

July/August 2015



Farm Tour: Wed. August 12

This year, the FPC Farm Tour will take us to Lee and Roxanne Uhl Dunn's White Deer Ranch in Fishtail. Many of you might know Lee and Roxanne from some of the FPC events like the fermentation class or "Connecting through Food and Film". They always come loaded with ideas, knowledge and some tasty samples.

Roxanne and Lee's philosophy:

We believe that if we take care of the worms and the honeybees with proper earth stewardship everything else will thrive. We are an agritourism ranch/farm, which is organic certified for hay, pasture and foraged plants. We think of ourselves as modern homesteaders. Our practices are neither ranching nor farming, they are a combination of both.



We will learn about:

- different microclimates on the property
- organic hay and foraged plants
- microgreens
- bees
- agritourism
- chickens, goats, cattle and pigs

There is a store where you can purchase eggs, micro greens, dried herbs, beef, honey, Rugged Ranch Woman (natural health) products and other seasonal items. Don't forget to bring a cooler.

A light lunch and beverages will be available after the tour. A donation of \$7.00 would be appreciated. You will taste some of the items grown or raised at the Ranch and cooked up by Roxanne in her home kitchen. A lunch headcount would make it easier for Roxanne, so please mention your intent when you register.

Please plan to meet at the Red Lodge High School parking lot at 8:00 am to get instructions and car pool. The Farm Tour is still free of charge to attend, but FPC greatly appreciates all donations to help us offer and advertise great programs like this.

Be sure to bring hats, water and some snacks. We have a limited number of people we can take; first come, first serve. So please sign up by August 7th with Annette Lavalette at annette@nemont.net or call (406) 328 7396.



Eating Local!

July and August are the months to take on a challenge to eat 50% local. Just one or two meals a week using local vegetables from the Farmer's Market, Rocky Fork Food Hub or your own garden supplemented with local meats. In our community of 6000 households, this small challenge enriches our local economy. It keeps producers and growers on their land which is good for the environment. So, take the challenge and post your local meal on our facebook page, www.facebook.com/foodpartnership.

Farm and Garden Camp 2015

Farm and Garden Camp was a huge success this year! We had a full house of 21 campers, and spent the week digging, planting, tasting, getting dirty, and having fun! Campers created a new flower bed in the garden, attacked some of our pesky weeds, and planted a new cycle of crops in our hoop house. We also got to make garden art projects like seed collages, flower suncatchers, and plant tie dye! We had the chance to visit Wholesome Foods Farm, the Hardimans' Ranch, and Boja Farm to learn more about local agriculture in Red Lodge. Thanks to all the families, farmers, and partners that made camp such a success!



Youth Garden

The garden is loving the summer heat! We've been feasting on lots of greens and are waiting patiently for our tomatoes to ripen. We need your help to carry the garden through August before school comes back in session! Please email emma.fernandez@foodcorps.org if you can help with some simple garden maintenance in August. Drop by anytime to check out how it's growing.

Kids Corner Grant

We are excited to announce that we received a grant from the Kids Corner to support Farm and Garden Camp this year. Because of the grant, we were able for the first time to compensate the farms we visited for the time they spent with us. We have greatly appreciated the generosity of our local producers in taking time out of their busy schedules to host field trips and tours, and we believe that it is important to compensate them for this time in order to contribute to a sustainable local economy. Thanks to the generosity and support of the Kids Corner for making this possible!



Farmers' Market

Remember that the Red Lodge Farmers' Market continues Fridays, 3:30 to 6:00 pm through September 25th at Lions Park. For additional information, contact Jenn Fusaro, Market Manager at redlodgefarmersmarket@gmail.com.



Local Food for Lunch in the Sun

Thanks to the generous community granting program through the Red Lodge Area Community Foundation, kids in town eating at the summer free lunch program for kids – “Lunch in the Sun” – are enjoying locally grown meats and produce this year. Lunch in the Sun is a program that helps ensure that youth (up to 18 years old) receive a nutritious meal 3 days a week in the summer months when school is not in session. With the help of VISTA service member Yvonne Johnson, we wrote the grant to help cover the costs of sourcing food close to home for this anti-hunger project, and the Community Foundation granted \$500. A large portion of this went toward purchasing local ground beef, and the rest is covering fresh produce from local growers.

One of Red Lodge Area Food Partnership Council's areas of focus is to help local food growers to sell more of their products here in the community. The benefits of increasing local sales for our regional

food growers include; keeping more food dollars in our local economy, cutting out the middle man so that farmers keep a much higher share of the food dollar than the typical 20%, increased production which contributes to local food security, and job creation. An additional benefit to serving local food to children is nutritional; local food is harvested closer to peak ripeness, and it has been shown that vegetables contain more nutrients when they are allowed to ripen naturally on the parent plant. On average, food purchased through distributors travels 1500-3000 miles before it is consumed, and increased amount of time post-harvest has also been shown to deplete nutrients. Plus, fresher vegetables are more delicious, leading to kids eating more of them!

Is Farming a Public Service?

by Liz Carlisle, fellow at the Center for Diversified Farming Systems at UC Berkeley and the author of "Lentil Underground."

A bill recently introduced in Congress, the Young Farmer Success Act, would make farmers eligible for federally subsidized student loan forgiveness — just as teachers and nurses are now — on the grounds that agriculture is a public service. But is it?

Certainly the history of U.S. farm policy would suggest that lawmakers have long seen agriculture as a public good. Why else would they pass a farm bill that, in its most recent iteration, commits \$134 billion to farm subsidies, commodity programs and insurance? Why would California so assiduously defend agricultural water rights in the midst of a severe drought?

