette Farm and Food Coalition**, based in Lane County, provides information to consumers that helps them connect with local farmers. They organize farm tours and a regular “That’s My Farmer” event with the faith community. They promote the website EugeneLocalFoods.com. They’re also in their fourth year of producing the *Locally Grown* guide, which has expanded to more than 80 pages and is also available online. Fessenden says, “It’s just exploded — the number of consumers interested and businesses and farmers who want to be in it.” WFFC also runs a Farm to School Program, which has made great strides in increasing institutional purchases of locally-grown food.
- Many of the groups and farms featured in this report have helped to organize “**Fill Your Pantry**” bulk food sale events. At the November 2010 event at A2R Farm near Corvallis, sale goers enjoyed live bluegrass and free, locally-produced beer and wine. At the April 2011 event held at Hummingbird Wholesale in Eugene, individuals were not only able to buy beans and grains in bulk directly from local farmers, but were served a free array of delicious vegan food prepared with those beans and grains by Krishna Khalsa and the Lane Community College culinary program. The farmers consider these events such a success that they plan to repeat them in at least Lane and Benton Counties on a routine basis.
- Krishna Khalsa and others are building on several small-scale examples, such as at the Fill Your Pantry event in Eugene and serving performed at



*Julie and Charlie Tilt at
Hummingbird Wholesale*

homeless centers to start routine **community dinners** at a local church that are free, vegan and made with locally-produced beans and grains. In addition to feeding people, these dinners are a way to share and develop skills in the areas of procurement, planning, preparation and advertising. They are also a way to increase appreciation of local food and re-establish food as a basis for community connectedness, real face-to-face networking and local organizing.

- The **Oregon Food Bank** has been conducting food assessments across the Willamette Valley in order to help communities evaluate their status, and come up with goals and strategies for eliminating hunger. The key to this work is focusing locally. Sharon Thornberry says, “Food assessments get put into practice when the scale is not too large, and the community members participate in visioning and goal-setting. ‘What do we want and why?’” Thornberry also notes the Farm Direct program, which allows consumers using food stamps to purchase high-quality foods directly from local farmers. The Springfield Farmers

Market in Lane County has a program that provides customers utilizing food stamps with an extra \$5 worth of produce.

- In Linn, Benton and Lincoln Counties, **Ten Rivers Food Web** (TRFW) advances a community-organizing model that establishes local groups to assess local food needs and develop community-based solutions. Groups in Sweet Home, Lebanon, Alsea, Alpine and Monroe have helped create community gardens and other food access projects. TRFW also funded a project at Oregon State University that helps poor students to access local food. Harry MacCormack says, "It's about stirring up the pot, finding out what's needed." In partnership with the Oregon Food Bank, TRFW has participated in local food assessments, and members lobby for state legislation that would benefit local food systems.
- **Adaptive Seeds**, located at Open Oak farm, works to adapt diverse crops to the local climate and soils, with the goal of providing seeds to area farmers that yield tasty, nutritious, tolerant and sustainable harvests. Still says, "A lot of organizations save seeds, but few are

crops ideal to the small farm scale. We're focusing on where help is needed: preserving rare things and finding solid varieties."

- The **Oregon Grows Partnership** is a collective effort among farm, rural development, local food and food security organizations (including the Oregon Fair Trade Campaign) to make public policy changes that aid in the recreation of sustainable, accessible and fairly-compensated local food systems. In 2011, the Partnership focused on legislative efforts in Salem designed to modernize and clarify farmers' market rules, recognize regulatory exemptions for small poultry growers and expand credit to farmers through the creation of an Oregon State Bank.

The Oregon Fair Trade Campaign is also organizing statewide (including in the Southern Willamette Valley with the Lane County Fair Trade Campaign) to help Oregonians better advocate for federal policy changes that would benefit farmers, farmworkers and consumers both in Oregon and globally. This report is just one small example of that work.



Lane County Fair Trade Campaign table at a Spring 2011 "Fill Your Pantry" event in Eugene

Interviewee and Farm Biographies

Harry MacCormack

Sunbow Farm (Corvallis)

Harry MacCormack is the owner of Sunbow Farm, certified organic since 1984. Known as the “Institute for Biowisdom,” the farm serves as a classroom for a variety of courses taught by MacCormack. Farmer, scientist, organizer and educator, MacCormack is the author of several books, including *The Transition Document: Toward a Biologically Resilient Agriculture*. Now retired, he was a researcher at Oregon State University for many years.

