

ORGANIC

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economics, and his daughter, Rachel Benbrook, a consultant specializing in science communication and data analysis, penned a response to the study and its limitations in the March newsletter for the Seattle-based Puget Consumers Co-op, the nation's largest community-owned food market.

"The French team, however, deployed sophisticated methods to control for such lifestyle factors and other possible sources of bias," they wrote. "Even if high levels of organic food consumption would reduce overall cancer risk by only 5-10 percent, that still would be a phenomenally important breakthrough."

The Benbrooks' article — titled "Eat organic, lower cancer risk by 25%?" — supported the French study and specifically called on Washington state, which is the third leading state in organic food sales, behind California and Wisconsin, to spearhead the organic agriculture movement.

"It's worth highlighting the agricultural sector in Washington state stands to gain the most of any state when the public and private sectors catch up with science and the market opportunity knocking on the door," the Benbrooks wrote. "From the state's booming organic apple industry, to the remarkable diversity of small- and large-scale organic vegetable farms, Washington farmers and food businesses are showing the country how well organic farming systems can work when serious resources are invested in the people and infrastructure needed to capture economies of scale at all points along farm-to-consumer food chains."

Trudy Bialic, director of public affairs and quality standards at Puget Consumers Co-op, said Oregon, as the fourth-leading state in organic food sales, could also step up to the plate and make a difference.

"Washington and Oregon are agriculture states and conventional agriculture dominates. When you see this kind of re-

search, you have to wonder why there wouldn't be a seismic shift," said Bialic, who has been working at PCC for 27 years. "I would like to argue that for states with high organic value like Washington and Oregon, we set goals to increase our organic agriculture to see benefits not just for people, but also for the environment."

Charles Benbrook, who resides in Enterprise, said transitioning to organic agriculture from traditional farming methods "won't prevent all cancer but will almost certainly lead to fewer and

keep up with the certification because there's a lot of paperwork and money going into it," she said. "To me, it's more important to know your farmer and how they grow than it is to have your organic certification."

Tachenko, who sells her organic veggies at the La Grande Farmers Market, said she mostly agreed with the health benefits proposed by the French study.

"I think their hypothesis was not substantially based, but I do know eating organic makes you stronger and healthier so you

food on anyone through legislation. She would rather have a grassroots effort led by consumer demand and education than more laws in the books.

"It's a lot better to educate, to train and to teach, and then people make their own decisions. It will last a lot longer and make a bigger difference in their life than making a law," she said. "Organic (farming) is where it is because it comes from the grassroots and people make their own choices. It's not because the big companies are doing it, it's because consumers are demanding it. I think if we educate our consumers, they will demand more organic food and more availability of it."

Tachenko gives the Baker City Food Co-op as a good example of consumer-led change in the organic food market. She said when the co-op started in 1976, one of its members approached the local Safeway to warn them they would be selling organic products, but the grocery store didn't think of them as competition. Now, Safeway has a large selection of organic food, and Tachenko attributes that to an increase in consumer demand for organic products.

"The organic food market needs to grow organically. That's how you make something last," she said. "Once you start regulating and bringing in all of these rules, pretty soon it's not a viable option for anybody."

Bialic, though, thinks a shift at the government and legislation level needs to take place in order for real change to happen. She points to the environmental advocate Kate Greenberg, the first woman appointed to the position of agriculture commissioner for the state of Colorado, as evidence.

"Washington and Oregon should pay attention and follow the model of Colorado and appoint an organic agriculture commissioner," Bialic said. "When we're facing challenges like climate change and epidemic levels of diabetes and cancer, you would think we'd pay attention to the science that we have.

We need to advocate and agitate in our state legislatures."

One group in California is already making moves to change agriculture legislation at the state level.

California Certified Organic Farmers, a nonprofit focused on advancing organic agriculture, is pushing a public policy roadmap to get the state's organic farmland up from 4 percent to 10 percent by 2030, although Charles Benbrook said he is skeptical this is much of a change at all because acreage of several key fruits and veggies are already beyond 10 percent organic in California, and "these are the most important crops to shift to organic in terms of public health because these crops are the source of most of the pesticide exposure and risk from conventional produce."

"I think the California produce industry could be 30 percent organic by 2030, and in Washington, 70 percent by 2030 if the government, food industry and retailers openly and honestly explained to consumers the trifecta of benefits that society will enjoy as a result — safer and more nutritious food, a healthier environment, and way fewer farmworker poisonings," he wrote in an email. "There is zero doubt about the farmer response — when the demand for organic is there, farmers will expand organic acreage, become more efficient, expand choices and lower costs."

