



OPINION

CONTACT YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS

Cottage Grove City Hall:
942-5501. www.cottagegrove.org/

Phone: (541) 682-4203
Fax: (541) 682-4616

Oregon State House of Representatives:

Rep. Cedric Hayden (REP)
District: 007
900 Court Street NE
Suite H-379
Salem, OR 97301
Phone: (503) 986-1407
Fax: (503) 986-1130
Email: rep.cedrichayden@state.or.us

Oregon State Senate:

Sen. Floyd Prozanski (DEM)
District: 004
900 Court Street NE
Suite S-319
Salem, OR 97301-0001
Phone: (503) 986-1704
Fax: (503) 986-1080
Email: sen.floydprozanski@state.or.us

Governor:

Kate Brown
160 State Capitol
900 Court Street
Salem, Oregon 97301-4047
Phone: (503) 378-4582
Fax: (503) 378-6827

United States House of Representatives:

Kate Brown

160 State Capitol
900 Court Street
Salem, Oregon 97301-4047
Phone: (503) 378-4582
Fax: (503) 378-6827

United States Senate:

Sen. Ron Wyden (DEM)
District: OS1
United States Senate
230 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-0001
Phone: (202) 224-5244
Fax: (202) 228-2717
Email: http://wyden.senate.gov/contact/

United States Senate:

Sen. Jeff Merkley (DEM)
District: OS2
United States Senate
404 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-0001
Phone: (202) 224-3753
Fax: (202) 228-3997
Email: http://jmerkley.senate.gov/webform.htm

United States Senate:

Sen. Jeff Merkley (DEM)
District: OS2
United States Senate
404 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-0001
Phone: (202) 224-3753
Fax: (202) 228-3997
Email: http://jmerkley.senate.gov/webform.htm

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Sen. Jeff Merkley (DEM)
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404 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-0001
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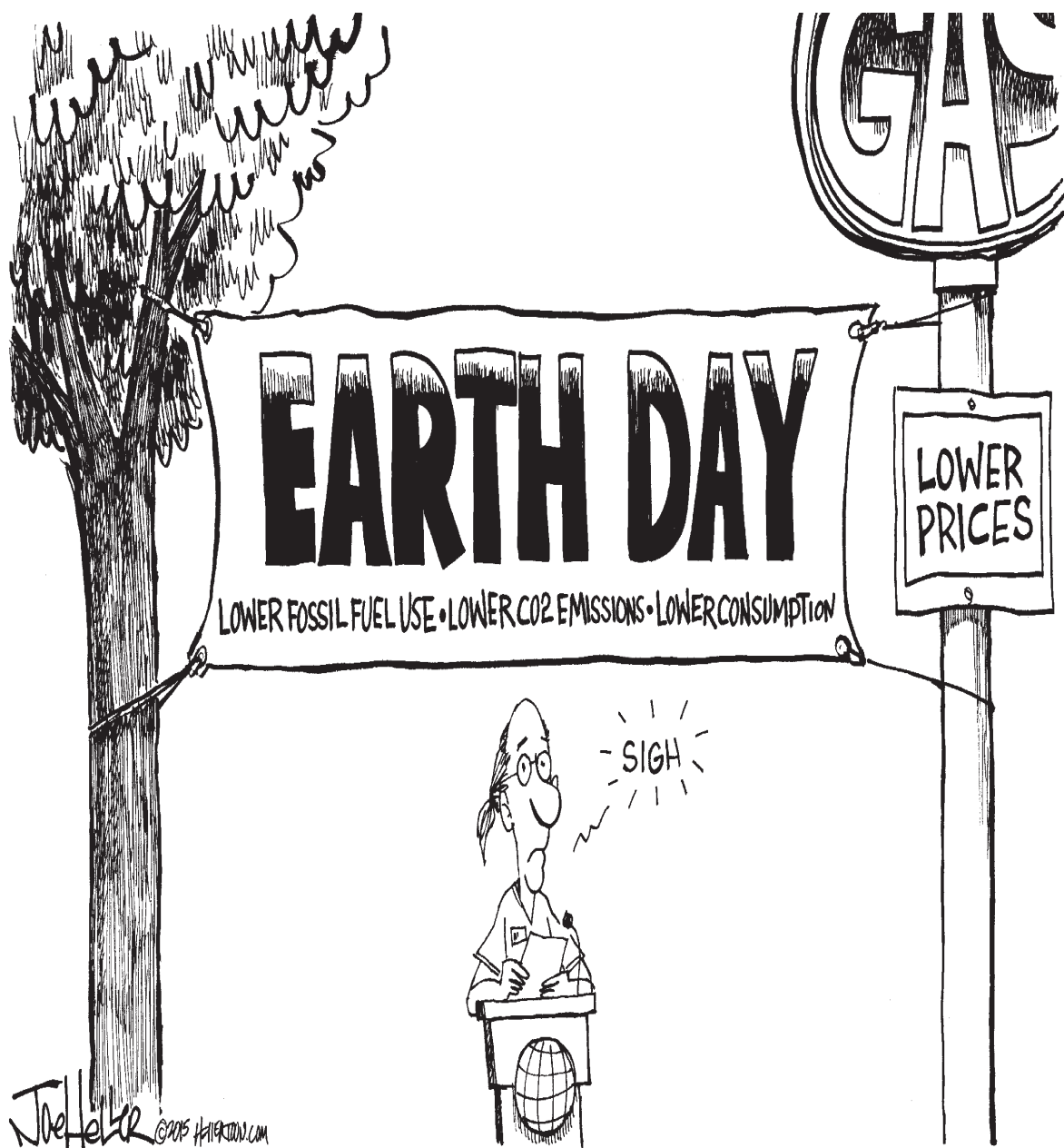
Rep. Peter A. DeFazio (DEM)
District: 004
United States House of Representatives
2134 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-0001
Phone: (202) 225-6416
Fax: (202) 225-0032
Email: http://www.house.gov/formdefazio/contact.html

