



O.U.E. Update

A Publication of Organizations United for the Environment

We Will Need to Build Sustainable Living on Our Own — Start by Buying Fresh and Local, and by Greening Schools

In this issue, we hope to persuade you, if you are not already doing so, to join us in a campaign to support local growers and/or to get the region's school officials to create green schools. In doing these things, we will join a worldwide campaign to engage in sustainable living — that is, to live as if we actually give a hoot about the health and welfare of our children, and their children. It is hard to imagine how we might tackle such an immense job without the support of elite politicians in Washington, D.C. and the giant U.S. corporations, as they so clearly dominate our political and economic life. However, we will need to do most of the work on our own because there are ever growing limits to what we can expect from these great seats of power.

Big corporations shape their operations to satisfy the pursuit of their owners and managers for profits; a goal that too often becomes simple greed. In the big U.S. corporations, the ratio of average CEO salaries to the average wage of their employees is now about 500 to 1 and has been rising for two decades. The global economy fuels corporate avarice by promising annihilation to firms that fail to anticipate consumer needs or to seek out the lowest paid labor. Some see a possible ray of light in this race to the bottom in the example of prominent U.S. corporations that pronounce themselves as “green and good.” Without doubt, some genuine corporate environmentalists have emerged from this process.* Yet — and this needs to be remembered — once a corporation's green technology and green products fail to turn a profit, it will abandon them without remorse or apology. Even those developing relatively “clean” operations are bound by the fact that corporations are most essentially legal structures for making profits; counting on them to lead the charge to a healthy environment is, to put it mildly, a pipe dream.

Regarding the environmental commitment of the political elite, it is now obvious that President Bush cares more for nurtur-

ing the oil industry than the air and water. For their part, both the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives have refused meaningfully to contest the president's infamous decision to ignore the fact and consequences of global warming. Partly, this is because so many politicians depend upon oil companies, or their co-dependents, the automobile giants, to finance their election campaigns. Between 1998 and 2005, Exxon/Mobil spent \$67 million, and the U.S. oil industry as a whole spent \$167 million, to get the politicians to vote for oil.** The oil companies also browbeat politicians into silence by spinning out “scientific” evidence that global warming doesn't exist,

even as the planet heated and the glaciers melted. Now, under the guise of reducing our petroleum dependency, the U.S. government is spending billions to support ethanol production, rather than expanding public transportation, mandating more efficient vehicles, or allocating those billions to alternative en-

ergy and conservation. It reminds one of comedian Lily Tomlin's line that, “No matter how cynical you get, it is impossible to keep up.”

Without question, state and local government policies do sometimes support sustainable living, such as the growing number of grants in our state for alternative energy projects. However, officials at this level are, by law, obligated to pursue a host of goals, some of which do not serve healthy living, or even rationality. For example, most local officials have interpreted the state's mandate to “support agriculture” to mean that they are powerless to stop an invasion of animal factories throughout the state, each of which embodies the antithesis to anything healthy or sustainable.

In other words: If we are going to develop a healthy and sustainable way to live, we will have to do it ourselves, gradually transforming our habits of eating, heating, cooling, and moving ourselves from here to there.

GOOD NEWS!

Just prior to going to press with this issue, we learned that OUE has been awarded an anonymous grant for \$7,500 to help pay for the installation of a PVC solar collector at Warrior Run High School. See pages 3-4 for more information about how we will use this grant money. ♦

In this issue, we've got lots of information about two things that you can do, starting right after you finish reading it. The enclosed map of regional farm markets and the companion article provide all you need to know to start buying fresh and local. We also include key details about green schools, including the possibility of one being developed in our own area. We urge you to read these details and then visit officials at your local school to ask them to start greening their campus. Remember that the path to any solution is someone's first step. Why don't you take it?

Our experience is that action on behalf of sustainable living can have many payoffs, and the central one is nicely embodied in a well-known lyric from the Rolling Stones:

You can't always get what you want.
But if you try, sometimes you just might find
You get what you need.....ahhhhhhh, yeah.....

