



Oregon
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Working on Common Ground

Interviews with Oregon Environmentalists:
Continuing the Dialogue

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Introduction

Building Common Ground

In 2002 the Oregon Environmental Council (OEC) published *Building a Dialogue Between Oregon Agriculture and the Conservation Community*, describing the results of interviews with agriculturalists throughout Oregon about their environmental concerns, their relationship with environmentalists, and opportunities to work together on common ground. These interviews formed the basis for the creation of OEC's Healthy Food and Farms Program and still inform our collaborative approach.

This report, *Working on Common Ground*, is in many ways a mirror image of the earlier report. It is a summary of author Peter Bloome's interviews with Oregon environmentalists focused on what they perceive to be the greatest environmental challenges facing Oregon, how these challenges relate to agriculture, and opportunities for working on common ground with the agricultural community. The author, Peter Bloome, is an emeritus Associate Director of Extension at Oregon State University and a former OEC Board member.

A great deal has changed since 2002, when OEC published *Building a Dialogue Between Oregon Agriculture and the Conservation Community*. There are a number of examples, both on the ground and in the policy arena, of conservation and agricultural partners working together to successfully accomplish joint goals they may not have been able to accomplish alone. Equally important is the learning that has occurred through these cooperative efforts, and a greater openness to further conversation.

For the first time in three-quarters of a century, Americans care about where and how their food is produced. In growing numbers, they want to support local agriculture, and ensure that it is sustained in the future. This is a unique moment in time that may allow both urban and rural citizens, and eaters and growers, to recognize some of the things they have in common, their interdependency, and the benefits to both if we support one another.

However, too often we still see one another as "other." We approach with suspicion and preconceived notions, rather than an open mind and open ears. As several interviewees noted, organizations representing both the agricultural and conservation communities often have hardened positions, and are more resistant to change than the

members they represent. On both sides, this can prevent change that may benefit both communities. As one conservationist interviewed said, to make positive progress in working together, “we have to slaughter some sacred cows and some of them have to be ours.”

I hope members of both communities, and those who have feet firmly planted in each, continue to talk, listen, and find and work on common ground. I believe that Oregon will be a better place for it.

Allison Hensey

Program Director, Healthy Food and Farms

Read *Building a Dialogue Between Oregon Agriculture and the Conservation Community* and learn more about our work at: www.oeconline.org/our-work/food-and-farms.

OEC's Vision

- Oregon will be a leader in food production and farming that protects our health and our environment.
- Oregon's farmers and food businesses will flourish economically and be rewarded for their stewardship of our rivers and water, air, and wildlife.
- Oregonians will have the opportunity to support local agriculture and eat local, healthy, sustainably produced food as part of our everyday lives.

The Interview Process

OEC created a list of leaders from the environmental and conservation communities whose work intersects with the agricultural community to be contacted as potential interviewees. In most cases, the interviews were conducted in the interviewee's office. Interviews lasted from less than one hour to more than two hours.

The interview questions mirrored those of OEC's original study. In this study the questions were:

1. What do you see as the greatest environmental challenges facing Oregon?
2. Of these, which are related to agriculture?
3. How can agriculturalists help in addressing these challenges?
4. What does it take for you to work constructively with agriculturalists? With the agricultural community?
5. As you imagine these relationships, what concerns you about working with agriculturalists? With the agricultural community?

The questions were intended as open-ended to generate thoughtful and open responses. The interviewer allowed the interviewees to speak until they stopped. Interviewees were asked questions of clarification and frequently encouraged to "say more."

Interviews were conducted with twelve environmentalists. Interviews were also conducted with seven agricultural producers who have interests and standing in both communities. This latter group includes two agricultural producers who were interviewed in the 2002 study. Individuals interviewed are listed in Appendix A.

While not scientific in the quantitative sense, the study was qualitative in that it attempted to provide a window into the environmental/conservation community. By taking in the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of leaders in the environmental/conservation community, the agricultural community can gain new understandings of long standing conflicts and new approaches to their resolution.

"We all – all of us – have to do all we can to make agriculture more economically viable." Martin Goebel

The Interviewer

The interviewer and author of this report is Dr. Peter Bloome. Peter grew up on a general livestock farm near Carlinville, in south central Illinois. He earned his degrees in Agricultural Engineering from the University of Illinois. His career has included positions of Extension Agricultural Engineer at Oklahoma State University, Assistant Director of Extension and Agricultural Program Leader at the University of Illinois, and Associate Director of Extension at Oregon State University. Peter's international experience includes agricultural work in Australia, New Zealand, and Pakistan.

Since retirement in 2002, Peter has provided leadership and organizational development training to non-profit organizations. Client organizations have included member societies of the Council for Agricultural Science and Technology and the sustainable agriculture client base of the Institute for Conservation Leadership. Peter served on the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, the Oregon Environmental Council Board, and is currently on the Food Alliance Board. He has served as project manager of two Oregon Solutions projects serving agriculture. Peter lives in Corvallis with Mary Lou, his wife of 43 years.

