



# Sustainable Choices

Fall/Winter 2010 Newsletter

## Putting It Together: Creating A Sustainable Food System



Last winter Western Sustainability Exchange hosted three Local Foods Commerce Days to bring together farmers, ranchers, processors, distributors and food buyers to establish a food system that is healthy, humane, environmentally responsible and locally based—that is, a Sustainable Food System.

It was at these events that WSE connected Yellowstone Grassfed Beef (YGB) to the University of Montana Dining Services Director.

In September, U of M's Dining Services proudly announced that they will serve YGB sustainably raised beef as their primary beef source for the University. This was great news for the ranch families of the J Bar L and Two Dot Land and Livestock Ranches that comprise the company. The ranchers have been using sustainable and grassfed production methods for some time on their operations in Montana's Centennial Valley and outside Harlowton.

U of M's announcement is great news for Stillwater Packing Co., a processing plant in Columbus. Stillwater Packing is certified to process organic meat and complies with USDA humane handling standards. YGB is one of their major clients and this contract will ensure that they have a reliable customer so they can expand their invaluable services.

The deal is also great news for the cattle because grassfed production means they will never have to endure life in a feedlot.

It is great news for the wildlife that rely on the over 30,000 acres managed by YGB because it demonstrates that habitat stewardship can open new markets. Part of the reason that YGB won the contract is because they protect winter range, birthing grounds, migration corridors and stream banks.

It is especially great news for the endangered Greater Sage Grouse, whose populations have declined by 99% primarily because of habitat loss. Much of the J Bar L Ranch—located next to Red Rocks National Wildlife Refuge—is prime breeding and nesting habitat for the birds. The recent US Fish and Wildlife Service's decision to not list the Sage Grouse as an endangered species because of budget constraints drives home the need for another approach to species conservation. WSE's programs incentivize ranchers for exceptional habitat stewardship through market rewards.

And of course, this is terrific news for U of M students because they will enjoy delicious and nutritious beef free of hormones and antibiotics. It also means that the landscape, wildlife, and agriculture legacy that we treasure stand a greater chance of still being here for them and their children.

This is the legacy that WSE works hard every day to pass on to the next generation.

## Ranching For Profit: Myth or Reality

With the US average Return on Assets a dismal negative 1.5% (excluding land appreciation) for most ranch operations, one could see why profitable ranching seems a myth. Which is why Western Sustainability Exchange focuses on financial rewards and education to improve the economic viability of sustainable farmers and ranchers.

In November, WSE organized three workshops specifically designed to improve the bottom line for ranchers. We partnered with Ranch Management Consultants Inc. (RMC) because of the impressive success of the alumni of RMC Ranching For Profit Schools. Producers who have been through the School and participated in RMC peer-support program, Executive Link, have an average Return on Assets of a positive 4%.

Dave Pratt, who has taught the Ranching For Profit School for nearly 20 years, led the workshops in Dillon, Livingston, and Red Lodge. Nearly 100 producers, extension agents, ag lenders, and ranchers attended WSE's half-day Ranching For Profit workshops.

Pratt described a method of benchmarking to compare an ag operation to other successful ranches, how to increase the availability of working capital, how to increase profit by structuring one's operation to be in sync with natural cycles and the three ways to increase profit.

Thanks to Park County Extension, Centennial Valley Association, Bridge Creek Backcountry Kitchen & Wine Bar, and Sterling Savings Bank for helping WSE organize and host these workshops!

## Steak With a Side of Wildlife Habitat, Anyone?



As consumers continue to use their purchasing power to enhance their health and the environment, WSE and Montana Audubon (MA) are partnering to promote the value of sustainably raised beef to

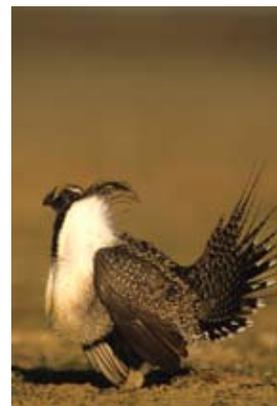
conservation-minded consumers. WSE and MA are launching a pilot marketing campaign to promote Yellowstone Grassfed Beef to Montana Audubon members.