**For one notable exception, see "Executive on a Mission," NYTimes, 5-22-07. **This information comes from www.exposeexxon.com, a site that includes details on the lobbying of other oil companies, ExxonMobil's efforts to deny global warming, and the names of the oil industry's favorite politicians. ♦*

Buy Fresh, Buy Local

by Amanda Burbage*

Few of us are aware that the act of eating can be a powerful statement of commitment to our own well-being and at the same time the creation of a healthier habitat. Your health, happiness, and the future of life on earth are rarely so much in your own hands as when you sit down to eat. - John Robbins, *Diet for a New America*.

Eating is something we each do every day, multiple times a day, but rarely do we take the time to consider exactly what it means to eat – what we're putting into our bodies, where it came from and what it took for it to arrive on our plates. In the 21st century eating has become an activity that has no less than transformed our economy, our landscapes and even the health of our bodies. Globalization has in many ways divorced our thinking about the implications of what we eat and how we eat with production methods and food miles cleverly hidden behind slogans and packaging. However, recent food scares in the national media have gotten more people paying attention to the importance of knowing where food comes from. This is a prime opportunity for us to consider not only how food affects our own health, but also the implications of its production on the health of our land and our communities.

Today, according to the American Farmland Trust, only 2 million of 300 million Americans are still farming, and 3,000 acres of farmland are lost each day to new development. It's not surprising then that at the peak of the growing season it is easier to pick up a piece of produce that comes from another state or country than it is to buy something grown by a local farmer. With rising fossil fuel prices threatening to drive up the cost of our already heavily subsidized food system, one might argue that we are on the verge of a national food crisis.

But here in Central Pennsylvania, things look a little different. Agriculture is as wed to the beauty of the local landscape as it is to the state's economy. We are fortunate to live in an area where sprawl has not overtaken all that remains of our farming heritage. Unlike many parts of the country, it is still possible to imagine feeding ourselves on the diversity of foods produced within a 50-mile radius of where we live. Living in such an Eden is not something to be taken for granted. Keeping farmland means keeping our farmers in business and to do that we must invoke a certain responsibility in ourselves to eat consciously, particularly when the goods are in season and in abundance.

Fortunately, a "Buy Fresh Buy Local" campaign is taking root in Central Pennsylvania, making it easier for consumers to find and identify products grown or raised in the Susquehanna Valley. Buy Fresh Buy Local is part of a national campaign launched five years ago by the Food Routes Network whose efforts have yielded a total of forty eight such campaigns across the country, including eight in Pennsylvania.

The "Valleys of the Susquehanna Buy Fresh Buy Local" campaign began last year as a joint undertaking between SEDA Council of Governments (SEDA-COG) and the Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture (PASA) who both recognized the value in keeping local agriculture viable. The campaign's goals are to 1) increase consumer demand for local foods, 2) heighten the visibility of the region's sources for local food, and 3) expand market opportunities for local farmers. To achieve this, Buy Fresh Buy Local works to connect consumers to local farmers by directing them to the region's farms, farmers markets, and restaurants and local businesses that purchase from local farmers. The campaign also organizes events aimed at building a stronger relationship between the producer & the consumer, such as bike tours between several local farms to enjoy the beauty of the rural landscape and to learn more about certain methods of local food production (heirloom vegetables, contract dairy farming, pastured pork, chicken). Afterwards, the bikers share a locally raised meal.

Most recently, the campaign partnered with six local visitors bureaus and Penn State Cooperative Extension to create an agritourism guide, *Homegrown in the Valleys*, to serve as a resource for consumers looking for local products. The guide features over 60 destinations across a 10 county area and includes information about seasonal products and hours of operation. With over 45,000 maps now in print, we hope that the guide will serve as a catalyst for the greater profitability of local, direct market farms.

