

Saving the Small Farmer

—continued from cover

"It helps us break into markets we couldn't otherwise. We can go to a big supermarket and say we've got Harry and David pears or Granny Smith apples for a good price. They'll start doing business with us, and then we'll say we've got this other line of stuff."

Once OGI was on solid footing, the members began kicking around ideas on how to help at the other end—the production of crops. For two years, Tom Forster, working under a VISTA grant, developed the mechanism of ARABLE, which was unveiled in 1983.

ARABLE's purpose, says Forster, is to help small farmers, many of whom grow organically, who don't have access to conventional short-term financing. Technical and financial advice is given, as are loans for seeds, fertilizer or equipment, made through one of three accounts at O.U.R. Federal Credit Union.

The Credit Fund is the general loan fund, into which members can place their funds at 7 percent interest. Loans from this fund are generally short-term. Assets have quickly mounted to \$200,000, and loans worth \$100,000 have been made, still short of ARABLE's goal of putting 75 percent of the assets into loans. Twelve local enterprises—nine farms and three food production businesses—have received loans from ARABLE.

"We're keyed to seeing that a loan will be used to increase the productive capacity of an operation," says Forster, "which will allow the repayment of the loan. We demand 100 percent security backing, but what's allowable is flexible: tractors, stereos, bicycles."

Since ARABLE's recent move into offices above O.U.R., the growth has been almost too fast, says Forster. They've stopped advertising for new money until they can make sure they have the borrowers to tap that swelling well.

Another ARABLE fund, the

Direct Loan Fund, links individual lenders with member borrowers who need more than the Credit Fund can supply. Interest and terms of payment are negotiated individually. The third fund, the Trust Fund, allows tax-deductible gift money to pass through the McKenzie River Gathering to community projects supported by ARABLE.

With OGI and ARABLE, then, the small farmer has the means to buy the seeds, purchase the equipment, and sell the produce. The only missing ingredient is the soil itself. That's where the Agricultural and Community Trust comes in.

ACT was also started with a VISTA grant. With that grant, Ellen Watson spent two years researching and organizing the Trust, whose goal is to purchase land, then lease it to eligible "stewards." ACT, says Walton, actually owns the land, and anyone who leases it is held to an agreement written only after an "intensive use-study" is made.

The group is now waiting for the paperwork to be done on their first application. Future projects are being hindered by lack of funding, but ACT's seven board members have high hopes for the future. "In our future utopian society here," Walton says optimistically, "ACT will hold title to the land, ARABLE will be able to loan money to those farming it, and OGI is the market for the products grown there."

For anyone interested in meeting some of these people turning the tide of local agriculture, the annual ARABLE meeting for 1987 will be May 23. It will feature Alana Probst, founder of the Buy Oregon Program, as well as tours to Laughing Stock Farm and Arbor Lane Nursery.

For more information, contact the ARABLE office at 485-7630, 1175 Charnelton, Eugene, OR 97401.

Dinosaurs and the Inner Animal

by Alice Carnes

WISTEC's attendance figures for the DINOSAURS! exhibit are astonishing: nearly 40,000 visitors in the first 8 weeks. As children, parents, grandparents and even non-parents continue to stream into the museum, I have begun to wonder with increasing curiosity: what is it about dinosaurs?

Why do children take on a beatific, all but ecstatic appearance when they are face to face with Apatosaurus? What magnetic force drew one small boy to WISTEC eight times in the first two weeks of the show? What fascination compels our customers to empty the "Dino-store" of its contents week after week?

I think dinosaurs give kids a breather from one of the toughest tasks of growing up: making sense of the adult intellect for purposes of self-defense, while resisting the pressure to become an adult.

Adults are forever telling kids that childhood is a happy time, while at the same time making it clear that children don't measure up. At the heart of what adults call "childishness" is the stubborn certainty that fantasy and imagination are as true as what the senses tell us.

"Reality" is a fluid concept for a young mind; a child looks at a mounted bird in the natural history museum and asks, "Is it real?" Adults take pains to separate dreams from waking thoughts, fiction from fact, and reverie from words and deeds. But for a child, a nightmare, an imaginary playmate, and a story are as real as any part of life. As children grow older, they hear adults insist ever more shrilly that the unseen world of the imagination be set aside. Each year, reason and evidence cast a longer shadow upon the child's inner life.

A dinosaur is a magic bridge between reason and the imagination. We know the dinosaurs existed, for we can see their bones in museums. But the fossil record tells us only a few things about the lives of dinosaurs. Most were herbivorous; some laid eggs; some traveled in herds; a few were fighters but most were not. As for skin color, sounds and signals, family life, feeding habits, territorial range—we can only theorize. In other words, we can only imagine, based on evidence. The mental efforts of the six-year-old dinosaur aficionado and of the paleontologist converge at this

point.

I asked an acquaintance what he thought about the dinosaurs, as he sat on the sidelines at WISTEC watching his children commune with the creatures. "Dinosaurs provide an antidote to high-tech, Star Wars imagery," he told me. "They're animals, like us. The children are drawn to them as animals, but it's really the inner animal that's being nourished."

Dinosaurs also interest us, as children and adults, because we are interested in death. The somber echoes of a museum hall where bones of great dinosaurs are displayed recall the melancholy of a graveyard or the ruined splendor of a Roman monument. In contrast, the animated dinosaur models now on display at WISTEC and in other museums throughout the country seem miraculously alive. The dead bones have taken new bodies; the dinosaurs that we dreamed have been made flesh.

And if you don't believe, use your imagination... or come see for yourself. And bring a child.

(Alice Carnes is executive director of WISTEC and, for 15 years, a parent.)

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