A Call to Action: Stop Losing Fertile Ground

By Paul Hubbard

Over the past few years, CFAC members have made significant progress in grassroots farm and ranchland conservation. But the quest for responsible growth and a vibrant agricultural legacy has just begun. In 2008 and 2009, for example, residential sprawl consumed 1,400 acres of pasture, range and cropland, despite local growth policies and state laws that discourage such destructive impacts.

Through CFAC’s role in reviewing subdivisions, we knew Missoula County’s farm and ranchlands were disappearing, but we still had a number of pertinent questions regarding the threats and opportunities to working farms and ranches here. To provide answers, CFAC is proud to release a new report, Losing Ground: The Future of Farms and Food in Missoula County.

Unfortunately, the situation is even worse than we had imagined. In the last 25 years, Missoula County has lost 29,000 acres of working farm and ranchlands – 1,443 acres per year on average. As vegetable farmer and CFAC member, Josh Slotnick, said, “Missoula County has lost much of its fertile lands, but I believe that if we work together, we can create a vibrant future for local agriculture and a local economy.” Thus, Losing Ground serves as a call to action for the City and County of Missoula to prepare today for future population growth and the increasing demands on both houses and food.

CFAC member and architect Don MacArthur explained that “the question is not ‘to build or not to build houses?’ The question is where are we going to put houses so that we maintain a great quality of life.” MacArthur added that the best farmlands are rapidly disappearing due to a pattern of poorly managed development that undermines the integrity of working farms and ranches.

Jason Wiener of Missoula’s City Council agreed. “Council and the County Commissioners are required to evaluate and mitigate impacts to agriculture when reviewing subdivisions and have been taking on that task piecemeal in the context of individual land-use decisions. To take the issue seriously – and deliver predictability for developers, planners and elected officials – we need a coherent policy that protects irreplaceable resources and honors landowners’ equity. I’m grateful to CFAC for recommendations that do that.”

In addition to continuing CFAC’s work with them, one of the most exciting benefits of locally marketing their grass-fed beef is their interactions with consumers, whether directly at the Clark Fork River Market or indirectly through the Good Food Store, Scotty’s Table, and more. David Mannix describes it as a relationship that “ties the consumer to the land.” Ultimately, Randy Mannix explains, “What we’re really trying to do is take care of the land.”

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Food Policy Expert Comes to Missoula

By Niraja Golightly

On April 12, Mark Winne, food activist, author, and policy consultant, addressed the myriad of issues regarding the state of our current food system and the inequities that plague access to healthful, local and affordable food for all in a lecture sponsored by CFAC, UM-EVST, Garden City Harvest, and Missoula Food Bank.

Winne claims that America literally has two food systems—one for the poor and one for everyone else. He is passionate about a future where extraordinary food is available to every person in this country. As a result, Winne spent 25 years attempting to make healthful food available for the poor in Hartford, CT by developing farms, farmers’ markets, food banks, nutrition programs, and a neighborhood supermarket.

Winne told Missoulians that if we want to end to end food insecurity, we must attack the root cause - poverty - and we must take a systemic and collaborative approach. This means supporting socially disadvantaged farmers, initiatives that protect precious farmland, and projects that enable lower-income folks to purchase local food. It also means supporting policies that promote local agriculture, healthful and locally grown food for students, and more opportunities for low-income people to better feed their families, including access to a living wage.

CFAC stands at the forefront of these efforts in western Montana. To help CFAC continue our work towards a food-secure future, please join us as a member! (Information on page 4 of newsletter). For more information about Mark Winne, visit his website: www.markwinne.com.

From the Ground Up: Gardening with Kids

By Rebecca Morely

The sunshine is peeking through the clouds and our Montana minds begin turning to gardens. And wouldn’t it be sweet to see our kids healthy, happy and having fun while gardening? The surest way to gain the interest of children is to actually involve them in the activity. They’ll end up enjoying fresh fruits and vegetables straight from the earth and just might develop a life-long love for the magic of gardening.

From the start, include your children in the process. Ask them, “What do you think we should plant in our garden?” “Where can we locate our garden to ensure it gets enough light, water, and shelter?” Once you answer these questions and gather supplies, the dirty (and fun!) work begins.

Make gardening fun! Most youngsters love to water plants and it’s a great way to cool down on hot summer days. Help your children learn by exploring which plants are “friends” and which don’t “get along” in a garden.

Harvesting is a time for celebration! Explore healthy recipes with your children, while using the products of your garden. Try treating the garden like a grocery store where the kids can do the daily or nightly shopping. Consider teaching kids about composting, canning, drying or freezing foods. Gardening in containers can help continue the learning experience into the colder months.

Building a garden with your children teaches them self-sufficiency and offers the chance to explore creative, earth-friendly practices. It also allows children to see and appreciate their food “from the ground up!”

Rebecca Morely is a Senior Community Health Specialist at the Missoula City-County Health Department.

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current work helping beginning farmers get started and expanding Missoula’s market capacity for local food. Losing Ground recommends specific measures to ensure future developments are more responsible and conservation tools strategically protect viable farmland within agrarian communities. For example, establishing Agricultural Cornerstone Areas in Missoula’s growth policies would identify areas where it makes the most sense to protect and promote agriculture based on existing resources and economic activity. Including Agricultural Resource Standards in our zoning codes or subdivision regulations would provide standard mitigation guidelines to restore predictability to development impacting important farm and ranchlands.