United States Senate:

Sen. Ron Wyden (DEM)
District: OS1
United States Senate
230 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-0001
Phone: (202) 224-5244
Fax: (202) 228-2717
Email: http://wyden.senate.gov/contact/

United States Senate:

Sen. Jeff Merkley (DEM)
District: OS2
United States Senate
404 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-0001
Phone: (202) 224-3753
Fax: (202) 228-3997
Email: http://jmerkley.senate.gov/webform.htm



Offbeat Oregon History

French sailors miraculously saved from certain death on the bar

BY FINN J.D. JOHN
For the Sentinel

Back in the 1800s, when a sailing barque struck bottom while crossing the Columbia River bar, its chances of survival were very close to zero.

Sometimes a frantic throwing-overboard of everything in sight — cargo, cannons, livestock, anything — would lighten a ship enough to float free.

But it had to be done fast, because time was never on a stranded ship's side. Ships usually crossed the bar on an ebb tide, or on the slack tide just before it started to ebb.

That practice made sense. Getting caught on the bar when the tide was coming in — and colliding violently with the seven-knot current of the river

water going out — was to be avoided at all costs. But it had some unpleasant implications for a ship that found itself stuck on the sandy bottom of the shoal waters of the bar. Every minute that went by, the tide dropped a fraction of an inch lower, leaving the ship a fraction of an inch higher and drier. So trying to lighten a stuck ship was a race against time and tide — a race that the forces of nature usually won.

When that happened, the usual playbook involved the ship getting hammered against the sand for hours by the incoming breakers and swells, which would get especially powerful after the tide turned and started coming in. By the time the water was deep enough to float a stranded ship, it usually had

spent a good nine hours being mercilessly worked against the sand, popping nails and tearing ribs and sometimes even breaking the ship's back.

If the wreck happened during good weather, the crew stood a great chance of surviving the shipwreck, even though their ship did not. But add a high wind driving heavy seas out of the southwest, and all bets were off.