The Interviews – Overarching Themes

A number of themes developed as the interviews progressed. They will be identified in following sections. However, two overarching themes seemed to constantly shape interviewee responses. They were:

- The importance of the economic viability of farms and ranches.
- The power and the challenges of collaborative approaches to addressing differences between environmentalists and agriculturalists.

The first theme is an acknowledgement that in order for people to live on the land and manage it in ways that protect the environment and support rural communities, they must make a living for themselves and their families. *"We all – all of us – have to do all we can to make agriculture more economically viable."*^{1/}

The second theme addresses the power and pitfalls of collaboration as a method for getting beyond intractable positions that allow no movement when interests conflict. Interviewees spoke about needing a greater capacity to find new innovative ways forward that meet a diversity of interests. How interviewees thought about and spoke about these themes is fleshed out in following sections.

A number of interviewees began their comments by expressing some discomfort with the label of “environmentalist.” Some were more comfortable with the label of “conservationist.” Several commented that they find themselves working more on economic issues and social issues than strictly on environmental issues. While not embarrassed to be associated with environmentalists, many are working with people in agriculture who are not comfortable with “greenies” or environmentalists.

Several interviewees pointed out that the environmental community is likely as diverse as the agricultural community. One suggested that the environmental community contains three major branches; the conservation branch, the land use branch, and the sustainable development branch. Others pointed out that a fourth branch concerns health, both human and environmental. Environmental organizations can also be divided into those that are regional within Oregon, those that are state-wide, those that are Oregon chapters of national organizations, and those that are international in scope.

Many interviewees were reluctant to speak of agriculturalists as “other.” There were several reasons for this. A number of the interviewees grew up on farms and ranches and in rural communities. In many cases the interviewee and their organization were working directly with farmers and ranchers on projects of mutual and public benefit. A third reason was their tendency to look critically at their own past actions as they expressed criticism of the actions of agriculturalists and to see their commonalities.

Responses of Environmentalists/Conservationists

Question 1: What do you see as the greatest environmental challenges facing Oregon?

Almost everyone mentioned climate change (or global warming) and most put it at the head of their list of greatest challenges. Other frequently mentioned challenges were: increasing population, land use planning, forest conditions, wildlife habitat, water quality and quantity, public lands issues, and government and politics.

“It is sobering to visit other states that do not have land use protection.” Chris Schreiner

Concerning climate change, one interviewee summed it up this way; *“Climate change is challenging because it is the least well addressed manifestation of human impact on the planet, it is cumulative and growing, unpredictable in its effects and it is not yet here, so most of us don’t have a healthy appreciation of the many forms its consequences may take. And there is a healthy skepticism in the general public.”*^{2/} Interviewees spoke of the need to prepare for the resilience that will be required by global climate change.

The interviewees see land use planning as having broad affects in water quality, air quality, community goals, transportation, habitat protection and numerous other areas. One commented: *“It is sobering to visit other states that do not have land use protection.”*^{3/} Several observed that land use planning is under attack. One interviewee focused on uncontrolled growth and the conversion of agricultural land to development. Another observed that how we build our towns is as important as keeping towns off the land.

Among the challenging forest conditions identified by interviewees were changing ownership patterns, encroachment of small diameter trees, build-up of ladder fuel, wildfires, and impacts on watershed health. Wildlife habitat challenges identified included invasive species, habitat fragmentation and loss, aquatic species, salmonid recovery, loss of diversity, and decline in species. The above are also challenges on federal public lands that provide much of our open space. Livestock grazing continues to be a contentious issue on public lands.

Water quality and quantity were identified as major challenges as well as rivers and river restoration. *“Water in all its aspects,”* was how one interviewee put it. Another commented that *“Oregon needs to reset. Oregon and its water are in a race that can’t be won on any time line or dollar figure unless we change the system through which we address the issues.”*^{4/} Yet another faults the perpetuation of myths in thinking about water resources by focusing on bricks and mortar (engineering) instead of conservation.

Several interviewees identified government and politics as major environmental challenges. Mistrust of government was mentioned as a major challenge. One interviewee believes the high cost of campaigns for public office and of ballot measures brings out the worst in how we function politically. Another said, *“Some of our biggest environmental challenges are political problems.”*^{5/}

Two interviewees discussed the need for a better understanding of the role of litigation. One sees litigation as a tool of last resort, to be used when two sides cannot agree on an issue and have an honest difference of opinion about what the law means; then it is the court's responsibility to interpret the law. While this individual believes that litigation will always be a part of resource management, he hopes to minimize its importance, have it become less of a lightning rod, and not be seen as a personal attack tool. The other interviewee defends litigation as a proper tool, pointing out that the courts are one of the three branches of government and deserving of respect, that agricultural interests do not hesitate to use litigation, and that collaboration is often only possible when there is a perception of risk, including juridical risk.