Arguably agriculture is more than a good; it's a necessity, because everyone eats. But given that most U.S. crops will become fuel, animal feed, processed food components, export commodities or waste, the reality is a bit more complicated.

The truth is that agriculture is a hybrid public-private activity, and when it comes to evaluating the costs and benefits of its public fraction, not all farming is created equal.

The dominant approach to farming in the U.S. — the one encouraged by the last 150 years of agricultural policy — focuses on maximizing the immediate private benefit to the farmer, measured in yield of cash crops. Public benefits of commodity farming, its supporters argue, include open space, the preservation of rural life and the American agrarian tradition, and — the boon most touted by the architects of 20th century farm policy — an advantage in the balance of foreign trade.

However, some of these benefits have proved hollow. Commodity farming has led to larger and larger farms, which have meant smaller and smaller rural communities, and the flood of grain has continually driven down prices.

Simultaneously, commodity farming has led to a number of public "bads," from dead zones in the Gulf of Mexico (caused by nitrogen fertilizer runoff) to toxic manure lagoons and poor air quality (due to confinement animal feeding operations). Plus, if you follow these commodity crops all the way to their eventual consumption by the public, an epidemic of obesity and diabetes. When you consider all its externalized costs, cheap food is not so cheap.

In response to widespread concern about these negative effects, the Reagan-era Department of Agriculture developed a parallel but less influential policy approach to farming, one that aims to

maximize not private gain but environmental good such as wildlife habitat and watershed protection. This alternative strategy encourages nonproduction, as epitomized by the Conservation Reserve Program, which pays farmers to leave land fallow.

What has only recently come to the attention of policymakers, however, is that the soundest long-term approach to farming and conservation comes from understanding them not as opposing objectives but as two goals grounded in the same foundation.

Farmers, in other words, don't have to stop planting crops to help the environment. Farms are sutured into living ecosystems, and their production is reliant on the health of those ecosystems. It is entirely possible for farmers to raise nutritious food and also protect water quality, invest in soil fertility and actively promote a diverse community of pollinators, beneficial insects and plant species.

So back to the question: Is farming a public service? Well, it depends, and not on the age of the farmer. Although there's a feel-good quality to supporting young farmers — and young farmers are proportionally more likely to manage their lands organically — age does not map neatly onto farming practices. More fundamentally, paying young farmers' college loans does nothing to change the incentive structure of U.S. agriculture to truly support them in farming for the long-term common good.

Instead of loan forgiveness, why not subsidize land access for farmers who commit to water conservation practices, cover cropping, crop rotation and avoidance of toxic chemicals? Why not expand the program that directly funds young people to participate in public service — AmeriCorps — including the portion that focuses on the food system, FoodCorps?

It's a missed opportunity to encourage young people to work on a farm, any farm, as if they were all equally beneficial to the American public. It makes far more sense to incentivize specific practices.

AERO Expo

Save the Date for the 2015 AERO EXPO & Annual Meeting, with keynote speakers Sarah Calhoun of Red Ants Pants, & Liz Carlisle, author of *Lentil Underground*, lots of great panels and workshops on renewable energy, conservation, and sustainable agriculture, music, dancing, BBQ, and much more! - The Annual Expo and Meeting will take place Sept. 25-27 at Arrowpeak Lodge, outside of Great Falls. Check www.aeromt.org/expo-annual-meeting for more info.

Small Acreage Weed Control

by Janet Peterson

A short time ago, my husband finished a phone call, then turned to me and said, “The goats are coming!” This was the fifth time that we anxiously awaited their arrival. They give us a break in the ongoing battle with noxious weeds, and they mark a turning point in our seasonal war.

We, like many people in this area, have a few acres that are part of our home. We don't farm or ranch this property, but believe that while we reside here, we are stewards of this land. Keeping our small place healthy is not an easy task. For the seven years that we have lived here, we have learned a great deal about noxious weeds.

So why are we talking about goats in a food newsletter? Well, this is about the beginnings of our food, keeping our land healthy for our use and future generations.

How do goats help? Goats eat a broad range of plants, including noxious weeds. Their hooves break up hardened soil, their digestive system kills most weed seeds, and their excrement fertilizes the soil after they leave.

Is that all it takes? No. It's only a piece of the puzzle. We pull, we cut, we cover, and we occasionally spot spray. One year, Canadian thistle took over a dirt pile from a new building foundation. It was solid thistle. After the goats ate all but the stalks, we covered the area with black plastic for several weeks. With no sun or water, that thistle still continued to grow! So, in desperation, we sprayed with herbicide and covered again. Finally, we had bare ground to enrich with manure and grass seed. Now the berm is thick with native grasses and wildflowers. It's very satisfying to see this conversion from scourge to flowing native grasses.

We continue to enrich the soil, and reseed each year as the deer, irrigation ditch, vehicles and wind bring more unwanted weeds to our land.

Ivan and Chia Thrane, from Healthy Meadows, have an extensive knowledge of soil, weeds and grasses. They and their goats have been an enormous help. This year, we had a patch of cheatgrass that the goats chomped on. It is now covered with straw, and in the fall will have compost, grass and wildflower seed added before the snow. If we don't get good germination in the spring (wild turkeys like the seed), we will seed again. Our hope is to leave this place better than we found it, and hope that the next landowners will continue to nurture this soil so it can produce food to feed the world, or just livestock and our Red Lodge neighbors.

The landscape is forever changing-good and bad. It was so satisfying to see a previous stand of Canadian thistle now native grasses flowing in the wind. This is what we work for. It is worth the fight.

Want to get More Involved?

FPC has several projects or initiatives in the works at the same time. You can get involved in whatever interests you. Contact Martha Brown at mbrown.mt@gmail.com or call (406) 445-7214.