If the crew could just get the lifeboats launched, they could usually make it — most of them. But getting a lifeboat launched in a stranded ship with waves crashing into it is tricky even in the best conditions. Add a howling gale, and it's nearly impossible. And once all the lifeboats were gone, the chances of any remaining crewmembers making it to shore alive were probably well north of 20 to 1.

But every now and then, a ship would beat those odds.

Such a ship was the Etoile du Matin, a French barque that found itself in terrible trouble

on the bar in July 1849.

The Etoile du Matin — usually referred to by the English translation of its name, the Morning Star — had been across the bar a time or two before. This was the ship that had brought Archbishop F.N. Blanchet back to Oregon with 20 priests and nuns, who would found many of Oregon's Catholic communities and even convert Dr. John McLoughlin to the faith. Its captain, a fearsome red-bearded man of florid face and volcanic temperament, was named Francis Menes.

On that particular day, Captain Menes and his crew had been tacking back and forth off the mouth of the river for a week, waiting for a pilot to come out and help them work the ship across the bar. They were coming in from Le Havre, a seven-month journey, and were all very much ready to get some dirt back under their feet again. And they couldn't figure out what the delay was.

Then a coastwise schooner came up, making for the bar,

and Menes hailed her. Her captain explained to Menes what the problem was: The bar pilot had, a few months earlier, piled a British barque up onto the Middle Sands for a total loss. Knowing this was going to lead to embarrassing questions and/or criminal charges, the bar pilot had thought the better part of virtue might be to run for it, and he'd left town immediately, apparently intending to lose himself in the gold-rush crowds in San Francisco.

We can only imagine the bilingual expressions of discontent that must have greeted this news. And Menes decided that, pilot or no pilot, he'd head into the river on the very first favorable wind.

His chance came on July 11, when the heavy-laden Etoile du Matin turned into the bar, drawing 16 feet of water, and headed for the channel — or, rather, headed for what Menes' two-year-old charts listed as the channel.

Just off Sand Island, the big

ship shuddered to a stop, skidding into the edge of the shoals, and a raging Captain Menes ran to the taff rail and hurled his charts into the sea.

As (bad) luck would have it, the weather was freshening into a regular summer gale now, and the pounding wind-driven seas hammered the stranded vessel mercilessly into the sand, working the planks so that water started to flow into the bilge. Desperately the crew started trying to launch lifeboats, but as soon as they hit the water, they'd be dashed against the hull and knocked to splinters.

Finally a crewmember volunteered to stay in the last boat as it was lowered, holding it in position with oars. But by this time, apparently, the tide was coming in, and the seas were getting huge. Just as the boat hit the water, a massive comber swept across the ship, tearing the boat away, and neither it nor the sailor was ever seen again.

Please see **OFFBEAT**, Page 5A

The truth about whole grains, rice and arsenic

BY JOEL FUHRMAN, MD
For the Sentinel

A high-nutrient (Nutritarian) diet is largely focused on vegetables, with all of their health-promoting vitamins, minerals and phytochemicals.



Other foods used liberally include beans, fruits, seeds and nuts, and whole grains, including whole grain rice. As the most widely consumed grain worldwide, rice serves as a staple food for a large part of the world. However, not all rice is equally healthful. Rice varies by type and origin, which contribute to both its nutritional content and potential level of arsenic contamination.

A whole grain contains a

complete "kernel" that consists of three edible parts; the bran, endosperm and germ. Whole grain rice is classified by the color of its bran, and there are four groups: brown, black, purple and red. Wild rice is similar, but technically not in the rice family.

The most commonly grown commercial rice is brown rice. When brown rice has its bran and germ removed, it is called white rice. This processing allows white rice to have a longer shelf life and shorter cooking time, but the healthful fiber in the bran and beneficial nutrients in the germ are lost. More colorful pigmented whole grain rice varieties are becoming increasingly popular, and red, black, and purple rice exhibit higher antioxidant activity as compared to brown rice. Overall, black rice, which is rich in anthocyanins, showed the highest antioxidant levels of all rice varieties, followed by red and purple, then brown and lastly white rice.