Benbrook emphasized that research on organic agriculture needs more funding and support in order for meaningful change to come about.

"Since the U.S. government has invested very little in the necessary research, the (conventional agriculture) industry will be able to sustain the debate (and) confuse the science for years to come," Benbrook wrote. "Like I said, what are we — especially Washington state and Oregon — waiting for? Permission from the pesticide industry?" ■

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Photo courtesy of Val's Veggies

The squash patch at Val's Veggies organic farm, pictured here in 2009.

less serious cases."

"The substantial decrease in pesticide dietary exposure (by eating organic food) is well documented, and likely the major factor (of the reduced risk in cancer), as noted by the French team," he wrote in an email. "The switch will cost virtually nothing compared to what we are spending on health care and preventable morbidity and mortality, while leaving farmers and rural communities better off."

Valerie Tachenko, owner and operator of Val's Veggies in Medical Springs, said she farms using organic methods because of the health benefits, but her operation isn't an official, USDA-certified organic farm.

"You have to add a lot more to the price (of organic food) to

can fight off other things," she said. "Other than that, I do agree with what they're saying because of my own overall experience with (eating) organic and what it does for my health."

The organic farmer, who was diagnosed with colon cancer in 2005, said she accepts the fact she will always have cancer in her body, but eating organically and as close to all natural as possible is one way she fights its growth.

"We don't use any fertilizers or pesticides or any kinds of chemicals on (our crops) at all, because whatever you put on is going to come through the vegetable," she said. "I feel strongly against using pesticides."

But the farmer said she wouldn't want to force organic



Dick Mason/The Observer

This is one of new dugouts being built at Sam Marcum field at Pioneer Park.

FIELDS

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something the old dugouts lacked.

"We wanted the girls to have more privacy," Bell said.

The total cost of the project will be about \$256,000 including in-kind donations. Funding includes \$24,000 from the La Grande School District, a \$18,162 Wildhorse Foundation grant, a \$96,308 State Parks Grant, \$32,000 in in-kind contributions, and about \$90,000 in local donations. Organizations that have made contributions

include Little League, the La Grande Optimist Club, Moda Health, Legacy Ford, Union County Babe Ruth, ASA Softball and the Grande Ronde Area Youth Group.

The \$32,000 in-kind contributions are from RD Mac and James Challis Construction, both of La Grande, which will do concrete work; the City of La Grande, which has done demolition and site work; and Boise Cascade, which provided building materials.

Stu Spence, director of the City of La Grande Parks

and Recreation Department, is helping oversee the project.

"The support we have received from the community has been incredible," Spence said.

The parks director said all of the work will be completed by the end of April. He said it would be ideal if everything were finished by April 2, in time for the LHS softball team's first home game. However, this is unlikely because of the late snow and cold winter weather Northeast Oregon is having. ■

LEE

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21 after a grand jury granted a secret indictment warrant. The Union County Major Crimes Team has been working on the investiga-

tion since Nov. 17 when Williams was shot while on the phone with dispatchers. She reported a man was in her backyard just after 1 a.m.

The dispatchers heard her confront the man and then heard a loud noise.

Deputies and troopers arrived within minutes and found Williams dead of one or more apparent gunshot wounds.

Lee and Williams were married until July 2018, according to court records. ■

DINNER

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lar or a adequate place to go at night in the La Grande School District and finds out what they need.

"I see if there's anything that we can do or provide to help the students in that family be successful," she said. "The Angel Fund provides the funding that we need to provide services we need for kids," she said, adding that the spaghetti feed is the biggest fundraiser of the year for the Angel Fund.

McKinnis said this is the 10th year that RE/MAX has organized the spaghetti feed, and it has grown over the years.

"In the beginning, we

were at a different location so we all just pitched in and made the spaghetti," she said.

RE/MAX employees still volunteer their time for the fundraiser, but now the feed has help from a variety of volunteers and also features a silent auction and live music by Don Flippy and KC Kunckle.

Volunteers from the Angel Fund program and the LHS wrestling club, as well as RE/MAX clients and their families, will help serve food at the event. Items in the silent auction will include handmade quilts, a family photo session, desserts and a handmade cribbage board that McKinnis described as "stunning."

McKinnis said the fundraiser was created when a couple of brokers in the RE/MAX office wanted to think of an idea to help students without a regular place to go at night in La Grande.

"We saw a need for this kind of thing," she said.

The event has served as many as 167 people in the past, according to McKinnis. She encourages buying tickets in advance by calling the RE/MAX office at 541-963-1000 or stopping by the office at 2106 Island Ave., La Grande, between 8:30 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. weekdays. ■

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