



# O.U.E. Update

*A Publication of Organizations United for the Environment*

## OUE, A Grassroots Organization

Recently, the OUE Board met with a group of investors and a representative from the Pennsylvania Farmers Union to discuss the desirability of an ethanol plant in our area. Ethanol from this plant would be added to gasoline for use in transportation, allegedly reducing the demand for domestic and imported oil. These visitors were seeking OUE's endorsement either because they thought we would enthusiastically welcome their endeavor or, more likely, they believed we might resist the permit for the plant if we thought its operations were an environmental threat. Board members had prepared for the meeting by studying several documents describing the costs and benefits of ethanol plants for their immediate neighbors and as an element in the nation's overall energy policy.\*

After our guests left and we discussed the exchange, the Board agreed that we would *not* endorse the proposed plant and that our guests had seriously misinterpreted the nature of OUE, both our goals and our practices. We wrote them a letter to explain our opposition and how we arrived at that position. Given that the letter amounted a description of "who we are and what we do," we decided to share with our readers and supporters the following extended version of its main elements.

As our readers know, for the past decade in this newsletter, and borrowing from our *Mission Statement*, we have described our principal dedication as "*protecting the environment*" and our practices as those of a "*grassroots organization*." What do these two ingredients mean to us?

For over two years, OUE has spent considerable time, energy and donated funds on planning and financing solar energy projects at two local schools. We intend to expand our work in this area because we have long assumed that a viable national energy policy demands speedier development of alternative energy sources, the consequent declining need for petroleum products, and considerably more conservation. The weatherization program to which OUE has recently donated funds (and which is described in another article) exemplifies the importance of relatively cheap ways to conserve energy, whether it comes from oil or the sun.

Reflecting these OUE goals and practices, our letter to the investors explained that our research had persuaded us that, at best, ethanol production can only slightly reduce the demand for petroleum products; that growing the crops for ethanol plants will degrade millions of acres of farm land that are needed for food production; that the emissions from such plants carry yet undetermined pollution hazards to their neighbors; and that the corporate

rush to build such plants is spurred by tax subsidies that more usefully would be spent on alternative energy and conservation. In other words, we will not protect our environment, either locally or nationally, by expanding the use of cropland to meet our fossil fuel consumption.

We also wrote that, even though we were spending more time on developing alternative energy projects, we considered OUE's most essential obligation as working with citizens to resist corporate polluters who threaten their welfare. We explained our reasons this way:

*The issue at hand is the civil liberties of citizens whose rights in these instances are so often trampled by corporate rights. Consistent with this long-term practice, our reaction [to an ethanol plant] will depend entirely on whether the evidence convinces people in the area that [its] construction and operation will threaten their health and welfare. . . .*

*[Perhaps] a strong case cannot be made that ethanol plants threaten the neighboring environment. It might also be true that whatever the evidence, the perception of regional economic gains from the plant will trump any worries about health and safety. However, if the evidence points to ethanol plants as potentially harmful to their neighbors, and if some of these neighbors come to us seeking to resist such a permit, we will almost certainly join them.*

Implicit in our letter to the investors is that being a "*grassroots organization*" means to us that we are answerable only to the readers of our newsletter, our donors, and to our own collective sense of how best we can obtain our goals. Our generous donors have always only encouraged us in what we do; we don't endorse politicians or seek their advice; and, indeed, almost all our relations with government agencies have been adversarial because they typically side with the polluting corporations.

Our Board is made up of eleven people from four counties who freely volunteer their time and efforts because they share the belief that when ordinary people get organized they can make a crucial contribution to protecting the environment and their own welfare. That view, we think, is what most genuinely makes us a "*grassroots*" organization. ♦

\* *There are countless studies on the internet about the pros and cons of ethanol production, most of them put there by writers friendly to the industry. For links to numerous critical looks at the industry, see the web site of Citizens for a Quality Environment: <http://www.c4aqe.org>*

# OUE's Alternative Energy and Conservation Program

Two years ago in this newsletter we announced an "Initiative on Alternative Energy and Conservation." We now call that our "Alternative Energy and Conservation Program," and we have considerably expanded its scope since our last issue. What follows describes existing projects, a conference many of us attended, and plans for the future.

