

APPENDIX A

Concerns Voiced by Farmers at April 4, 2008 Meeting at Sunbow Farm:

Education is critical. The change-over to beans and grains involves knowledge and techniques that will be entirely different than that for growing grass seed. There needs to be a clearing house for the exchange and advancement of regionalized knowledge.

The Soil is depleted. Almost all the acreage in the southern Willamette Valley has been farmed with conventional industrial farming techniques. Large plots of monoculture crops, cultivated for years with chemical fertilizers and protected from pests and weeds by pesticides and herbicides, are now badly depleted and must be reinvigorated.

Weed control is difficult without herbicides. After two generations of fighting weeds with chemicals, the move to organic involves entirely new weed control techniques. This harkens back to the need for education and experiment.

Pest control is difficult without pesticides. The same situation regarding weeds is repeated regarding pests. Slugs and voles are a major problem. Efforts to use no-till techniques with grass seed and wheat production has been an uphill battle. Slugs in particular are extremely difficult to control with no-till methods.

Cover crops are a work in progress. Experiments with cover crops as a way to diminish soil moisture loss, fight weeds, and protect the soil from erosion have created an array of secondary problems. Again education and experimentation with cover crops is a high priority.

Growing organic wheat will test the farmers' limits. Harry Stalford's unadulterated opinion about growing organic wheat in the Willamette Valley is that it is impossible—without chemical inputs it will merely be difficult.

Devalued dollar alters market gradient. The devaluation of the dollar has had a positive effect on the grass seed market. (This, however, may be minimized if grain prices remain high.)

Wheat offers soil moisture problems. Because of high moisture content in certain portions of the Willamette Valley it may be necessary to use tilled fields. In other portions of the valley, wheat may need partial irrigation.

Processors are needed. One of the clearest effects of the domination of grass seed farming in the Willamette Valley has been the loss of food system infrastructure. In the case of growing beans, it will be necessary to create locations for bean cleaning and bagging.

Storage is needed. For the same reasons that there is a lacking of food processors in the valley, there is also a radical dearth of grain and/or bean storage. If we move to more wheat and beans as a staple crop and foundation of a regional food system, there must be more storage—public, private, or cooperative.

Local markets need stimulus to generate buyers for increased food production. Just as there are no food processors or grain/bean storage, there are not sufficient markets to justify a food production increase. Markets must grow in conjunction with increased food production. (Currently, there is movement regarding large scale grain and bean buying from Golden Temple, Grain Millers, and GloryBee. Contracts are on the table waiting to be settled. More than just getting more farmers markets, more than prompting local grocery stores and restaurants to buy local produce, it will be necessary to organize neighborhood grain or bean buying cooperatives. Making a local food system requires everyone joining in.)

There will be considerable difficulty pricing wheat futures contracts. Wheat has sold in the \$3.00-4.00 range for the last twenty years. The push to grow corn for ethanol, extended drought in Australia, and a growing Asian middle class drove all grain prices to record highs this winter. Setting contract prices in the aftermath of this grain crisis will be difficult. Next year's harvest will be telling. Until then, projection of future wheat prices in particular could range from \$7.00 a bushel to \$15.

Nutritional density is as important as yield. Recent research at Washington State by Steve Jones has revealed that wheat grown in the 1800s without chemical inputs may have had higher nutritional value than current strains. When it comes to food security, optimizing

cropland will also mean using optimal nutritional varieties of beans and grains. More work must be done with pre-chemical input strains of wheat.

No-till transition involves time. The transition from contemporary industrial farming to no-till and/or organic techniques is not a one-year conversion. In the case of using cover crops, crop rotation, minimum tillage, and complementary weed or pest fighting plants as an alternative to pesticides and herbicides, it takes no less than four years to make significant reductions in chemical inputs. Six years is more realistic. This makes the transition all the more difficult. All risk is on the farmer. The only way to go about this is through piece by piece transition. Some conventional plots must be used to support farmers while transition is made.

Balance on farm is necessary. Farms devoted solely to crops or solely to livestock are difficult to manage as real living systems. Small farms, where livestock is balanced with field crops, allow livestock manure to be a valuable field crop input. Where there is too much livestock, this same valuable input can become a ground water toxin.

Grain diversity is necessary. The bean and grain project concentrates on black beans and soft wheat, however, the real challenge is to diversity varieties of beans and to diversify varieties of grains. Buckwheat, triticale, flax, amaranth, and quinoa are possible additions to Willamette Valley farming.

People won't buy local. Right now, the buy local push runs against the current of the economy. Why should people buy locally when non-local prices are lower? (There is evidence to believe that the economic gradient is changing. Higher fuel prices will undercut the labor advantages available to foreign/distant growers.) It must be "taught" to local buyers that dollar value is not the only criterion. There is much "non-dollar" community value in supporting local growers. The long-term good sense of building secure local food systems far out weighs the short-term gains of modest price differentials. Consider it a critical cultural shift; we are only just learning the difference between competitive "adversarial" markets and mutual "community" markets.

Farmer demographics pose a serious problem. The average age of Willamette Valley farmers pushes sixty. There is no next generation of Oregon farmers. The largest base of future farmers comes from the growing number of Mexican immigrants working as cheap farm labor. We need to find a next generation of Oregon farmers. Farm internships and mentoring are necessary.