One interviewee identified the rural/urban divide as the state's greatest environmental challenge. He sees political, social, and life style dimensions that make it a challenge for Oregonians to come together on natural resource, environmental, and public lands issues. And he worries that the divide will make these issues more difficult rather than less difficult as the state's population continues to climb.

Question 2: Of these challenges, which are related to agriculture?

The most common response to this question was that all are related in some way. One interviewee pointed out that almost by definition, agriculture is land conversion from a natural state to something else. That something else can be as different as highly input-intensive monoculture to grazing land protective of native vegetation, making it hard to generalize about agriculture. Several interviewees see agriculture as a major player in every issue related to water, accounting for 70-90% of the diversions and as having direct impacts on the state's rivers.

At this point in the interviews, most interviewees began to speak about agriculture in general terms. They acknowledged that farming is a high capital, high stress occupation and that healthy environments and good farming often blend well. One pointed out that it is hard to generalize about agriculture as it is such a spectrum of diverse interests.

"Some of our biggest environmental challenges are political problems." John DeVoe

Question 3: How can agriculturalists help in addressing these challenges?

The responses to this question can be divided into three groups: things that agriculturalists can do, things that agriculturalists can avoid, and things that agriculturalists can work toward.

Among the suggested things that agriculturalists can do are:

- Work to strengthen Oregon’s farm and ranch economy
- Acknowledge and talk about the issues
- Be creative and innovative in embracing change and shaping it to meet needs
- Initiate contact – reach out - with environmentalists/conservationists
- Engage in the on-going conversations – i.e., watershed councils, etc.
- Support a greater flow of information between the communities
- Share information about where movement is possible
- Recognize that the issues are not simple and should not be treated as simple
- Take risks in order to move issues to resolution

Suggested things that agriculturalists can avoid included:

- Stereotyping
- Statements that irritate
- “Cheap shots” in public settings
- Intractable positions that make movement impossible
- Silence about agricultural bad actors
- Denial about situations that are not right

Several interviewees suggested that farmers and ranchers could become more involved in new kinds of markets, such as sustainable, certified, organic, but also ecosystem services markets. Agriculturalists need to be at the table and be very communicative as the rules for these markets are written to avoid having to play catch-up. These markets are seen as ways to bring greater strength and resilience to the farm and ranch economy while strengthening ties to urban consumers.

The land trust movement and grazing permit retirements were mentioned as ways to provide financial support to land owners while protecting the environment. It was pointed out that agriculturalists have important roles in energy transition through the production and use of biofuels and in any carbon or greenhouse gas markets that may be created.

Interviewees raised three major challenges facing agriculturalists and environmentalists: 1) land use laws that provide an unearned windfall for a few landowners at the expense of all others; 2) regulatory systems designed to keep bad things from happening that are now keeping good things from happening; and 3) antiquated water laws that can not meet the requirements of the future.

Conversations including environmentalists and agriculturalists could explore possibilities for: 1) establishing a “value recapture charge” as urban growth boundaries expand with revenues used to pay for the required increased infrastructure and to buy conservation easements on farms that want to continue; 2) changing the regulatory default from “no” to “yes” for all restoration projects; and 3) new markets and approaches to honor historic water rights while conserving and allocating for future water needs in-stream and out.

Interviewees suggested that agriculturalists could work to identify common ground with environmentalists. Examples where common ground exists include invasive species, ORV and ATV impacts, wilderness conservation values, watershed restoration, and incentives for growing renewable energy. One person suggested that agriculturalists could work to increase funding for the Agricultural Experiment Station and Extension at Oregon State University as *“40,000 farmers can not do the needed research.”*

Question 4: What does it take for you to work constructively with Agriculturalists? With the agricultural community?

A majority of interviewees responded that they are working with individual agriculturalists in a variety of ways. They believe they are building working relationships with individual farmers and ranchers based on patience, understanding, empathy, respect and realism. By being willing to listen and learn, keeping an open mind, and struggling with the complexity of issues they work to build relationships one at a time. One interviewee responded that what is required is *“the patience and humility to recognize that they know a lot more about their businesses than we do*

and that they are fiercely proud of their own conservation leanings and their common sense approach to economics and policy. They are as responsible as anyone else for the success of the Oregon model of land use planning. The farmers are keepers of the conservation tradition.”6/

“Give credit where credit is due. A lot of people in agriculture are mindful of these things and doing what they can in their circumstances to maintain water quality. The conversation gets further if it doesn’t include imposing regulatory oversight.”7/

Several interviewees believe their greatest impact comes from working directly with agriculturalists addressing real cases to resolve an issue for the farmer or rancher and meet objectives of the environmental organization. They especially want to support the early adopters and use farmer-to-farmer and demonstration methods to disseminate information. Some suggested stronger relationships with the community of service providers, i.e., Extension, NRCS, SWCD, etc.

