



ADVOCATE

...helping to shape western Maine's future

www.westernmountainsalliance.org

Winter 2005

Vital Local Food System for Western Maine

Fresh, wholesome and locally grown food is at the center of an emerging project of the Western Mountains Alliance, designed to rejuvenate agricultural economies in the region's communities by developing a new and sustainable year-round market for farmers: our public school kitchens! The farm-to-school proposal will benefit children by making fresh and nutritious foods a regular part of school lunch menus. Food service personnel in school kitchens and farmers will receive coordinated supports to build a business relationship and to develop sustainable systems for storage, packaging, convenient delivery, and compliance with regulations. Farmers, schools and parents understand the connection between fresh food, children's well-being and learning, a thriving economy and a healthy environment. Action groups and projects are emerging across the region. The benefits of a thriving local food system are within our grasp.

The Western Mountains Alliance is committed to its support for local agriculture and farming as traditional rural industries and is actively seeking funding to implement the farm-to-school project. Paula Day, an organic farmer and breeder of draft horses in Starks, developed this project with the Alliance. Founding member of the ME Alternative Agriculture Association, Paula stresses the importance of creative marketing to keep local farms viable. As it becomes more difficult for farmers to compete with regional and global food market systems, direct marketing with diversified products becomes a necessity for creative enterprise. Through this initiative the Alliance hopes to assist growers, parents and schools to strengthen the region's capacity as a network of innovative agricultural communities.

Supply, cost and labor create challenges. Supply has to be reliable throughout the school year, therefore the growing season must be extended with new greenhouse and root crop storage technologies. High quality food is more expensive. If farmers were eligible for a Department of Defense Fresh exemption, schools might find 'buying local' a cost effective option. DOD Fresh certification has worked in other areas of the country when farmers formed a marketing cooperative, which then applies for an exemption. Locally grown food can require more labor to prepare in institutional kitchens. Cooks have to chop and peel instead of opening prepackaged produce. Schools must meet a "no waste" policy and serve foods that children will eat. The farm-to-school project will involve children, farmers, and artists in creating a message that eating fresh foods is cool.

A large-scale food system needs brokers. It's hard for a buyer, like a school, to get all the produce needed from one farmer and farmers generally don't have the time needed to act as their own brokers. One broker could handle distribution of farmers' combined goods to the buyer. A system like Maine Sustainable Agriculture Society's successful Farm Fresh Connection project in central and southern Maine serves as just such a broker, promoting consistency in packaging and quality. A uniquely rural solution is needed in western Maine to build capacity for storage and distribution across a wide geographic area with remote farm locations. Coordinated distribution of packaged foods to school kitchens is a major systemic issue that the Alliance's project will address through facilitated dialogue, technical assistance, and cooperative action.

Regional groups are generating creative solutions. Poultry farmers convened in Litchfield to explore growing interest in forming a legal poultry-processing coop. A Slow Food Convivium for the western Maine region formed in Bethel and its first goal is to explore strategies for community-supported agriculture. A new farmers' market will open every Tuesday from 2:00 – 5:30 PM in Harrison Village beginning May 2005.

Many of Maine's farmers will retire in the next 10-15 years, so it is important for rural

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Guide to Local Food Producers

Farmington Area Local Food
(207) 779-0635
buylocalfood@localnet.com

Local Farms of Somerset County
University of Maine Cooperative
Extension, Skowhegan
1-800-287-1495
cessom@umext.maine.edu

A Guide to Farms, Farmstands and Farmers' Markets in the Mountain Counties of Maine
Mountain Counties Heritage
(207) 778-3885

Maine Highlands Food and Farms
ME Highlands Farm Products Promotion
Group, University of Maine Cooperative
Extension, Dover-Foxcroft
(207) 564-3301

Search for farmers' markets, CSAs, farm stands and more at: www.getrealmaine.org

Search for a certified organic farm or market at:
www.mainefoods.net/mofga/certstart.php



WESTERN MOUNTAINS ALLIANCE

Mission Statement

The Western Mountains Alliance strives to improve the quality of life and to strengthen the regional identity of Maine, while honoring rural values and the environment, and supporting sustainable community development. We provide a forum to bring together many voices and many communities to find common ground through regional dialogue, bold thinking, and capacity building. We serve as an energetic advocate for the western mountains region.

