

Reversing the Trend

Or, what's up with beans and grains?

The concept of relocalization as a response to peaking oil production and climate change is by now relatively well-known in Eugene. In the simplest sense, it's a decentralization strategy aimed at diminishing our carbon footprint. But what exactly does that mean? Aside from the advice of the oft-repeated slogan "buy local," how does a community or region go about relocalizing?



One answer is to reverse the trend of the last 50 years of building sprawling suburban neighborhoods. Shortening commuter distances and building efficient mass transportation systems are a part of the strategy. In Lane County, however, relocalization begins with the farmland and returning to an agrarian regionalism aimed at reinvigorating our rural communities and rebuilding our local food system. Growing beans and grains is one way to get there.

Fifty years ago, the Willamette Valley agriculture was known for its production of fruits and vegetables and a sizeable winter wheat crop. The valley contained more than 50 fruit and vegetable canneries, and it had the infrastructure to mill and store significant amounts of wheat. Over the last 30 years, the dynamics of globalization have changed that. Because grass seed gave the greatest return per acre on the global market, the largest farms in western Oregon stopped growing wheat and focused on grass seed. The south valley became the "Grass Seed Capital of the World." Wheat became a secondary crop. Fruit and vegetable production was reduced. The grain mills and silos were gradually abandoned. The canneries can now be counted on one hand. A working food system was given over to the grass seed industry, and a region that once had considerable capacity to feed itself, now imports more than 95 percent of its food.

Relocalization calls for reversing this trend by returning to a diversified farm model and rebuilding the lost food system infrastructure – canneries, grain storage, distribution sites and mills. Instead of prioritizing production for the global market, we use our foodshed (the valley) to grow to the needs of our populace, then, if there is excess product, it goes out to the regional and then the global markets. Not only does this strategy make sense ecologically, it also answers to local food security issues, diminishes the distance food must travel from field to dinner table, and offers the potential to invigorate the local economy and create jobs. This is exactly why we would want to relocalize.

The Willamette Farm and Food Coalition in Eugene and the Ten Rivers Foodweb in Corvallis are two nonprofits focusing on this relocalized food model. The Southern Willamette Valley Bean & Grain Project, the brain-child of Corvallis organic farmer Harry MacCormack and supported by both these nonprofits, is at the center of this work. For almost four years now, the Bean & Grain Project has been working with valley grass seed farmers to find alternatives to grass seed production and encourage smaller farmers to experiment with a variety of beans and grains, hoping to find good fits for our valley and its climate.

Soft wheat is the most obvious choice, since it has a history in this valley, but hard wheat, barley, oats, rye, flax and buckwheat are also crops local farmers are familiar with growing. Along with the dry beans, other grains and edibles seeds like teff, millet and quinoa are also being explored. Hard red wheat, garbanzo beans and lentils particularly have shown early success in what is really a ten-year experiment to bring our food sources closer to home.

Why the focus on beans and grains? These are staple crops. Beans and grains make up something like 80 percent of our diet. If we are going to rebuild our food system, it makes sense to start with these staples. They can be dry stored for several years, grown with modest amounts of water, and the beans fix nitrogen in the soil and make an excellent rotation crop for wheat and other grasses. For the consumer, beans and grains bought in bulk are relatively cheap. Add the infrastructure to process beans and grains and you have a foundation for rebuilding the rest of the food system.

The bean acreage is still quite modest, but wheat acreage has climbed from a 30,000 acres in 2006 to more than 200,000 today. The Green Willow Mill in Brownsville has opened and this spring Camas Country Mill opened in north Eugene. Another mill is planned for the Corvallis area. All are offspring of the Bean and Grain Project work.