Interviewees suggest it is important to acknowledge differences and then seek common ground to move forward. *“There will always be people at the extremes trying to undermine constructive work and there has to be enough trust to overcome this.”* A number of interviewees expressed gratitude for the people in the agricultural community who take the risk of working with them and hope they are not harmed or disadvantaged as a result.

Several interviewees talked about their involvement with difficult issues, such as pesticides, water allocation, and public lands use. In their experience, the first difficulty is getting everyone to the table, acknowledging the issue and being committed to producing a different result. It often takes a threat – regulatory action, litigation or threat of litigation – to bring people to the table. It can be helpful to have a target date when action will be taken if there is not an agreement. Even with everyone at the table, issues can go on for years. Over time they tend to mature as the political landscape changes, opportunities pass and new ones appear, and new incentives emerge. *“All participants have to be willing to put away their myths about being rugged individualists or doing god’s work in order to become practical.”*

“Give credit where credit is due.” Mark Stern

Working with organizations

When asked what it takes to work with agricultural organizations, several interviewees said that they only work with individual farmers and ranchers willing to work with them. One observed that working with agricultural organizations is *“not a place where we spend a lot of time. We spend our time out on the ground. We focus on the people who are affected. We are not appropriate messengers to be talking to these organizations – we are not their constituency.”*^{8/} He went on to say, *“In both communities there is great diversity of interests and because of this it is often easier to do nothing or to take an absolutist approach. This is very limiting.”*

Other interviewees were more direct in their criticism. They see the major farm organizations as much more intransigent and resistant to change than farmers and ranchers. The people who work in the legislature on behalf of agricultural organizations are not known to be easy to work with from a conservation perspective. *“Their posture is usually ‘No’, whatever, ‘No.’”* They stonewall, even over simple changes that benefit private landowners. *“Traditional industrial lobbyists tend to resist change and are more likely to try to kill a new idea than embrace it.”*^{9/}

Several interviewees see the ability to work with farm organizations as a function of the personality of the leader. The working relationship changes with the leader. In some cases the relationship has gotten worse. In addition to leadership changes, as progressive members have left, the organization has become more intractable.

Interviewees pointed out that the environmental community is also resistant to change. As one put it, *“The conservation community has resisted amendments to the Endangered Species Act because we suspect that the changes would weaken the Act. However, in an atmosphere of trust and cooperation with other stakeholder groups, some positive changes to the Act would be possible.”*^{10/}

Considering past environmental positions, another interviewee stated that, *“We have to slaughter some sacred cows and some of them have to be ours.”*^{11/}

One interviewee suggested that all special interest organizations, environmental organizations included, function within their own vacuum. They tend to operate with short-term tunnel vision.

Even so, another believes that *“The environmental community can now come out of defense mode and think about the new vision that is proactive and positive. Who can we sit down with to talk about moving forward? That will require some compromise on our part to come to resolution on key issues. We will see a transition in the environmental community moving out of a conflict mode to a collaborative mode.”*^{12/}

Another interviewee believes working with agricultural organizations is worth the effort.

“You start with key people in the organization. It takes work of another order of magnitude to forge a relationship with the governing body of the organization. Any organization has a lot of institutional membership pressures on it so it can’t move as agilely as you can move in one-on-one conversation. That said, organizations often offer the opportunity to have some dialogue and exchange. Those opportunities come on the strength of individual relationships with key people. Even with some hostile feelings there is the opportunity to address misperceptions. Misperceptions are sort of uncanny and in the absence of dialogue they get reinforced.”^{13/}

The fact that progressive farmers do not lobby was lamented by one interviewee. No farmer group working with the legislature is speaking for these farmers and the environmental community can not effectively lobby for progressive agriculture without the leadership of progressive agriculture.

Question 5: As you think about this relationship, what concerns you about working with agriculturalists? With the agricultural community?

Interviewees voiced a number of concerns in the following areas:

- That it will be a waste of resources and time
- That the agriculturalists working with them will be negatively impacted
- That there will be conflicts with other environmental groups
- That the need to find new ways forward will outstrip the capacity to create them

“Traditional industrial lobbyists tend to resist change and are more likely to try to kill a new idea than embrace it.”

Sara Vickerman

A Waste of Resources and Time

Interviewees pointed out that building relationships takes time, for busy farmers and ranchers and for environmentalists. Building trust and the capacity to collaborate requires the expenditure of scarce resources in both communities.