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Deborah M. Burd, Strong

Assistant to the Director, Web Site Editor, Western Maine Farm Fund Coordinator

Tricia Cook, Livermore Falls

Projects, Grants and Communications Coordinator

Kathleen Beauregard, Industry

Here at the Alliance — *by Deb Burd, Executive Director*

Lead Western Maine

Lead Western Maine participants have been meeting since November 2004, networking and developing skills and tools to make a positive difference in their communities and the region. The four group projects are: building a business and civic alliance in Strong; organizing a community conference in Bethel; developing a model tool for effective retention of adult Girl Scout volunteers; and organizing for sustainability of the annual Skowhegan Heritage Days. A new class is offered each year.

Dirigo State Health Plan

Western Maine Legislative Caucus examined the Dirigo State Health Plan. Trish Riley of the Governor's Office of Health Policy and Finance and Rick Batt of Franklin Community Health Network led a discussion of the implications of health care reform for rural communities at a January public meeting. The Alliance organizes several caucuses annually in partnership with the University of Maine at Farmington, MSAD#9, Western Maine Community Action, Franklin Community Health Network and Mission at the Eastward. A video tape of the proceedings, broadcast by Mt. Blue Community Access TV, is available at each local community access television station for viewing.

Farm Marketing Workshop

A Farm Marketing and Image Building workshop held in January and March assisted farmers to develop a professional farm logo and build an overall farm image to boost consumer loyalty and sales. Farmers learned that marketing can be fun! The workshop was facilitated by Kerri Sands and Gabe McPhail and sponsored by the Western Mountains Alliance, Coastal Enterprises, Inc., River Valley Growth Council and the University of Maine Cooperative Extension.

Strong Builds a Business and Civic Alliance

The Strong Area Business and Civic Alliance is a new charter organization structured to promote local economic growth. The vision grew through the leadership of Eileen Miazga and Heidi Richards, both residents of Strong and participants in the WMA Lead Western Maine program. Congressman Mike Michaud and Rep. Tom Saviello joined more than 75 citizens in this new beginning for Strong.

With technical support from Deb Burd, Western Mountains Alliance and Mark Hews, Threshold of Maine RC&D, the steering committee set up a strong foundation to grow their town, while striving to preserve its unique assets and heritage.

New Faces

We are please to note the addition of four new members to our Board of Directors:

Dr. Allen H. Berger – New Sharon

Dr. Berger has been the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs at the University of Maine at Farmington since 2000. He previously served as Vice President for Academic Affairs at Franklin College in Indiana. He currently serves on the Board of Franklin Memorial Hospital and the Franklin Community Health Network.

Rebecca Bearden Welsh – Rumford

Becky Welsh is Community Arts Coordinator for the Healthy Communities Coalition. She served as Co-Director of Maine Arts, Inc. and Executive Director of the Maine Arts Sponsors Association. Becky has worked in the environmental field as a grant writer for Maine Audubon Society and as Development Coordinator and Grant Writer for the Maine Volunteer Lake Monitoring Program in Turner, Maine.

Jacquelyn Cressy – Bethel

Jacquelyn Cressy is the Chairperson of the Western Mountains Senior College board of directors. She serves on the Bethel Conservation Commission and is Coordinator of the Garden Committee for the Bethel Historical Society. Jacquelyn is the owner of the Rivendell Bed and Breakfast in Bethel.

Ken Coville – Wilton

Ken is the Principal of Carrabec High School in North Anson. His former affiliations include: President Western Maine Superintendents Association; board member of the FCHN, Healthy Community Coalition board of directors; Island Falls Town Budget Committee. Ken is a founding member of the Save our Schools Coalition of rural Maine schools for equitable funding.