## Existing Projects

The two solar energy projects that we announced two years ago, at Turbotville Elementary School and Greenwood Friends School, are now installed and operating. At Turbotville solar panels pre-heat water for the school's cafeteria, and at Greenwood photovoltaic cells generate electricity for use at the school. Both have educational display components that the schools have begun to incorporate into their science curricula. The two projects were installed by Solair Energy, Inc., our alternative energy consultant, and were funded by donations to OUE, a foundation grant, and by smaller contributions from the two schools.

## Pennsylvania Renewable Energy and Sustainable Living Festival

As a result of the attendance by several of our Board members at the first annual meeting of the PA Renewable Energy and Sustainable Living Festival, the Board made a donation to this year's festival. We did so because we greatly value the Association's efforts to hasten the spread of alternative energy and conservation. Before we were able to announce our donation, we were invited to make a presentation in September at the festival in Kempton, just north of Kutzdown. Pam Denlinger and two OUE Board members made a presentation, "Solar Projects at Schools," to an enthusiastic audience.

The festival, which attracts alternative energy advocates and vendors from all over the mid-Atlantic area, provides a rich assortment of demonstration models, lectures, discussions, food and music. We all learned a lot about new technology and new ideas, and spread the word about OUE. We plan to go back next year, hopefully with another presentation about additional OUE projects installed or underway. *For information about the festival, see: [www.paenergyfest.com](http://www.paenergyfest.com).*

## Wind Power Machine at Warrior Run School

On the day that Solair installed the project at Turbotville elementary school last summer, Pam Denlinger and Dan Schaeffer, superintendent of the Warrior Run School District (WRSD), joined two OUE Board members for a meeting with the press. After that meeting, and after a conversation with Pam, Dan decided to apply for a grant to the "PA Economic Development Association" (PEDA) to construct a wind driven turbine (wind power machine) to help run the school district's waste water treatment plant.

The good news is that WRSD received the grant, and Solair currently is installing the \$10,000 wind turbine. The turbine will be connected to the grid, and every kilowatt hour generated will produce a kilowatt hour of credit on the electric meter. It will generate between 150 to 500 kilowatts of electricity each month (or a savings of between \$15 and \$50 per month). Pam wrote us to say that, "Apparently, PEDA may offer future grant opportunities like this, which would be good for your readers to know." To check for such possibilities, send an email to: [info@peda.org](mailto:info@peda.org).

We hasten to point out that OUE had no direct role in getting this wind turbine financed and installed. We will, however, take credit for bringing Pam Denlinger and Dan Schaeffer together at the Turbotville installation, the beginning point of this project. Further, we received the following email from Dan with additional good news: He wrote that,

*The word is spreading. I received a call from a teacher at Wellsboro and he and his maintenance supervisor, with the superintendent's blessing, are coming down next Friday to look at the solar and wind turbine projects. They want to replicate what we did and develop systems that they can integrate into their program.*

## Weatherization Program for Senior Citizens

In October, the OUE Board voted to make a \$400 donation to a program that pays for materials used by volunteers to weatherize the homes of area senior citizens. The program is the result of a coalition of local groups and is monitored by the Union/Snyder Agency on Aging.

In deciding to participate in the program, OUE worked most directly with one of the new groups in the coalition, the Lewisburg Action Network. The LAN is worth a mention here, and we are quite glad to know that they are on the scene and underway. In one of its flyers, LAN described its mission this way:

*Our goal is to make it easier for individuals to improve their environmental profile on their own and at the same time to provide the community as a whole with a wider array of choices.*

Presently, the group's members are pursuing an ambitious range of activities. They include participating in the updating of Union County's comprehensive plan; holding a series of small group discussion courses on "Choices for Sustainable Living" developed by the Northwest Earth Institute; carrying out several public education projects; and revising a workbook published by EnAct, a group in Madison, Wisconsin that helps people create action teams to reduce waste, conserve energy and protect the air and the water.