Several interviewees mentioned the importance of having clear expectations of one another when you are working together. *“There must be real understanding of the commonality and what is expected. You must be clear and careful about the language being used.”*^{14/}

One interviewee observed that there is no forum for discussing the issues. No one is providing a forum and there is no short-term pressure for agriculture to change. Farmers have unique political standing; they can reasonably conclude that they are not likely to be regulated. They can just say no and do so indefinitely. Any forum needs an immediate purpose. Another interviewee commented that if there isn't a decision point or trigger point then they are reluctant to try. The issue may never reach a critical mass. Yet another interviewee is concerned about raising false expectations. *“It takes so much time to build up trust and then it doesn't happen because of any number of things that can go wrong and that reinforces the problems we have in working together.”*^{15/}

Negative Impacts for Cooperators

Interviewees were sensitive to the ways in which agriculturalists could be negatively impacted by working with environmentalists/conservationists. One saw the need for a safety net for people who risk conversion to a different agricultural model. Another spoke of working with ranchers who don't want it to be known in their community for fear of how it will affect their standing in that community. *“This is an understandable concern; it takes people who are willing to take some risks in terms of community understanding in order to build understanding in the larger community.”*^{16/} Another interviewee commented that the loss of community standing can also affect agency and university personnel who work with environmentalists. They can become marginalized and have their careers negatively impacted within their own organizations and institutions.

Conflicts with other Environmental Groups

Interviewees acknowledged conflicts with other environmental groups that have

different missions and goals. Groups working to restrict development to land with marginal agricultural value may find themselves in conflict with groups working to conserve wildlife habitat. Several interviewees spoke at length about how these conflicts have played out around specific issues. Another group may be willing to trade your issue for a goal they have. They may be willing to compromise on issues that they don't fully understand. They may have come to the table at a late date and not be willing to do the work to fully understand all the history and interests that are present.

Two interviewees spoke of struggling with trade-offs in complex negotiations and working toward what they believed to be the best resolution given their understanding of all the circumstances of the issue in that community only to receive pointed criticism from a distant environmental group. In describing the situation, one interviewee called this "drive-by environmentalism." Other interviewees acknowledged their real struggle to balance their strong desire to reach an agreement with their need to remain true to their values and mission. In this setting, one interviewee spoke of his concern that some people at the table have a direct financial interest in the outcome. *"This becomes an obstacle in coming to communal decisions we can all stand behind."*^{17/}

One interviewee expressed discomfort with the elitist and conformist character of environmental advocacy in the metro area. This environmentalist finds it liberating to experience the different thinking common to rural areas.

Interviewees spoke of the financial incentive to not collaborate in both communities. People contribute to an organization when they believe they are facing a threat and that the organization will defend their interests. Prolonging disputes could become a fund raising strategy for both agricultural and environmental organizations. Conversely, announcing an agreement with long time adversaries will generally not bring in contributions. However, one interviewee countered that he had never observed an environmental organization prolonging an issue to raise funds and another sees this as a "red herring."

"Just as environmentalists are reaching out to agriculture, agriculturalists are reaching out to environmentalists because increasingly they have more in common and that has to continue." Martin Goebel

The Need to Find New Ways forward will Outstrip the Capacity to Create Them

As pointed out by several interviewees, the issues can appear intractable. Interviewees cited examples of past policies that have created infrastructure set-ups that are not sustainable. These range from western water law to forest issues to public land management. For example, the issues in the Klamath Basin involve irrigation for farming, a large commercial fishing industry, fishing rights of the tribes, endangered fish, migratory birds and a history involving multiple layers of short-sighted policies.

One interviewee mentioned that the intractability of issues extends to the legislature where agricultural lobbyists are able to lock-up people and issues and no discussion is possible. They employ a “circle-the-wagons” approach with other industry organizations joining with them. The interviewee wonders, *“Does this mean that people are just not willing to have the conversation?”* *“Why are other industry groups joining in the lock-up; what is their interest in this issue?”*^{18/}

Interviewees commented on the pace of change that is coming to agriculture in terms of public policy and the limited capacity that agriculture has developed to embrace and shape change.

Interviews with Producer/Conservationists

Interviews were also conducted with seven farmers and ranchers who are actively involved in conservation practices on their properties and with collaborative efforts. The purpose of these interviews was to capture the perspectives of producers with standing in both communities. Rather than following the series of questions, these interviews tended to flow where the interviewee took them.

In terms of environmental challenges in the state, one producer sees the biggest challenge as *“getting every Oregonian to understand that they are part of the environmental issues that we face and that each of us is accountable.”*^{19/} Another sees the need for people to realize that agriculture and timber are major pieces of the environment and to work with the people on the land. Yet another laments what he sees as an anti-environment national government and negative environmental externalities of the global food system.