Over the course of his career, MacCormack co-founded the regional Tilth and Oregon Tilth, and also co-founded and served on the Board of Ten Rivers Food Web, a farm-community organizing nonprofit spanning Linn, Benton, and Lincoln counties. MacCormack and TRFW founded the Southern Willamette Valley Bean & Grain Project to re-localize the production and processing of high-protein, high-calorie foods. He also co-founded and is currently the President of Willamette Seed and Grain, LLC, a partnership that helps farmers pool resources for equipment and infrastructure, promises a fair price when the crop must get sold, seeks and sustains demand and coordinates crop rotation to retain soil quality.

Mary Ann Jasper

Greenwillow Grains (Brownsville)

Mary Ann Jasper lives in Shedd, and is a member of the Stalford family, which owns Stalford Seed Farms in Tangent. Jasper is currently the Sales and Distribution Coordinator for the Greenwillow Grains, located in Brownsville, which mills and sells organic wheat flour from Stalford and several other local farms who are partners in the Willamette Seed and Grain, LLC. Recently, Jasper organized Stalford’s membership with the Domestic Fair Trade Association. She is also active in the Southern Willamette Valley Bean & Grain Project and the Corvallis Sustainability Coalition’s Local 6 Food Action Team. As a volunteer with Technica, just following the passage of the Central America Free Trade Agreement, she created a pre-press printing

curriculum for what became the first technical printing school in Nicaragua.

Clinton Lindsey and Mike Robinson

A2R Farms (Corvallis)

Mike Robinson, owner of A2R Farms, grew up on a livestock farm and started planting crops at an early age. He and his son, Clint Lindsey, run A2R. A2R Farm is a member of the Southern Willamette Valley Bean & Grain Project and is in transition from conventional grass seed to organic food production, receiving a small government grant to assist with the costs involved. A2R is also a member of the Willamette Seed and Grain, LLC.

Charlie and Julie Tilt

Hummingbird Wholesale (Eugene)

Hummingbird emerged from Honey Heaven, established in 1972 as a specialty honey shop in Eugene. The business was purchased by Eugene Scott in 1981, and he changed it to a wholesale business. In August of 2003, Charlie and Julie Tilt purchased the business from Scott when he retired. Hummingbird remains a small, family-owned and operated business that is supporting the work of the Southern Willamette Valley Bean & Grain Project in conjunction with Willamette Farm and Food Coalition (WFFC), hosting the first “Fill Your Pantry” bulk food sale in Eugene. At the sale, consumers could buy directly from farms, including Hunton and Open Oak.

Hummingbird buys products locally when available, and prefers working directly with farmers. It and WFFC have been working on a “lottery grant” program with the Lane County government to help share the risk that farmers bear, and it already has a Distributor-Supported Agriculture program to share risk with farmers. Hummingbird sells directly to consumers two days per week at its location in Eugene and offers discounts for bulk purchases, encouraging people to buy collectively. They also distribute regionally to the bulk sections of 35 natural food stores and co-ops from San Francisco to Seattle. Deliveries are made by bicycle to Eugene area stores, typically using reusable packaging materials. Hummingbird has a zero waste policy and currently needs only



Andrew Still of Open Oak Farm at a global Tierra Madre convention report back

one household-sized trash can every two months to contain all of its landfill waste from the warehouse.

Tom Hunton

Huntons' Farm (Junction City)

Tom Hunton is the second-generation owner of the third-generation, 2,800-acre Hunton Farm in the Junction City area that produces grass and clover seed, grains, dried beans and legumes. Hunton has farmed fulltime since 1968. The majority of his farm's acreage is leased. Huntons' Farm employs 30 people fulltime, and still more during harvest. Most of the farm's income is from grass seed production and wheat export, but the farm is also attempting to increase its dollar revenue from local-sector crops. The operation includes a seed and grain processing facility, rail access and now (since the interview) the Camas Country Mill. With this new mill, locally-grown and stone-milled flours and cereals are available in the Southern Willamette Valley for the first time in 80 years. The mill also has a major contract for wheat grown in Eastern Oregon.

Sharon Thornberry

Oregon Food Bank (Portland)

Previously a gleaning coordinator, Sharon

Thornberry is currently Community Resource Developer at the Oregon Food Bank. Thornberry, and two Americorps staffpeople working with Ten Rivers Food Web and Resources Assistance for Rural Environments (RARE), recently completed community-based food assessments in Linn, Benton, and Lincoln counties in an attempt to highlight specific needs, assets and opportunities in the region's food system.