Given this range of activities, it is obvious that in LAN we have a natural ally, and in late November we met with its planning committee to begin discussions about how we can build that alliance. For information on how to get involved with LAN, contact: Samantha Pearson, 570.522.8159 or [sam.z.pearson@gmail.com](mailto:sam.z.pearson@gmail.com).

## What's next?

OUE intends to apply for grants to finance more alternative energy/conservation projects. We are currently in contact with several area schools in search of possible sites for future projects. ♦

### 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 Watsonstown. Our meetings are open to the public, and we encourage local citizens to attend and, better yet, to join us in our work. ♦

## Getting the Word Out

In our last newsletter we reported on plans to expand our public education efforts by arranging more opportunities for public speaking, and in other ways. These plans are now well underway. During the summer we produced an informational brochure and began distributing. In the past few weeks, board members have spoken about OUE's current activities at the Milton Kiwanis Club, and at a combined meeting of the Lewisburg Kiwanis, Lions, and Rotary Club. One board member joined Pam Denlinger of Solair Energy and Dan Shaeffer of the Warrior Run School District in an interview by host Mark Lawrence of radio station WKOK. Early next spring, five Board members will discuss OUE's history and present activities with the Lifelong Learning Institute in Selinsgrove. If you are interested in having us meet with your group, please contact us. ♦

## Two Approaches to Conservation

In order to survive, human beings will have to satisfy their need for energy by replacing fossil fuels with alternative sources. The potential for replacing oil with wind and sun and water power will not, however, be realized for a while, probably decades. That is why we and others concerned with the environment are turning more attention to such conservation practices as weatherizing, turning off lights, walking more, building houses pointed to the south, and all those things on lists we likely all know. Developing the habit of these practices will undoubtedly help us to conserve material resources, including fuel, and give us more time to develop a rational energy system and more environmentally friendly ways to live. OUE's grant to the Lewisburg Action Network exemplifies our growing commitment to this kind of conservation.

Though the threat of global warming has caught the attention of the world, Americans, and particularly our national government, are inclined to ignore it. The best evidence that we

don't listen is that as five per cent of the world's population we continue our unparalleled gluttony by consuming about one fourth of all the energy the world uses in a given year.

If the threat of global warming doesn't persuade us to cut back and start conserving, what kind of evidence do we need? Below, we provide two examples that might not so easily trickle off our chemical raincoats.

### Eating up all the Brain Food

Recently, the *New York Times* described a study by neurologists who, basing their data on a study of 899 elderly people, found that people who ate two or more servings per week of fatty fish (such as salmon) "reduced their risk for dementia [such as Alzheimer's] by 39% but there was no [lowering of the risk] for those who ate less than that."\* Maybe, you already knew that eating fish was good for you. But, there's more to this story, as it relates particularly to conservation.

Last June 21<sup>st</sup>, the British environmentalist, George Monbiot, in a heavily documented article, reported that modern human beings eat only about 1/17th as much oily fish as they did in Paleolithic times (the age of the Neanderthals). Basing his conclusions on a growing body of scientific evidence, Monbiot described some of the consequences as follows:

*Dyslexia, ADHD, dyspraxia and other neurological problems seem to be associated with a deficiency of omega-3 fatty acids, especially in the womb. The evidence of a link with depression, chronic fatigue syndrome and dementia is less clear, but still suggestive. None of these conditions are caused exclusively by a lack of these chemicals, or can be entirely remedied by their application, but it's becoming pretty obvious that some of our most persistent modern diseases are, at least in part, diseases of deficiency.*

*Last year, for example, researchers at Oxford published a study of 117 children suffering from dyspraxia, [which] causes learning difficulties, disruptive*

### OUE'S COLLEGE SCHOLARSHIP AWARD

Last February, we sent applications to local schools for a new scholarship program, aimed at 8<sup>th</sup> graders. Students were asked to do independent study of college opportunities and write a letter or essay. During the summer, we awarded three such applicants \$200 savings bonds to be used to help pay college expenses. We are proud to announce that the three winners of this year's awards were: Kayla N. Dunlap from Allenwood, Deanne Griffin from Lewisburg, and Jeanna Stiadle from Montgomery. We thank these three for their excellent efforts and wish them well in their studies. ♦