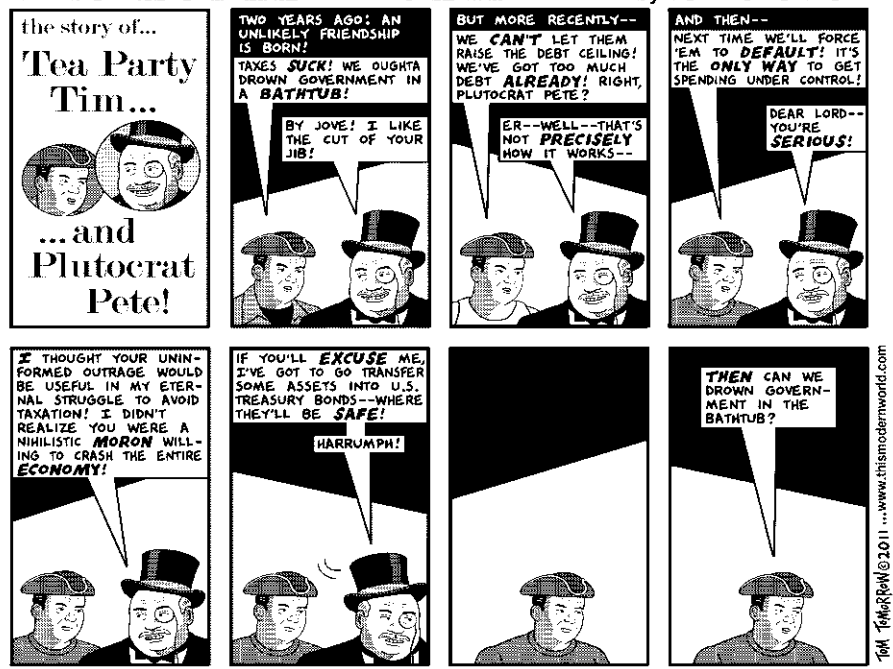
The consumer's part is to support the farmers who've had the courage to take the first step. Make a conscious change in your eating habits. Buy local beans and grains and learn to cook with them. You can find them at Hummingbird Wholesale, the Lane County Farmers' Market, the Springfield Farmers' Market, and – if they aren't in your local grocery store, ask for them.

For the complete story go to <http://wkly.ws/d2>

Local writer and localization activist Dan Armstrong is the author of *Prairie Fire*. He was featured as an EW "Happening Person" Sept. 3, 2009. See *Activist Alert* this week for a Bean & Grain Project event Aug. 23.

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

WE STRUGGLE ON

"What are "human rights" in our present time?"

In Oregon, there is no institutional racism or sexism, unless you count the religions, several of which make sexism a "gift from God." While there are those who fight racism and sexism battles on a individual basis even today, government and business must respect human rights as regards skin color or gender.

It is my impression that the average voter would vote against giving human rights to others based on poverty. They would say there are rich and poor and that will never change...that there is no human right to a public shelter if you are homeless, or a right to a job if you cannot find a private company to hire you. If Eugene/Lane County has no public shelter system and you are destitute and sleeping in the weeds, that is not their problem. Suck it up and die like the poor have always died, with platitudes of the rich ringing in their ears.

If the very poor have no human rights, then neither do the rich and powerful. If the law doesn't do much of anything for those without anything or anyone, except perhaps give arrogant assessments of their character via the downtown police, then the law is more than an ass, it is illegitimate. If we are not at least struggling to hear the voices of the poor and the lost, then our own voices are not worth hearing. And if human rights efforts don't work for the economic and social needs of those in the weeds, then they are just another co-opted series of meetings.

I look at the past and despair for the future. Some warlord thousands of miles away gets the human rights; our poor get the weeds. The Eugene police get a "Country Club" palace of a new building, the poor get ... hopelessness, unless you think the timber jobs are coming back. Or that you think the hearts of those in power will open to the concept of real human rights for the poor.

Hugh Massengill
Eugene

WHITEAKER LET-DOWN

Maybe I'm just not cool enough to live in this neighborhood — still walking on broken glass, dodging dirty syringes in the street (and my mailbox!), and covering my nose as I pass by the heaps of garbage left over from

the Whiteaker Block Party (besides having had to hose down my yard several times to clear away the smell of human excrement left behind after partygoers ripped my fence apart looking for a restroom).

I thought this neighborhood was known for being "progressive," "green" and "artsy." I've lived here less than a month (and maybe we got started off on the wrong foot with the BP leaving a bad taste in my mouth) but thus far the Whit has been a big let-down full of pseudo-intellectual, angry drunk/junked-up burnouts dressed up as "hippies" because, well, it's hip!

This neighborhood does not have soul, nor a single original idea coming from it. It's simply a collection of burned out assholes calling themselves artists because they're too lazy and stupid to get a real job. Go back to Los Angeles, a-holes!

Julie Bonaduce
Eugene

HYPOCRISY

I appreciated the cover story (8/4) that brought to light the consequences of sex trafficking, but was disappointed to see yet again the classified ad for "dating services" with a thinly veiled offer of prostitution. The well-written article made it clear that prostitution is not a victimless crime. How do you reconcile allowing the ad?

Thanks for thinking about it.

Lisa Fincher
Eugene

CUSTOMER DISSERVICE

Regarding "Problems with the 'PUD" (8/11) I found this article to be interestingly appropriate as I have just endured several consecutive months of extremely poor EPUD customer service including being held responsible for my landlord's (illegal) auxiliary "clubhouse" bill. Also I recently attempted to find out the actual billing cycle dates for my own rental. I have seldom if ever been on the receiving end of such nonsense as I have experienced from EPUD "customer service" (dis-service probably should be being spelled "DISS" service!) both in person and on the phone including being told that they cannot provide the billing cycle dates unless I come in and "identify" myself (not accepting that I have the service address and my account