Andrew Still and Sarah Kleeger

Open Oak Farm (Sweet Home)

Open Oak Farm, only in production for about a year at the time of our interview, produces grains, beans and winter vegetables. It is also home to Adaptive Seeds, a program working to identify, adapt and preserve crop varieties that thrive in the area's soils and climate.

Willow Coberly

Stalford Seed Farms (Tangent)

With her husband, Willow Coberly owns and operates Stalford Seed Farms, which helped to make Linn County the "grass seed capital of the world." Stalford was the first grass seed farm in the Southern Willamette Valley Bean & Grain Project to transition to organic-certified beans and grains. Stalford is also the largest farm in the Project. Of a total of 10,000 acres, they currently have 300 acres of certified organic grains and beans in 20-acre plots. Although Stalford still exports most of its wheat, it is expanding its local market.

John Eveland

Gathering Together Farm (Philomath)

John Eveland owns Gathering Together Farm (GTF), along with his wife, Sally Brewer. Producing organic-certified fruits and vegetables, GTF, a neighbor of MacCormack's Sunbow Farm, expanded from 7 acres in 1987 to about 65 acres in 2011. During harvest, GTF employs 80 workers, most Latino. GTF pays a living wage and has Latino managers. GTF produces organically-grown seed and has a restaurant on the farm, at which the workers have lunch three days per week.

Krishna Singh Khalsa

Lane County Food Policy Council (Eugene)
“Building communities through food has been a passion for me for more than 40 years,” says Krishna Khalsa. He was involved with the Golden Temple chain of vegetarian restaurants that helped to popularize vegetarianism in certain urban centers the 1970s and '80s. Saying that food is at the heart of the Sikh cultural model, he explains, “Because we had beards and wore turbans, there wasn’t really employment for us, so we had to create our own jobs. And in that process we created jobs for hundreds of others.” He is a member of the Lane County Food Policy Council, and has been organizing community dinners featuring food made from locally-grown beans and grains, like at the Eugene “Fill Your Pantry” event.

Lynne Fessenden

Willamette Farm and Food Coalition
(Eugene)
Lynne Fessenden grew up in farm country in upstate New York. Her sister is a farmer.

Before being hired as the Executive Director of the Willamette Farm and Food Coalition (WFFC) in 2000, she worked for the National Environmental Health Alliance. Fessenden has belonged to Groundwork Organics CSA and has served on the Board of Oregon Toxics Alliance. WFFC is a nonprofit and partner in the Southern Willamette Valley Bean & Grain Project and Oregon Grows Partnership. WFFC has close ties to the faith community and emerged from the Edible City Resource Center, which was formed in the 1970s and had been all-volunteer until 2000. WFFC co-organized the “Fill Your Pantry” bulk sale events at A2R Farm near Corvallis and at Hummingbird Wholesale in Eugene, among many other events. WFFC annually produces a *Locally Grown* guide in hardcopy and online.

Websites

A2R Farms

<http://corvallisfarmer.blogspot.com>

Adaptive Seeds

<http://www.adaptiveseeds.com>

Camas Country Mill

<http://www.camascountrymill.com>

Corvallis Sustainability Coalition

<http://sustainablecorvallis.org/>

Domestic Fair Trade Alliance

<http://www.thedfta.org>

Farmworker Housing Development Corporation

<http://www.fhdc.org/>

Gathering Together Farm

<http://www.gatheringtogetherfarm.com>

Hummingbird Wholesale

<http://www.hummingbirdwholesale.com>

Open Oak Farm

<http://www.openoakfarm.com>

Oregon Fair Trade Campaign

<http://www.oregonfairtrade.org>

Oregon Food Bank

<http://www.oregonfoodbank.org>

Oregon Grows Partnership

<http://oregongrows.wordpress.com>

Southern Willamette Valley Bean & Grain Project

<http://www.mudcitypress.com/beanandgrain.html>

Sunbow Farm

<http://www.sunbowfarm.org>

Ten Rivers Food Web

<http://tenriversfoodweb.org>

UNETE Center for Farmworker Advocacy

<http://uneteoregon.org/>

Willamette Farm and Food Coalition

<http://www.lanefood.org>

Willamette Seed and Grain, LLC

<http://www.WillametteSeedandGrain.com>



www.oregonfairtrade.org