Water quality and quantity were mentioned by several producers along with population growth and the need to balance development with environmental protection. One producer focused on the need to reconcile the purpose and use of public lands and asks, *how do we continue to have high environmental quality and high quality environmental experiences with increasing population?*^{20/} Another spoke of *“unique opportunities to reinvent the natural resource industries in ways that raise the value of the natural resources themselves.”*^{21/}

These producers were chosen because of their conservation ethic. They spoke with pride of the conservation practices they are employing to address environmental issues on the land they manage. Several mentioned that they adopted these practices because they were the *“right thing to do;”* not because there was a financial incentive. However, one producer discovered that *“doing the right thing”* became an advantage in marketing his products.

Each producer also spoke of the challenges unique to their situation. These challenges included: the reluctance of surrounding farmers to change in order to keep the land in agricultural use; struggling with a history of mistaken policies while seeking a new way forward; the uncertainties of new regulations and the supply of essential labor; the frustrations of competing against the system created by government policy; attempts to eliminate all commercial activities on public lands including grazing; gridlock in regulatory decision-making processes; and the challenges of exercising leadership in the industry.

Each of these producers is addressing these challenges by serving in organizations, on boards and commissions and in collaborative efforts and they encourage other producers to do the same. Farmers and ranchers can help *“by addressing water issues and becoming a model for moving forward”* was one response. *“By accepting the reality that things will continue to change”* was another.

The producers spoke of struggling against uncertainty and feelings of hopelessness in the face of changing policies and legal actions. They see dialogue and collaborative efforts as being both difficult and powerful. *“It takes a great deal of time, it takes patience, and it is slow and unwieldy. Sometimes you can reach consensus and sometimes you can’t. It feels like people who want to obstruct the process have all the leverage – and they do.”* *“Given that, we have opportunities here. Collaborative groups are possible. There is always an answer in the room beside the preconceived*

notions you come in with. I think we have opportunities to figure out solutions that everyone can live with – not solutions that make us totally happy, but solutions we can all live with.”^{22/}

“You need an objective understanding of the folks who don’t agree with you. Agriculture has generally not done a good job of that. I’m not sure why.” “It has always worked for me to sit down together and look for solution.”^{23/}

Another producer who is centrally involved in a collaborative effort commented that, *“Addressing these issues means not sleeping at night. There are environmental organizations that are coming along and feeling some of the pain. They seem to be grappling with what it takes to create positive environmental change. Others seem to care about the environment, but in an almost lazy way.”^{24/}*

The Case for Optimism

Several environmentalist interviewees commented that while they know that the issues are complex, they have no concerns or fears in working with agriculturalists. In fact, they see reasons to be optimistic. A number of them are successfully working directly with individuals or groups of farmers. They cite a number of positive developments including greater reaching out by both communities. *“Just as environmentalists are reaching out to agriculture, agriculturalists are reaching out to environmentalists because increasingly they have more in common and that has to continue.”^{25/}*

Among the positives, they point out that sustainable agriculture is the fastest growing segment of the industry. The growth of farmers’ markets and markets for organic, sustainable and certified products can provide greater economic viability for farms as well as entry paths for new young farmers. These can also be the vanguard of eco-services markets yet to be developed.

Perhaps the greatest reasons for optimism are the cases where diverse interests have successfully created a new way forward. The creation and implementation of the Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Act of 2000 is one notable example. Oregon Solutions and watershed councils are examples of government supported collaborative work.

The list of locally created collaborative groups is long and varied across the state. When asked to give examples of successful collaborative efforts, interviewees readily responded. They mentioned a number of Oregon Solutions projects, such as the Lakeview Biomass Plant, and a variety of other project types including the Applegate Partnership, the Ochoco Water and Economic Optimization Project, the Upper Deschutes Basin Canal Lining Project, the Hells Canyon Restoration and Stewardship Collaboration, the Upper Joseph Collaboration, and the Walla Walla Stream flow Restoration Project. Collaboration around important issues, long a feature of Oregon life, may be experiencing renewal.

Conclusions of the Interviewer

I am grateful to all who shared their time, thoughts, and experiences with me. I especially appreciated their openness and candor during the interviews. Interviewees were thoughtful and reflective. Without prompting, they directed criticism at themselves, their organizations and the environmental community as well as at agriculturalists and agricultural organizations. I was impressed by their commitment and dedication and felt especially privileged to interview them.

The environmentalists/conservationists interviewed are committed to keeping farmers and ranchers on the land by working toward a varied, secure and resilient farm and ranch economy. They see the rapidly growing markets for local, organic, sustainable and certified products as the beginnings of the development of eco-services markets and believe that farmers need to be actively involved as the rules for these markets are developed. At the same time, some continue to believe that grazing on public land damages the health of that land in some, most, or all cases.

Distinctions appear to be falling away. Several interviewees were uncomfortable with the title of environmentalist. One identified more as an agriculturalist. Several had farm or rural backgrounds. Many were working directly with farmers and ranchers. For some, the title of environmentalist carried baggage that could be a barrier in their work. They have also come to know many agriculturalists who are also environmentalists and conservationists.