New Staff Team

We have also welcomed two new staff to the Western Mountains Alliance team: Tricia Cook,

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Roots – Living History Museum Preserves Rural Maine Heritage

A year-round working farm and living history museum on Waters Hill in Livermore is preserving the heritage and culture of 18th and 19th century rural life and the remarkable story of the Washburn family's achievements. In its 30-year anniversary the **Washburn-Norlands Living History Center** celebrates a journey of development and innovation. Executive Director George Lyons brings life to the center's mission with new programs and partnerships. The Board of Directors recently welcomed several new members including Deb Burd, Executive Director of Western Mountains Alliance, who became a Norlands' trustee in 2004. "The Alliance will link regional, state and national networks of individuals and organizations as resources for Norlands. This remarkable place is a gem in the western mountains of Maine," Burd said. "We have the potential at Norlands to become a thriving model of rural heritage education."

Then In 1809 Israel Washburn came to Livermore to start a country store and though his venture didn't succeed he turned optimistically to farming. Israel's seven sons had remarkable achievements as Secretary of State, Navy Captain, Army General, Senator, Congressmen, Foreign Ministers, Governors, inventor, lawyer, and authors. Israel's wife Martha Benjamin was a native of Livermore and had an astute interest in political affairs. She and Israel also raised three daughters. In 1867 the sons built Norlands, the stunning Victorian mansion that now stands. They would summer and sometimes farm at the country home, where their father lived his last years.

Now Long after that day, 115 heirs established the foundation that became Washburn-Norlands Living History Center and Museum. Today visitors and scholars delight in the lively journals of national and local events written by the family, which are housed in the library and expansive archives. The home and granite neo-Gothic library serve as galleries for finely preserved portraits of the Washburn family and photographs of the farm and Livermore's region and people.

Visitors experience history with all five senses, their intellect and emotions as they encounter interpreters wearing period clothing, speaking as a character from the past. The exhibits at this museum are alive and engaging: working oxen, laying chickens and fat pigs that make their way to the country kitchen. Parents or grandparents come to the living history center with their children to pass on stories of their own farming memories. Together with the interpreters visitors spend one hour, day or weekend immersed in the past to discover a social history that books cannot convey.

Living history is a vehicle to explore the interface between environment and people, agriculture and the economy, and communities and civic responsibility.

Hands On History

"People today want history to be educational and entertaining," says Executive Director George Lyons. Norlands designs creative programs that attract modern people who want to understand the past; *edutainment* is both authentic and fun. Yet, this is not the tourist glimmer of Disney. Visitors are participants in history. They chop, carry, sweep, scrub, and when a hard day of "make it or do without" - the motto of many rural Mainers - is done, they dine on a hearty farm-grown meal.

The schoolhouse built in 1823 is a genuine one-room classroom where children experience education as it was in the mid 19th century with its quill pens, plenty of farm chores and lessons in the frugal lifestyle. The museum has revitalized research and two-month internship opportunities in areas such as agriculture, soil conservation and period costume as win-win partnerships with the University of

Maine at Farmington. Students' fresh insights enhance the authenticity for future visitors and can help today's rural citizens. The center also likes to take history "on the road," such as creating a living period setting for Hebron Academy's 100th anniversary celebration.

Part of the Community Fabric

Museums collect artifacts. In a living history museum, the artifacts include the buildings and landscape and are experienced not as 'exhibits,' but in the context of everyday period life. At Norlands the community enjoys this remarkable collection as a centerpiece for local events, celebrations and employment. The museum supports the local economy through jobs, renovation work and events. There are fifteen employees: interpreters, historical farmers and administrative staff. Weddings are booked in the 1828 white steeple church. Monthly gourmet theme dinners are



In the late 19th century Maine exported one million tons of ice per year, employing about 9,000 people and using 3,000 horses to harvest the ice, mostly off of Maine's rivers.
WNLHC Newsletter.

seated in the mansion's meticulously renovated Victorian dining room. There's a public picnic area and miles of cross-country skiing trails. Food is grown on the farm or in collaboration with Nezinscot Farm in Turner. The center hosted an antique car show for the Model T Club this fall and a community ice-cutting party in January. Enthusiasts of all ages came to Barlett Pond for a morning of hard work with simple tools and a work ethic that is an essential part of a thriving rural culture. Norlands is a window into the past that invites us to explore its relationship to the present.

