

APPENDIX B

Concerns Voiced by Farmers at April 4, 2008 Meeting at Sunbow Farm with Responses Six Months Later in Bold Typeface:

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

The importance of education can not be overstated. The experience at Stalford Farms revealed the difficulties of entering into new crops and new techniques. Creating a clearinghouse for the knowledge gleaned from this past growing season would be invaluable.

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.

There was no real problem with weeds in the Stalford Farms organic plots.

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.

There was no real problem with pests in the Stalford Farms organic plots.

Cover crops are a work in progress. Experiments with cover crops as a way to diminish soil moisture loss 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 was "growing organic red wheat in the Willamette Valley is impossible—with chemical inputs it will merely be difficult."

There was reasonable success with organic wheat in 2008. The smaller plots at Sunbow Farm were easier to manage, but the one-and-a-half acres of red wheat at Stalford Farms were a huge step forward. It is worth noting that there was no real problem with weeds or insects. Expanding this acreage in 2009 will be a furthering of this experiment.

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.)

The financial markets are in turmoil. The dollar has climbed in value against the Euro in the months since April. Projections about the future of the dollar or world financial markets is no more than a crap shoot at this time.

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.

Processors are still sorely needed. Stalford Farms did their own cleaning and bagging of beans and grain this year. They have also recently bought a seed polisher and a dehuller to further enable their work with beans and grains in the future.

Storage is needed. For the same reasons that there is a lack 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, there must be more storage—public, private, or cooperative.

The shortage of wheat storage became very evident during harvest. A detailed inventory of existing grain storage in the valley does not exist at this time. Short term storage was created by grass seed dealers, but not nearly enough by a factor of ten—maybe fifty. According to one USDA grain agent in Portland, wheat storage was a central topic at virtually all Oregon wheat growers meetings this summer. There was some discussion by an eastern Oregon grain dealer of building an elevator in the Willamette Valley; unfortunately, it will probably take several more years of increasing wheat acreage to get this to happen. Small scale on-farm storage and local neighborhood storage is more likely in the short term. Futures options arrangements or “cyber-storage” is an alternative; grain can be traded for futures options as a way of hedging against the market. This, however, does not help local food security or the building of a local food system.

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.)

The size of the 2008 bean crop did not sufficiently test demand. Arrangements with Golden Temple, Grain Millers, and GloryBee Foods will require more time to develop. A strong connection was made, however, with Hummingbird Wholesale, a small Eugene distributor, and significant farm direct sales were generated through the Ten Rivers Food Web listserv. It should also be mentioned that there is a

gathering momentum for more farmers markets in the south valley and several small markets did appear, but beyond talk, no major steps forward were taken.

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.

The price of wheat has become highly volatile in the last year. The 2008 harvest price (approximately \$8.50) was high enough to make wheat a viable alternative as a commodity crop or as part of grass seed production rotation schemes in the Willamette Valley. The post-harvest price has dropped three dollars, and where that price will be at harvest of 2009 is dependent of the results of the December wheat harvest in Australia and Asian demand. Will the wheat price remain viable next year? No one knows, but the farmers must make that gamble now as winter wheat must be planted in October.

Nutritional density is as important as yield. Recent research at [Washington State University](http://www.washingtonstate.edu) has revealed that wheat grown prior to the 1950s 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.

The Bean and Grain Project is oriented toward development of wheat varieties for organic farmers utilizing breeding that was done prior to the period when crops were oriented to chemical management. (For more information, contact Stephen S. Jones or Kevin Murphy, Dept of Crop & Soil Sciences, Washington State University, email jones@mail.wsu.edu.)

No-till transition involves time. The transition from conventional farming practices 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. When 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 and quinoa are possible additions to Willamette Valley farming.

Solid advances in bean and grain diversity were made during the 2008 growing season. Several varieties of beans and grains showed potential, including the red wheat, garbanzo beans, lentils, anazasi beans, and pinto beans. Black beans have a longer track record in the valley and appear to be viable.

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. This involves a critical cultural shift; we are only just learning the difference between competitive “adversarial” markets and mutual “community” markets.

Establishing local food demand is still a matter of building awareness. Insight into what local food buying means to a community increased during the last year, but there is still a long way to go. Economic conditions, fuel costs, and increased desire for food safety all point in the direction of more locally grown food and higher local demand.

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.