Time is a scarce commodity for both communities. Farmers and ranchers are busy managing their operations. They have limited time to engage in policy development. In general, they join agricultural organizations that employ staff to represent them. The interviewees do not believe that this is currently working in the best interests of

farmers and ranchers – at least in the interests of the farmers and ranchers with whom they are working.

The interviewees recognize the importance of contact and communication in building the trusting relationships that are required for collaboration, but they also are limited in the time they can devote to these activities. They focus on the contacts important to their mission.

There were several dimensions to how the interviewees spoke of “the capacity to collaborate.” The dimensions included personal, community, agency, and organizational.

Personal Capacity to Collaborate

At the personal level, they spoke of the need for individuals to be willing (and able) to come to the table, acknowledge what is wrong or could be better, share what their needs are for their future, and where movement is possible around their interests. In this, the interviewees spoke of all the people at the table; farmers and ranchers, environmentalists, agency personnel, local officials and community leaders. There can be no hierarchy of interests at the table. No one has higher moral standing than anyone else there.

The effort to collaborate was not described as a search for “win/win” or even “gain/gain” solutions. Rather the search is for “new ways forward;” what can work for this issue in this community at this time and for some time into the future. To build the necessary trust, interviewees stressed the importance of patience, understanding, respect, empathy and humility and the need to celebrate and share credit for small successes.

Community Capacity to Collaborate

Interviewees mentioned two crucial needs for collaboration at the community level; the need to honor the unique history of the community and the need to bring the

“I think we have opportunities to figure out solutions that everyone can live with – not solutions that make us totally happy, but solutions we can all live with.” Jack Southworth

community along as the collaborative group works to find new ways forward. These are especially difficult in cases like the Klamath Basin with its painful history of misguided policies involving so many different groups and resulting in an unsustainable set of infrastructures. Bringing the community along is important for broad local buy-in and support and for the strength to withstand criticisms that may come from outside the community.

Agency Capacity to Collaborate

The capacity to collaborate is also needed at the agency level. Regulations that the agencies enforce were set to keep bad things from happening as externalities of commercial enterprises. The regulatory default was set at “no” for these negative impacts. Landowners requesting approval of restoration projects therefore face the red tape intended to protect the environment as commercial activities are carried out. There is a need for agency collaboration in setting a regulatory default of “yes” for restoration projects. It was suggested that such projects may be simplified for willing landowners by providing a third party responsible for performance standards and monitoring and by assuring that the projects have no worse than a neutral financial impact on the landowners.

Interviewees included agriculture research and extension as part of agriculture’s capacity to collaborate. They emphasized the importance of public support for university research, the statewide public service agencies of the Agricultural Experiment Station and the Extension Service and other service providers for the development, dissemination and application of innovative new technologies.

Organizational Capacity to Collaborate

Interviewees spoke of collaboration at the organizational level as being perhaps the most difficult challenge of all. Historically, organizations have not prospered by collaborating. Whether they enjoy a broad membership with diverse interests or a narrow membership with a sharply focused mission, their interests have seemed to be best served by staking out a position and fighting for it. Issues quickly have become locked-up with only a “win/lose” outcome possible. Examples of past positions that have precluded any new ways forward include “not one cow removed from the federal grazing permit system,” “not one acre of agricultural land converted to conservation,” “getting all the cattle off public lands,” and “eliminating pesticides.” Such positions can serve the purpose of organizational identity. They do not serve the purpose of finding new ways forward.

Interviewees believe that during the past few years, organizations in both communities have begun to reach out with more emphasis on dialogue leading to collaboration. They appear to be working more toward their interests with fewer defenses of rigid positions. They have even managed to join hands on some important issues.

An unmet Need

Interviewees identified the clear need for an agricultural organization to speak for the most rapidly growing segment of agriculture in the state. This segment is focused on keeping farmers and ranchers on the land as well as maintaining environmental health. It has dimensions of local, organic, sustainable, and certified. It has sprouted “farm to school” and “farm to hospital” programs. It is closely connected with the food retail and service industries in the metropolitan areas. Unlike the rest of agriculture, its practitioners are young and trending younger. It is pointing the way to eco-services markets with potential to bring greater variety and stability to rural economies. Yet there is not an agricultural organization communicating from this important segment with the legislature, the media, or the public.

Along with every need comes an opportunity. The need could be met by a new agricultural organization or by one or more of the existing organizations willing to broaden their scope to appeal to, incorporate and ultimately to represent the values and interests these agriculturalists and their customers.

Keeping the Focus on What may be Possible

In January of 2002, Paul Axtell of Contextual Program Designs came to Oregon State University to lead a workshop on Conversation Skills. While on campus he met with workshop participants in a session to discuss our experiences in applying what we were learning. He began the session by saying, “Take out a piece of paper and write down three things you are going to do this year that will make possible things that you can’t imagine now.”