When visiting the 445-acre complex you experience a microcosm of 19th century rural life. For more information about Norlands call (207)-897-4366 or see the website at www.norlands.org. To learn more about "living history" see www.alhfam.org.

'Here at the Alliance' Continued...

Assistant to the Director, Website Editor, and Western Maine Farm Fund Coordinator and Kathy Beauregard, Projects, Grants and Communications Coordinator.

Of Note...Many Thanks

The Western Mountains Alliance is grateful for the services of Linda Macgregor, Rumford, Steve Wight, Newry, Theo Kalikow, Farmington, and Jan Kremin, Carrabassett Valley who retired from the Alliance Board of Directors in 2004.

Jane Holt deFrees of Rumford Center, founding Alliance board member and friend,

"No factors will more influence the ability of Western Maine people to secure the benefits from good jobs, to realize their full potential or to function effectively in our ever-changing world than the education they receive and the perceptions they hold of the role education must play throughout their lives."

– Jane DeFrees, Alliance Committee to Develop Education Agenda, Western Mountains Alliance Advocate, Fall 1988

died on September 16, 2004. She was a model of civic engagement. Her community and the western mountains region are better places because of her ability to help others see the many aspects of an issue. Jane was a tireless advocate for education.

Jane is remembered for her uplifting discourse and genuine belief that every voice matters and all people can succeed. She served on the Alliance Board of Directors from 1988 to 2003. We will miss her guidance and warm spirit.

Vital Local Food System for Western Maine Continued...

communities to consider who will be their next generation of farmers. Maine would need to recruit 200 new farmers to keep 7,200 farms [statewide] productive and viable. The Piscataquis County Soil and Water Conservation District recently hosted a Farmland Trust Workshop to help farmers consider how to keep all or part of the family farm intact in the years to come. *Moosehead Messenger, 01/11/05*

With a grant from the Birch Cove Fund of the Maine Community Foundation, many of the foods [eaten by] children at Sweatt-Winter Child Care and Education Center are now purchased from local farmers. The center at the University of Maine at Farmington will create a cookbook including menus and local food sources for other area childcare providers, according to Sweatt-Winter's director, Dawn Brod. Heather Hiscock, food coordinator for the center, said the locally grown food is better quality, fresher, healthier and just tastes better. *Sun Journal, Jodi Hausen, 1/6/05*

Steve Lacasse, chairman of the New England Apple Growers Association, is enthusiastic about a study [that could promote] the future for sliced apples. "Studies have shown children will eat more apples if you cut them

in slices," said Lacasse. Apple growers, like McDougal Orchards in Springvale, Maine are responding to the market and the growing interest in healthier foods by experimenting with research for processing and marketing fresh-cut sliced apples. *Morning Sentinel, Anne Saunders, Associated Press, 2/9/05*

George Bradt of Bridgton organized two winter meetings of about 45 area farmers, food store managers, and small restaurant owners to share ideas for a stronger food system for western mountain communities. Paula Day of ME Alternative Agriculture Association, Marion Browning of Cumberland County Extension Service, and Lauri Ackley of Fare Share Farm in Canton, former *Lead Western Maine* participant, joined in the networking aimed at linking good food with local people. Farmers are eager to find direct markets and consumers want fresh produce, meat and dairy products with reliable distribution.

A vital local food system benefits our health, environment and economy.