As Wendell Berry so eloquently puts it, "eating is an agricultural act." With over a million acres of farmland in the Susquehanna Valley, we are ideally situated to begin grappling with issues of food security in the coming decades. With a mounting regional awareness of the importance of supporting local agriculture, now is the time to recognize how the power of our food purchases can translate into a brighter future for our region. The beauty of conscious eating is that it can take you beyond the simple enjoyment of the flavor of the food on your palette. When you eat locally, every bite you take is helping to protect the beauty of the

place where you live, building the resilience of the local economy, and most importantly, enhancing the web of interconnection that is the strength of a local community. ♦

**We invited Amanda Burbage, an urban planner who is coordinating the regional campaign to buy fresh and local, to submit the article above. Amanda also supplied "Homegrown in the Valleys," which we have enclosed with the newsletter to give you at least sixty reasons to buy fresh and local.*

OUE BOARD MEETINGS

The OUE Board meets at 7:00 p.m. on the first Monday of every month at the United Methodist Church in Watsontown. Our meetings are open to the public, and we encourage local citizens to attend and, better yet, to join us in our work. ♦

Taking the Path to Green Schools

I. The Basics

What does it mean to "green" a school? One of the best descriptions we know is from an article, "The Top 10 Green Schools in the U.S.: 2006," on the web site of *National Geographic* (www.thegreenguide.com) This web site is but one of a surprisingly large number on the topic, and the article provides a typical list of the aspects of a school which will qualify it as "green." The usual tool for evaluating green schools is the "LEED" Guidelines, provided by the U.S. Green Building Council's "Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design." (www.usgbc.org).

We have summarized below the basic elements of the LEED guidelines because 1) they speak for themselves about what is involved in greening a school, and 2) provide a good starting point for anyone who wants to begin the work of persuading local school officials to green their schools. We have constructed the list of elements in the form of a series of questions that are asked of schools who apply to achieve the "green" status.

1. Green Building and Construction: How do the following aspects of the school's construction serve overall greening: a) Site Location; b) Indoor Air Quality; c) Energy Efficiency; d) Material Selection; e) Waste Management.

2. Electricity Supply: To what extent has the school reduced dependency on electricity supplied by utilities with on-site or off-site solar wind, hydroelectric or other sources of energy?

3. Food: Does the school offer organic food and/or rely on local growers? Are the school vending machines supplied with healthy snacks, or with junk food?

4. Recycling: Does the school have a re-cycling program, and does it also use a broad range of recycled materials?

5. Procurement Policies: Does the school regularly purchase

recycled, low-toxicity goods? Factors involved in defining such goods include recycled content, life cycle analysis, energy use, water use, toxicity, length of usable life. Also, does the school have "Green Seal" certification for office and other products, take-back programs for electronic equipment, and efforts to reduce paper usage?

6. Transportation: Does the school encourage carpooling, bicycle lanes, and public transportation? Does the school have a policy to prevent buses idling on school grounds?

7. Environmental Curriculum: Does the school have an environmental curriculum, and to what extent does it make a connection for the students between the quality of their life and the environment that they live in?

8. Environmental Contaminants: Does the school a) eliminate pesticide and implement "integrated pest management"; b) use green cleaners; c) monitor the threats posed by lead in paint, asbestos, mold and arsenic in pressure-treated wood used in playground equipment?

9. School Green Spaces: Does the school provide learning opportunities with flower and organic vegetable gardens, trails and woodland areas, landscaping with native plants, wildlife observation, (all of which help to reduce water and pesticide use)?

II. Steps Toward the Greening of the Warrior Run School District

Editor's Note: We will use the \$7,500 grant referred to on page one to help pay for a photovoltaic solar project at Warrior Run High School. This system will provide lighting for the science lab, and its operations will be incorporated into the school's curriculum. The installation will cost \$12,500, and OUE and Warrior Run will pay the balance. Our receiving this grant adds a further dimension to the article below, one that we had finished writing before we got the news about the grant. Indeed, the grant amounts to yet another step in the direction of greening the Warrior Run School District.

During the past two years, OUE Board members have often talked to Dan Schaeffer, Superintendent of the Warrior Run School District (WRSD), about green schools, and he shares with us the idea that his district is a prime candidate for greening. The first embodiment of the idea began to emerge last year when OUE, using its own funds combined with those from a grant and WRSD, hired Solair Energy, Inc. to install a solar system at the Turbotville elementary school. Soon after that installation, Dan applied for and received a grant from the "PA Economic Development Association" (PEDA) to construct a wind powered turbine. That turbine, also installed by Solair, is now up, running and connected to the grid, meaning that all the electricity that it generates will reduce the District's electricity bill.