*behaviour and social problems. It affects about 5% of children. Some of the children were given supplements of omega 3 and 6 fatty acids, others were given placebos. The results were extraordinary. In three months the reading age of the experimental group rose by an average of 9.5 months, while the control group's rose by 3.3. Other studies have shown major improvements in attention, behaviour and IQ...*

Why, then, don't we all just eat more fish, as many already are doing? The barrier to that plan is declining fish stocks all over the world. Monbiot explains the decline this way:

*Charles Clover, in his beautifully-written book *The End of the Line* [shows] how the grotesque mismanagement of fish stocks has spread like an infectious disease. Governments help their fishermen to wipe out local shoals, then pay them to build bigger and more powerful boats so they can go further afield. When they have cleaned up their own continental shelves, they are paid by taxpayers to destroy other people's stocks. The European Union, for example, has bought pampered[British] fishermen the right to steal protein from the malnourished people of Senegal and Angola. West African stocks are now going the same way as North Sea cod and Mediterranean tuna....*

Monbiot mentions the development by a Swiss company of a new strain of algae that produces the kind of omega-3 oils that human beings need. As Monbiot suggests, the Swiss project "had better work. Otherwise the human race is destined to take a great cognitive leap backwards."\*\*

\*New York Times, November 14, 2006, page D-7. \*\*To see all of Monbiot's article and its footnotes, along with many more articles about the environment, see: [monbiot.com](http://monbiot.com).

## **Wiping out the tigers (and tens of thousands of other species)**

Fish oil is food for the body, while the existence of exotic and magnificent animals has long been food for the human soul, and perhaps none more so than tigers. Their striking combination of beauty, liveness, strength, and ferocity has long captured our attention and fueled our imagination. Despite it all, tigers are on the verge of extinction because of the destruction of their habitat

by the spread of human societies and hunting. In India, where about 60% of the tigers live, their estimated numbers have fallen from 100,000 in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to roughly 1,500-3,000 now. Whatever the actual number, it has been roughly halved in *the last ten years*, and the area occupied by tigers is 41% smaller now than it was ten years ago. Of the six tiger sub-species, three are already extinct. In a word, if we don't give them more space and protect them from hunters tigers will no longer be with us. (*This information on tigers comes from the Guardian Weekly, July 8-August 3, 2006.*)

Tigers are being joined in what experts are calling a "crisis of extinction" of what might now be tens of thousands of species each year. Stephen Meyers, writing in the *Boston Review* (May/April 2004), states the evidence dramatically.

*The fossil record and statistical studies suggest that the average rate of extinction over the past hundred million years has hovered at several species per year. Today the extinction rate surpasses 3,000 species per year and is accelerating rapidly—it may soon reach the tens of thousands annually. In contrast, new species are evolving at a rate of less than one per year.*

*Over the next 100 years or so as many as half of the Earth's species, representing a quarter of the planet's genetic stock, will either completely or functionally disappear. The land and the oceans will continue to teem with life, but it will be a peculiarly homogenized assemblage of organisms naturally and unnaturally selected for their compatibility with one fundamental force: us. Nothing—not national or international laws, global bioreserves, local sustainability schemes, nor even "wildlands" fantasies—can change the current course. The path for biological evolution is now set for the next million years. And in this sense "the extinction crisis"—the race to save the composition, structure, and organization of biodiversity as it exists today—is over, and we have lost. . .*

Perhaps Meyers is right, that "we have lost." Yet, in the hope that we haven't, it's surely time for you and for me to try to develop more reasonable patterns of consumption. We must develop ways to feed our own needs without destroying species crucial to our own well-being and yet under our prolonged siege. ♦

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OUE is a grass-roots organization dedicated to protecting the environment. As a non-profit, charitable organization, OUE is completely dependent on public support 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](http://www.ouenews.org). Please send your comments to: [editor@ouenews.org](mailto:editor@ouenews.org).