Health: Farmers in the region are already producing foods that could be supplied to

schools and institutions: apples, onions, garlic, potatoes, squash, cabbage, herbs, meat, poultry, eggs, and dairy. Fresh, high quality foods can be served at the peak of their flavor and nutritional value. Organically grown foods generally have more minerals due to better soils. Studies are demonstrating that when children eat whole, nutritious foods at school academic performance, behavior and health improve.

Environment: Locally grown food requires less energy to transport and does not rely on heavy use of pesticides, which harms the environment. Farms are a source of pleasure for cross country skiers, hikers, tourists and children. Farms provide open spaces and edge habitats for wildlife and diverse wild plant species. "Well-managed fields also maintain permeable soils that allow rainwater to be absorbed into the ground, unlike pavement and structures which cause water to run off the surface quickly and carry sediments and pollutants into water bodies and contribute to erosion." *Maine's Natural Resource-based Industries: Indicators of Health, Maine Development Foundation, 2004.*

Agricultural Economy: Supporting local growers keeps regional farms viable and strengthens the local economy. Historically Maine has moved away from farming as an economy, increasing our reliance on food from away. "From 1850 to 1992, about 1.2 million acres of farmland disappeared from western Maine. This amounts to four-fifths

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...helping to shape western Maine's future

Vital Local Food System for Western Maine Continued...

of the farmland in the region.” *Maximizing Shared Assets in Western Maine*, Craig Freshley, ME Center for Economic Policy, 2004, a publication of the Western Maine Sustainable Development Collaborative. “In 2003, the value of farmland per acre was \$1,750. At the same time, the value of farm income per acre was just \$60, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Rising land values make it increasingly difficult for newcomers to get started in farming and they also act as an increasing incentive for farmers to “cash out,” that is, sell their land and get out of farming.” *Maine’s Natural Resource-based Industries: Indicators of Health*, Maine Development Foundation, 2004.

Buying locally grown food keeps money circulating in other local businesses. Taxes on agricultural land provide money for towns while requiring fewer services in return. As consumers, we keep farms in our communities thriving by choosing to buy from them and asking local restaurants, grocers, and schools to sell or serve locally grown food. This makes a statement about the value we place on our children’s health and farming as part of the fabric of a healthy community; and it helps farming remain a viable way of life for future generations.



YES! I want to become a supporting member of the Western Mountains Alliance.

Membership levels:

- \$25 Individual Supporter
- \$50 Family Supporter
- \$100 – \$249 Small Businesses
- \$250 and up Sustaining Contribution

Name: _____

Home Phone: _____

Business Phone: _____

Mailing Address: _____

E-mail Address: _____

PLEASE RETURN THIS FORM WITH YOUR CHECK MADE PAYABLE TO:

WESTERN MOUNTAINS ALLIANCE
PO Box 29, Farmington, Maine 04938

Thank you for joining with others who care deeply about a more prosperous future for the western mountains of Maine. Western Mountains Alliance is a non-profit tax-exempt organization under 501(c)(3) of the tax code.



‘Round the Western Mountains...

is an effort to highlight and celebrate some of the innovative and/or collaborative activities being undertaken by individuals, organizations, and towns in Oxford, Franklin, Somerset, and Piscataquis county. The information has been gleaned from newspapers and newsletters in the region. For a more complete and updated listing, check WMA’s website.

Cornville: When her infant daughter developed eczema—a skin disorder characterized by inflammation, itching and scales—Tracey Smith set out to find a solution. Her research would pull her and her mother, Ruth Craft, into a full-fledged O-Nature-L soap-making business. From a small batch of chemical-free laundry detergent six years ago, the two women now make a line of all-natural household cleaning products that are sold in 36 natural food stores from Bangor to Bethel. “There are no perfumes in our cleaners; they are safe for the environment,” Smith says. See their Web site, <http://www.o-naturel.com>. *Sunday Sentinel*, Darla L. Pickett, 11/21/04