Arsenic is a toxic element that is naturally present in the earth's crust. As such, it is found in the soil, water and some foods. In addition, some areas have in-

creased concentrations of arsenic as a result of industrial pollution, the use of arsenic-based drugs in poultry production, and arsenic-containing pesticides and fertilizers.

All plants can absorb some arsenic, but rice can absorb up to 10 times as much as other grains. This is due to how the rice (including wild rice) is grown, in flooded paddy fields. The soil in the fields, when covered with water, create conditions that allow arsenic to be converted to more readily absorbable forms. Arsenic accumulates most in the outer layer of rice, which is the reason that whole grain rice, with its bran intact, can have up to 80 percent more arsenic than white rice.

Arsenic is well recognized as a human carcinogen and chronic exposure (via inhalation or from high-arsenic drinking water) is a known cause of skin, lung and bladder cancer and is also associated with other cancers such as kidney, liver, and prostate. Studies have also demonstrated associations with noncancerous conditions, such as diabetes, heart and lung diseases, immunological effects, and impaired

cognitive function.

Although whole grain forms of rice have a superior nutritional profile compared to white rice, they also have a higher risk of arsenic contamination. When you do eat whole grain rice, these are some ways to minimize arsenic exposure:

Select whole grain rice grown in areas with low arsenic levels. Consumer Reports found that brown basmati rice from California, India or Pakistan has about a third of the inorganic arsenic as compared to brown rice from other regions and would be the best choice. Rice grown in Arkansas, Texas, Louisiana and most other U.S. locations had the highest inorganic arsenic levels, so would be better to avoid or minimize. Check companies' websites. Some rice growers conduct independent testing for arsenic levels in their rice and post the results. There are also companies that harvest wild-growing rice from northern Wisconsin and Canada without the use of commercial fertilizers. Keep in mind that organically-farmed rice may mean there is less pesticide use, but does not necessarily mean there

are lower arsenic levels

Rinse rice before cooking to reduce arsenic content. Rinse rice until the water becomes clear.

Cook rice in a higher water volume. Research has shown that the amount of arsenic in rice can be reduced by approximately 40 percent if the rice is boiled in a large volume of water. Cook rice using a 1-to-6 cup rice-to-water ratio, drain and discard the excess water.

Eat a variety of starches—not just rice. On a Nutritarian diet, the most emphasized starch sources are beans, lentils and other legumes. There are also healthful starchy vegetables such as butternut squash, winter squash, carrots, beets, parsnips, rutabaga and turnips, and a variety of whole grains such as amaranth, barley, buckwheat, bulgur, farro, millet, and quinoa. If you utilize a variety of these foods, arsenic exposure from the occasional serving of rice will not be a concern. However, as a result of this arsenic issue, brown rice should not be eaten often and regularly.

Cottage Grove Sentinel

116 N. Sixth Street • P.O. Box 35 • Cottage Grove, OR 97424

ADMINISTRATION:
JOHN BARTLETT, Regional Publisher.....942-3325
Ext. 203 • robin@cgsentinel.com
GARY MANLY, General Manager.....942-3325 Ext.
207 • publisher@cgsentinel.com
ROBIN REISER, Executive Assistant.....942-3325
Ext. 203 • robin@cgsentinel.com
E. SCURRY ELLIS, Sales Representative.....942-3325
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MELISSA WARE, Inside Sales Representative.....942-3325
Ext. 202

GRAPHICS:
RON ANNIS, Graphics Manager

NEWS DEPARTMENT:
JON STINNETT, Editor.....942-3325
Ext. 212 • cgnews@cgsentinel.com

SPORTS DEPARTMENT:
MATTHEW HOLLANDER, Sports Editor.....942-3325
Ext. 204 • sports@cgsentinel.com

CUSTOMER SERVICE
CARLA WILLIAMS, Office Manager.....942-3325
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