Creating and adopting the land-use policies and tools that will secure Missoula’s agricultural legacy is going to require participation from fellow CFAC members and Missoula County residents. To see how you can lend a hand, please contact CFAC’s Land Use Program Coordinator, Paul Hubbard (pfhubbard@gmail.com, 543-0542).

To download the Losing Ground executive summary or full report, visit www.MissoulaCFAC.org.
Keeping Food Safe and Local Farmers in Business

By Crissie McMullan

In February of this year, CFAC wrote to Senators Jon Tester and Max Baucus with a straightforward request: help make our food supply safer, without risking the livelihood of family farmers. Through the FDA Federal Food Safety Modernization Act, S. 510, the federal government is attempting to address major gaps in current food safety laws—faulty regulations and poor oversight that caused spinach to go from a health food to a health disaster overnight. While well-meaning, in practice the bill makes no distinctions between the scale and types of food production.

Josh Slotnick, Missoula farmer, says that lumping small producers and industrial producers in the same regulatory framework could break farms such as his. “We would be forced to build new climate controlled buildings, install high-tech washing and plumbing facilities as well as electronic monitoring...colossally expensive.” Meanwhile, such measures would do little to truly protect consumers since direct market sales are already immediately traceable, transparent and inherently accountable.

On April 14, Montana’s Senator Jon Tester responded to requests of CFAC (and hundreds of other like-minded organizations led by the likes of Western Organization of Resource Councils and the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition) when he introduced two crucial amendments to S. 510. One exempts producers selling food directly through farmers markets, while the second keeps the responsibility of food safety at the local and state level for food producers with adjusted gross incomes of less than $500,000 a year.

If you’d like to join CFAC in supporting these amendments, please call Senator Baucus at (406) 329-3123 and urge him to support the Tester amendments to S. 510, the Food Safety and Modernization Act. And if you see Senator Tester, buy him a local micro-brew or a hearty Montana burger in thanks.

For more information and updates about the Food Safety and Modernization Act, visit Western Organization of Resource Councils: www.worc.org, or National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition: http://sustainableagriculture.net.

Missoula Farmers’ Markets Open May 1st

By Niraja Golightly

Wow! The signs of spring are everywhere. With the longer days and warmer weather, Missoulians are discovering long lost friends who disappeared during our annual winter hibernation—some of those friends proudly showing off a new family member or “baby bump”. I am counting down the days before I can plant my container garden or browse the aisles for some healthful, fresh local food and plant starts at our two downtown farmers’ markets—all while socializing and listening to some great music.

The good news is we don’t have much longer to wait. The fun starts Saturday, May 1st! The Missoula Farmers’ Market—located at the north end of Higgins Avenue by the XXX’s—is open Saturdays from 8:30 to noon. Look for Missoula County Extension Service events from 10am-12pm to answer your home gardening questions.

The Clark Fork River Market is located under the Higgins Bridge, in the Riverside Parking Lot, just east of Caras Park. Hours are Saturdays, 8am until 1pm, rain or shine, and live music is featured from 10-12pm.

The EBT program continues to flourish, each year generating more income for local farmers, ranchers, and food producers, while also creating easy access to healthy foods for market customers. In fact, over the past two years, SNAP proceeds through the EBT program have increased with both markets bringing in approximately $15,000 for 2008. In 2009, the Clark Fork River Market alone generated $15,843. Amazing!

Look for the EBT swipe booth where SNAP participants can use their Montana Access Cards or folks low on cash can swipe their Visa or MasterCard in exchange for tokens that can be used throughout the season. Now everyone has the option of purchasing food from the farmers’ markets, supporting our local economy, and helping to preserve Montana’s agricultural heritage.

And remember SNAP participants—you can also purchase seeds and plant starts with your EBT card as long as they are considered food.

The Community Food and Agriculture Coalition (CFAC) is comprised of a diverse membership base that represents many facets and perspectives of the Missoula County food system. CFAC is currently seeking new members. Now is your opportunity to get involved in developing our local food system!

I want to be involved with the Community Food and Agriculture Coalition to enhance our local food system!

Name(s): ________________________________________________________________________________________
Address: ________________________________________________________________________________________
City, State, Zip: ______________________________________________________ Phone: _____________________
Email: ___________________________________________________________

☐ Sign me up for your electronic e-news!

I am interested in the following issues/activities (check all that apply):

☐ Farmland Conservation  ☐ Farm Transitions (exiting and entering agriculture)
☐ Food Security  ☐ Food Access Projects
☐ Farm to School  ☐ Food & Ag Policies
☐ Education & Outreach  ☐ Other: _________________________

I’m setting my dues at:

☐ $35  ☐ $50  ☐ $100  ☐ $250  ☐ $500  ☐ $25 (living lightly)  ☐ Other _____

☐ Please count me in as a Sustaining Member. Enclosed is an additional $100.

Please make check payable to CFAC and mail to: Community Food and Agriculture Coalition, P.O. Box 7025, Missoula, MT 59807
or join online at www.MissoulaCFAC.org.
Membership dues and donations to CFAC are tax deductible. Tax ID#: 81-0362732