The J Bar L, a producer of Yellowstone Grassfed Beef, manages its cattle to not only produce high-quality beef, but also to steward vital habitat for the threatened Greater Sage Grouse.

WSE and MA recently received a TogetherGreen Innovation Grant to help support our marketing and education efforts, with the hope that enough "Conservation Customers" will pay a premium for this beef in order to encourage more ranchers to adopt similar practices.

WSE believes that this approach is an important new tool for habitat conservation because it is non-regulatory and completely voluntary on the part of landowners. It also gives those of us who care deeply about fish and wildlife a delicious way to literally put our money where our mouths are.

WSE sincerely thanks the National Audubon Society and Toyota (underwriters of the TogetherGreen grants program), Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, and the Cinnabar Foundation for their invaluable seed funding for this innovative program.



## Do you share WSE's mission and value our programs?

If so, please become a member, volunteer, purchase our license plate or sponsor a program or special event.



© Renee Evanoff Rock Dog Art



## WSE MISSION

to advance sustainable choices that enhance economic opportunities which preserve open space, wildlife habitat, farm and ranchlands and quality of life for future generations

# Sustainable Choices

[www.westernsustainabilityexchange.org](http://www.westernsustainabilityexchange.org)

## Mentoring Young Entrepreneurs

Once again WSE partnered with LINKS for Learning, 4H, and Junior Achievement to organize a week-long summer kids camp in Livingston. In addition to gardening, crafts, and daily activities, the campers learned business fundamentals including budgeting, financing, promotion and sustainable business practices.

The business curriculum—taught by WSE staff from Junior Achievement materials, the PBS financial literacy TV program Biz Kid\$, and an innovative tool called Biz in a Boxx®, as well as from first-hand experience mentoring youths through WSE's Young Entrepreneur Stewardship (YES) Program—emphasizes the symbiosis between business and community.

By the end of the camp, most students had brainstormed a business. The boundless creativity spawned such ideas as Elk Antler Art Works, Bjorn's Bugs, and a "Laugh-A-Lot Stand" to entertain farmers market-goers. Students received their own Biz in a Boxx®, a business setup tool for children. It guides kids through the development of a business plan, from brainstorming ideas for a business clear through to an investor's contract.



With the help of WSE volunteer, Susan Frederickson, these Young Entrepreneurs put their heads together to create a business plan during the summer kids camp.

Our young entrepreneurs came out in force to the Livingston Farmers Market. A total of 53 kids participated in the YES program, with 28 setting up "Youth Booths" at the Market.

Along with the traditional cupcake, cookie, and jewelry sales, youth booths at the 2010 market featured "Wondrous Wizarding Wands" and "Pink Lemonade, Made-to-Deliver."

WSE's YES program is designed to break the cycle of poverty that many face in our rural community, by giving kids the tools they need to learn business skills in a low-risk and fun setting.

Thanks to First Interstate BancSystem Foundation, Montana Financial Education Coalition, Pamida Foundation and Park County Community Foundation and for making this program possible!

## Bountiful Harvest

"Let's start the bidding at \$300." Steve Mandeville, professional auctioneer, commanded the Chico Hot Springs banquet hall for WSE's 8th annual Harvest Celebration. The record attendance of over 200 guests enthusiastically supporting Western Sustainability Exchange's initiatives and enjoying the feast that make our Harvest Celebration a sell-out event year after year.

Through ticket sales, auctions, and general donations, this year's event raised nearly \$30,000 for WSE's programs. Money raised from Harvest Celebration go towards funding WSE's Market Connection Program, our Livingston Farmers Market, Montana Farm to Restaurant Connection, and the Steer to Steak initiative.