What a wonderful way of staying open to what may become possible! Most of us have had the experience of starting a project with a clear idea of what we were working toward, only to end with outcomes much more valuable and important than the one we had in mind when we started. Yet we are often reluctant to start something without first being clear about what we want to create. In working toward the outcome we want, we may miss the possibilities for outcomes of much greater importance to us.

This becomes particularly limiting when we act out of the fear that something bad may happen. As Bob Chadwick of Consensus Associates points out, we are programmed by distant ancestors to focus on the bad things that might happen and we have to force ourselves to imagine the good things that might result.

I continue to fight against my own hard-wiring. I have made a heavy investment in creating my world view and my understanding of how things are and how they should be. When faced with a perspective, idea, or proposal that doesn't match how I have come to make sense of the world, I can easily see it as a threat to my foundation – as a threat to who I am. This kicks in my “fight or flight” reaction. I can argue against this alien thing or I can refuse to take it in at all. My fear closes me off to anything it has to offer and anything it might make possible.

When faced with something that challenged his thinking, a former colleague would say, “fascinating!” And that is what I aspire to do – to be fascinated by this different thing. I want to try to focus on what this might have to teach me or how it might help me make sense out of something else. I try to say, “Yes, and....” or “Yes, if...” instead of “No.”

Using Difference as a Resource

Difference is often seen as a problem. I believe it is a resource.

I have had the experience of working with a group of people who shared a common background, the same worldview, and the same or similar life experiences. Being a member of the group was comfortable and congenial. It was easy for us to reach agreement and we were frequently wrong when the thing we agreed on was outside our narrow expertise. We were a weak group because we lacked the resource of difference.

I have also had the experience of working in a group of people with very different backgrounds, quite different world views and divergent life experiences. Being a member of that group was frequently uncomfortable. Clear communication and understanding required hard work all around. We struggled in coming to agreement, but our decisions were almost always the right ones. We were a strong group because

“You need an objective understanding of the folks who don't agree with you.” - Rob Miller

we had the insights of difference to inform our decisions.

If a strong, trusting and resilient relationship was created between the agricultural and environmental communities – what might that make possible for Oregon’s farms and ranches, its rural economy and its environment?

Interviewees went to lengths to describe relationships and outcomes that environmentalists and agriculturalists could work toward. Some believe that the most important outcome is the creation of open and honest relationships strong enough to find new ways forward. They spoke of building foundations of trust, caring for the environment, caring for people, struggling with complexity, honoring the local community in its unique history, and gaining traction to mold the future.

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|--------------------|---------------------|
| 1/ Martin Goebel | 14/ ibid |
| 2/ Bob Stacey | 15/ Brent Fenty |
| 3/ Chris Schreiner | 16/ ibid |
| 4/ Joe Whitworth | 17/ Greg Dyson |
| 5/ John DeVoe | 18/ Ivan Maluski |
| 6/ Bob Stacey | 19/ Becky Hyde |
| 7/ Mark Stern | 20/ Jack Southworth |
| 8/ Brent Fenty | 21/ Rob Miller |
| 9/ Sara Vickerman | 22/ Jack Southworth |
| 10/ ibid | 23/ Rob Miller |
| 11/ Joe Whitworth | 24/ Becky Hyde |
| 12/ Ivan Maluski | 25/ Martin Goebel |
| 13/ Mark Stern | |

“Addressing these issues means not sleeping at night.”

Becky Hyde

Appendix A - Interviewees

Environmentalists/Conservationists

John DeVoe	Executive Director	Water Watch
Greg Dyson	Executive Director	Hells Canyon Preservation Council
Brent Fenty	Executive Director	Oregon Natural Desert Association
J. Martin Goebel	President	Sustainable Northwest
Norma Grier	Executive Director	NW Coalition for Alternatives to Pesticides
Cylvia Hayes	Executive Director	3E Strategies
Ivan Maluski	Grass Roots Coord.	Sierra Club
Chris Schreiner	Quality Control Dir	Oregon Tilth
Bob Stacey	Executive Director	1000 Friends of Oregon
Mark Stern	Director	The Nature Conservancy
Sara Vickerman	Senior Director	Defenders of Wildlife
Joe Whitworth	Executive Director	Oregon Trout

Producers/Conservationists

Ken Bailey	Orchard View Farms	The Dalles
Dan Carver	Imperial Stock Ranch	Shaniko
Becky Hyde	Yamsi Ranch	Klamath Falls
Rob Miller	Mt. Jefferson Farms	Salem
Larry Pearmine	Pearmine Farms	Gervais
Jack Shipley	Rocky Creek Farms	Grants Pass
Jack Southworth	Southworth Bros. Ranch	Seneca



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