Parkman: In this neck of the woods...hulking pick-up and logging trucks rule the roads. Charles MacArthur, however, scoots around in the smallest, most energy-efficient cars he can find. Eventually, the 60 or so cars that 77 year-old MacArthur owns will fill a museum he is busily building—a testament, he hopes,

to the value and fun of fuel-efficient cars in an age of dwindling oil supplies but, paradoxically, ever bigger cars and trucks. MacArthur hopes to open the Wilkinson Institute in the spring or summer, its funny little cars drawing people and school groups to this out-of-the-way town. *Morning Sentinel*, Chris Churchill, 11/2/05

Oxford Area: The Western Oxford Foothills Cultural Council has received a \$5000 grant from New England State Foresters Association to produce a prototype of a cultural map of western Maine. Executive Director, Toni Seger says, “We know [these maps] have been very effective at stimulating economic activity through cultural means. That’s something this region could benefit from. Agriculture was the area’s original culture, so there’s lots of history there, but the new face of western Maine agriculture includes a remarkable range of fiber farms as well as many exotic animals like buffalo.” “The Oxford County’s bi-centennial is 2005,” says Seger.

“What a perfect opportunity to celebrate the rich indigenous culture of this county.” *Advertiser Democrat*, 1/20/05

Farmington: Thanks to a new digital equipment upgrade, viewers of Mt. Blue Television, Farmington and Wilton’s local cable access station, will enjoy better picture quality while watching community events. “Technology is now going digital. It’s nice that we can follow on its heels,” said station manager J.P. Fortier. “That means clearer, sharper pictures,” Fortier said. “The whole idea around here is community access. We’re trying to inspire people with video cameras, computer editing equipment and microphones. Everyone can use this — it’s a medium to communicate with the rest of the community.” MBTV (Channel 11, for Bee-Line cable subscribers) offers free instruction on the use of cameras and station equipment for those who wish to learn. Call Fortier at 778-8146. *Morning Sentinel*, Tanya Miller, 1/12/05



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In Collaboration: Deborah Burd Celebrates Ten Years of Network Building

Deborah M. Burd celebrates her ten-year anniversary as the Executive Director of the Western Mountains Alliance. “Here we are in this little part of Maine, yet Deb’s work is known and respected all over the nation and world,” says Board Chairperson, Becky Davis-Allen. A Western Mountains Alliance founder, Paul Frederic of Starks recalls Deb before she was a staff member at the Alliance. She was a person with a “notion that things could be better in the region; she had a set of ideas about life in the western mountains and she brought that vision to the Alliance. The Alliance has provided an opportunity for Deb to clarify and express that vision to others.” At their annual meeting in February, the Board of Directors honored Deb for developing a financially sound organization, poised to move forward with a meaningful strategic plan.

Through the Alliance, Deb has been a catalyst for the formation of numerous

innovative collaborations and sustainable development projects. She facilitated the first years of development of emerging organizations such as: Mt. Blue Community Access Television, River Valley Farmers’ Market, and Western Maine Paper and Heritage Museum. Unique educational and loan programs have helped farmers and artisans to grow their capacity as small business owners. Groundbreaking one-of-a-kind partnerships have been formed in the western mountains, with the Alliance doing what it does best: linking people, facilitating discourse and dialogue, and empowering people and communities with tools to achieve their local goals.

As an advocate for the region Deb was a founding member of the Western Maine Sustainable Development Collaborative and the Maine Women’s Agricultural Network. Attesting to her ability to

create a synergy among a network of people and ideas, in the fall of 2004 Deb was a finalist in a prestigious national Leadership for a Changing World award. But “the real reward for this work,” says Deb, “is experienced behind the scene. It is the magic that happens when a group of concerned and energized citizens unite behind an issue, educate themselves, and tap into their potential to build a positive future. Everyone has the capacity to lead.” The Alliance, by design, does not stand in the forefront; yet Deb’s approach is strategic and engaged. By serving as trustee on a diverse set of prominent state and regional boards over the past ten years, she shares this vision for a prosperous region rooted in its rural heritage. Deb is well known for her tenacity and networking capabilities, encouraging individual citizens to collaborate, stay the course, and remain open to new opportunities to make the vision a reality.