Not only is the Harvest Celebration a great time for the diners, it also gives the producers and chefs (who come from all over Montana and as far away as Colorado) a rare opportunity to rub elbows with their colleagues at a special reception held in their honor after the dinner.



Chico Chef John Lignoski's bruschetta appetizer. Photo by John Zumpano

Thank you to the 24 producers who contributed to this year's bounty of:

Natural beef, grass-fed beef bacon and hand-cured petite pastrami, natural lamb, organic whey-fed pork, heirloom tomatoes, artisan cheese and bread, Montana organic wine, mushrooms, root veggies, cabbage, lettuce, organic cherries, local eggs and cream. Yum!

Mark your calendars for next year's Harvest Celebration: **Friday, October 7th at Chico Hot Springs Resort and Spa.**

Heartfelt thanks for our 2010 Sponsors



Auctioneer Steve Mandeville works the crowd. Photo by John Zumpano

Visit us on the web at:

[www.westernsustainabilityexchange.org](http://www.westernsustainabilityexchange.org) to view a list of restaurants participating in WSE's Farm to Restaurant program and a list of producers and local foods available to you through WSE's Market Connection program.

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## WSE's Livingston Farmers Market: a Little Event With a Profound Effect

Farmers markets are a venue for customers to purchase fresh, healthy food directly from the folks that grow it...at WSE's Livingston Farmers Market it just doesn't stop there.

From 2009 to 2010, vendor participation increased by 76%, with many vendors reporting record sales. Final numbers were not in at the time of printing, but all indications suggest that the 2010 market exceeded the record set in 2009 of \$145,000 in sales generated for our local vendors. In any case, *this farmers market is a major economic development force.*

And there's more, whether it's increasing the sustainable business literacy of 53 kids with our Young Entrepreneur Stewardship Program that brought 28 youth booths to the market, providing seniors with free produce through the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program or providing a single mom with the opportunity to boost her

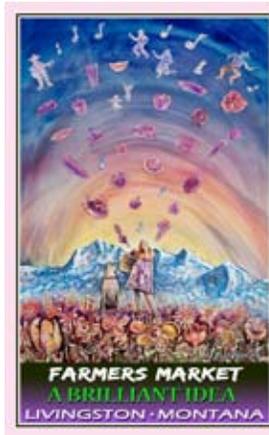
income and provide for her family with pie sales, *this farmers market is about building community.*

And of course, meeting friends, neighbors and guests in a park on the banks of the Yellowstone River framed by the Absaroka Mountains, enjoying a freshly prepared dinner, dancing in the summer evening or finding that one-of-a-kind piece of art or craft; *this farmers market is about having fun.*

These are just some of the reasons that make WSE's Livingston Farmers Market the place to be every Wednesday evening, June – September.

As nationally renowned artist Parks Reece captured in the original artwork inspired by this event: **Farmers Market, A Brilliant Idea.**

Thank you Parks for donating the proceeds from poster sales to support WSE. Call WSE at 406.222.0730 to order a poster. It makes a great gift!



## Governing Board

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**Administrative Assistant**  
Heather Muldoon  
**Volunteer Farmers Market Master**  
Rob Bankston



## Working Together to Foster Sustainability

Where do you get sustainable building materials? Who specializes in green design? What are the new developments in renewable energy?

For eight years Western Sustainability Exchange organized annual Sustainability Fairs and Expos to provide this information. WSE was the first in the state to promote sustainable living concepts.

While the summer events were a great place to learn about sustainable living, the demand for the information is now year-round and region-wide. To meet this need, WSE is teaming up with Green Directory Montana (GDM) on a joint membership program to offer continuous access to the businesses and organizations that provide sustainable goods and services.

Green Directory provides web-based information about the businesses, organizations and individuals that have passed GDM and WSE's ranking system, which quantifies a company's sustainability efforts.

GDM's Sustainable Badge Ranking System incorporates WSE's Sustainability Criteria to create Green Badges and a Green Score that ranks a business's sustainability efforts.