In May, the Board invited Dan Schaeffer to discuss with us our desire to begin a long term process whereby we work with his district to make it "green." For certain, this was a preliminary meeting, and neither Dan nor the Board was prepared then to draw up a plan and start to work. Reading the previous article, about the necessary ele-

ments that constitute a green school, makes it clear that some elements, such as site location, construction, and energy supply, are capital intensive and would demand an appeal to tax payers for financing. At the same time, many items on that list, such as the solar projects already installed at WRSD, recycling, procurement, and curriculum changes, can more easily be incorporated into a current school budget. In a word, both Dan and the Board agreed that we should continue our conversations, and that we shared the excitement of the idea that WRSD might become a model green school in the area. It is hard to imagine a more important step in a community's transition to sustainable living than a school full of kids both experiencing and learning about the constituent parts of a green school. We will certainly keep our readers informed about how this plan unfolds. ♦

Pennsylvania Renewable Energy and Sustainable Living Festival

This year's event will take place on September 22 and 23, and for the third straight year, several OUE Board members will attend. The Festival, held in Kempton, just north of Kutztown, provides assorted demonstration models, lectures, and discussions on renewable energy/conservation, along with good food and music. Last year, OUE donated funds to help organize the event, and two of us joined Pam Denlinger of Solair Energy to discuss the solar energy projects at Warrior Run and at Greenwood Friends School. This year, Festival organizers have invited us to make a presentation on the wind machine and other solar projects at Warrior Run. We, in turn, have invited Dan Schaeffer to make that presentation, who will do so if his schedule permits.

The theme for this year's event is "Sow the Seeds of Change," especially as that slogan relates to conservation, renewable energy sources, and a more sustainable way of living. We urge you to attend, and for more information about how to get there and what you'll find, go to: www.paenergyfest.com. ♦

News of the Local Action Network (LAN)

In our last issue, we introduced readers to LAN, a new, energetic group that aims "to develop perspective, vision and direction about pressing social, economic and environmental issues of the day for residents of the Central Susquehanna Valley." We invited the group to provide us the following

update on it's activities. To contact LAN, call 570.522.8159 or email info@LocalActionPA.org.

The Local Action Network wrapped up its May of offerings with a presentation on Green Building and a program on canning and food preservation. Each is part of the LAN commitment to moving the Central Susquehanna Valley toward greater sustainability as a self-sufficient community.

In the first, Sam Pearson, spokesperson of LAN, gave a lecture on the concept of green building: reasons for it, economic parameters, and scope. The large audience then proceeded to hold a thoughtful discussion as a group for 40 minutes and then broke down for less formal conversations. It was a great opportunity to make connections, whether between local contractors and designers, the housing authority and researchers at Bucknell, or just between like-minded, energy- and environment- conscious people in the community. There will be a number of follow-up programs growing out of the event, including closer examination of material choices, a working list of local resources, and collaborative work with local suppliers.

In addition, along allied lines, the first of LAN's Home Energy Workshops will be held in June. These Saturday morning sessions will involve a discussion of energy conservation and efficiency strategies, training in how to conduct an energy audit of your own home, and meeting with an environmental consultant, a heating contractor and a designer on best strategies for the current and long term energy issues in your house. There will be a fee of \$15 and advanced registration is required. There will be additional such sessions later in the year.

Annette Kratzer of the Penn State Cooperative Extension presented the second program on canning techniques. LAN hopes to follow this well-received lecture format with more hands-on canning klatsches during peak harvest times. Anyone interested in canning local and organic produce with others, whether with or without prior experience, is welcome. This may prove to be an informal resurrection of the Master Canner program that fell by the wayside as convenience foods took over our thinking. ♦

OUE Publications Committee: Editor, Charles Sackrey; Associate Editors, Linda Godfrey, Sally Lauver, and Clyde Peeling; Distribution, Bessie Bush and Linda Godfrey.

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OUE is a grass-roots organization dedicated to protecting the environment. As a non-profit, charitable organization, OUE is crucially dependent on our readers' donations to continue its work, and you can help us along with a tax-deductible contribution. Donations are used to fund efforts such as the *Ban the Burner* campaign in the early 1990s, activities of *The Task Force on Hog Factories*, alternative energy projects that will be built at local schools, and for public education. Our web site is: www.ouenews.org. Please send your comments to: editor@ouenews.org.