Consumers can immediately review every aspect of a company's sustainability program and see the badges each company has achieved. To be included in the Green Directory, applicants must earn a minimum of three environmentally-focused badges and a total of five badges. GDM's auditing team reviews the applications. GDM also has a Secret Shopper auditing program to verify business claims.

WSE and GDM have created a \$50 membership option that supports the work of both organizations. Membership benefits include subscriptions to Green Directory Montana's Annual State Directory and Green Scene Newsletter, special offers from certified businesses, WSE's newsletters and discounts for certain WSE events.

By joining the program, members can keep abreast of the latest green living trends and know that their membership dollars are fostering programs that sustain the environmental, economic and community integrity of Montana. Contact WSE or GDM (www.GreenDirectoryMontana.com) for details.

## A PINT OR THREE FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Join Western Sustainability Exchange in raising a pint for sustainability on **MONDAY, JANUARY 31st 2011**. \$1.00 per pint purchased from the Blackfoot River Brewing Co. that day will go towards supporting WSE's initiatives. To learn more about WSE, come join us in Helena at the Blackfoot, 55 South Park Ave.



Visit KitchenTLC.com for information on WSE's "Yum\$Raising" program.

**KitchenT.L.C.**  
simply - scrumptious - sweet

## Power of a Personal Choice: To Be a Volunteer - Blessing Beyond Money

By Mary Hibbard

When I started writing this article, I turned to the internet to get a lay person's definition for the word "volunteer." I found this explanation from Wikipedia: volunteering is "the practice of people working on behalf of others or a particular cause without payment for their time and services. Volunteering is generally considered an altruistic activity, intended to promote good or improve human quality of life."

WSE's Livingston Farmers Market would not be the success it is without the commitment of our volunteers, especially our Market Master Rob Bankston. For eight years Rob has volunteered the same amount of time to staff meetings, special events and the market as that of a half-time employee. He even postponed a surgery this year to finish out the farmers market season and to help WSE prepare for our annual Harvest Celebration.

Rob figures he averages about 30 hours a week volunteering for the Livingston community. When asked why he volunteers, Bankston offers, "to give back the blessings that have been given to me."

Ten years ago Rob survived a ruptured brain aneurysm and he says his life changed completely. "Friends organized a benefit event to raise money to help with my medical bills

and this community responded with blessings beyond money," Rob shares in a rare moment of seriousness. "The generosity of the people at that gathering and the events that followed instilled the belief that I have a debt, one that I'm grateful for and can only pay on, never pay in full."

Rob's generosity has also benefitted Big Brothers and Big Sisters, Retired Senior Volunteer Program, Yellowstone Gateway Museum, and Horse Medicine to name a few.



Rob Bankston, Volunteer Farmers Market Master

"The pay isn't great, but the benefits are endless," quips Rob, his grin back in place.

At WSE, we are lucky to work with many dedicated volunteers who are truly committed to our region and mission. We don't have to look very far for examples of the power of personal choice to volunteer for the good of our community.

To Rob, our Market Master, Volunteer Extraordinaire, co-worker and friend, and to all our exceptional volunteers, a heartfelt thanks for all you do for WSE, the community and Montana. We could not advance sustainability without you!

### THANK YOU TO OUR VOLUNTEERS!

WSE Governing Board (See list inside)  
WSE Advisory Board (See list inside)

Alicia Baker	Amanda Knuchel
Rob Bankston	Jenn Legnini
Karen Donnerstag	Shannan Mascari
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James Horan	John Zumpano



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### Save These Dates...

#### Holiday Farmers Market

Saturday, December 4th 9 am to 4 pm

#### Community Monday

Blackfoot River Brewery-Helena  
January 31st

#### Local Foods Commerce Days

Livingston-January 24, 2011  
Billings-February 28, 2011  
Missoula-March 7, 2011

#### 2011 Livingston Farmers Market

June 1st through September 28th

#### Harvest Celebration

October 7, 2011  
Chico Hot Springs



Summer fun at WSE's Livingston Farmers Market