

The July 17-19 Forum in Okanogan and Omak on *“Survival of Small Agricultural and Logging Enterprises in Time of Economic Downturn, Globalization, and Corporate Agri-Business”* appears to have been a success. Over 55 participants took part either as presenters/speakers, welcomers, and tour leaders or a combination thereof. Attendees, ranging in age from high school students to retirees, came from 17 counties around the State.....from Whatcom to Asotin Counties, with five West Side counties present and accounted for. ARC (Agriculture and Rural Caucus) seemingly accomplished President Obama’s and Governor Gregoire’s bipartisan outreach efforts, with at least one-third of the Forum attendees coming from the Republican Party along with a sprinkling of Independents. And in keeping with ARC’s agricultural roots and in appreciation of the attendant symbolism, the Forum’s all-day Saturday session took place at the Okanogan Grange Hall.

The Forum featured four panels, examining aspects of survival from the perspective of government, industry, labor and individual farmers and loggers. The Forum took place in a civilized environment with constructive and meaningful dialogue, informative question and answer sessions, and a genuine concern for the future of small rural farms, ranches and logging operations. There was no partisan bickering, rather soul searching efforts to define the issues and concerns, and how to overcome them. Presenters and attendees at the Forum stayed at the Grange Hall from start until past the scheduled completion time. There was no late afternoon rush to depart. Of the three current Okanogan County Commissioners, two former Okanogan County Commissioners, and one former Whitman County Commissioners present, Republicans all, all but one stayed the entire day.

A listing of the presenters and welcomers appears below. In addition to handout materials the presenters provided to the Forum, Rural Roots (Eastern Washington/Northern Idaho), Tilth Producers of Washington, Slow Food USA, USDA, and the Colville Tribal Enterprise Corporation sent materials to be included in the Forum Packet/Folder provided each participant. Providentially, a local orchard provided several boxes of some five varieties of cherries, freshly harvested the morning of the Forum.

The two tours were quite informative. Friday was a visit to the biomass/biofuel facilities of the Colville Indian Plywood & Veneer plant, coping with recent employee layoffs and outdated technologies. (Albert Roberts, ARC Vice Chair-East arranged the mill tour.) The Sunday tour of the Omak Stampede and Suicide Race site served as an example of joint tribal/city/county cooperation to obtain grant funding for upgrading the arena and increasing Stampede revenues. The Friday night “early bird” was, for all purposes, icing on the cake, providing an excellent networking opportunity for presenters and attendees to get to know one another in an informal setting...lasting until the wee hours of the morning.

The host county Democrat Central Committee was Okanogan County, while Jackie Bradley, ARC Chair and Larry Ludwig, ARC Secretary were the two principal Forum co-organizers. The budget for the three days activities came in under \$1,200.

As to media coverage, the “Omak Chronicle” has committed to running an article. The local conservative radio station in Okanogan, KONW, already featured the Forum in its weekly hour-long broadcast with the County Commissioners. ARC Chair and Forum Moderator Jackie Bradley is scheduled for a future broadcast as well.

Feedback regarding the Forum has to date been positive. Sharon Smith, WSDCC (Washington State Democrat Central Committee) Vice Chair from Spokane, states “the ARC conference was awesome”, while Gene Trainor of the Asotin County Democrat Central Committee calls it “an inspired meeting”.

Some of the topics discussed during the Forum include:

- o Best way to contact your U.S. Senators is through their regional (Western, Central, Eastern) Washington Offices. E-mail and phone calls will generate best response and possible action.
- o Washington cattle ranchers/producers are being put out of business by unfair competition from Canadian ranchers who in addition to Canadian governmental subsidies face less costly U.S. regulations than U.S. producers. For example, only one out of every 10 cattle that enters U.S. has to be inspected, whereas every cattle a U.S. producer ships domestically within the U. S. has to be inspected. Also, Canadian cattle receive growth hormones (known carcinogens) that are banned on cattle raised in the U.S. making Canadian cattle grow faster and more profitable than U.S. produced cattle.
- o Honey bees and other beneficial insects are being destroyed, wiped out by genetically modified/engineered plants, with potentially disastrous consequences for crops (including fruit orchards) that rely on bees for pollination.
- o Small farmers and loggers and family ranches are overwhelmed and being suffocated by over regulation by both the federal and State government. Particularly egregious are very costly, overly protective, counterproductive and overly numerous State regulations that make it impossible for many small enterprises to make a profit.
- o Washington loggers, in addition to the slump in demand for lumber due to current economic downturn, face unfair competition from governmentally (Canadian provincial and federal) subsidized Canadian lumber loggers and mills.
- o The U.S. Forest Service in parts of Washington State have apparently come to realize that clearing out of slash and other forest waste, combined with using that slash/waste as a biofuel source, is both an ecologically and economically viable alternative to current forest management practices. A major paradigm shift.
- o The United Farmworkers union, in addition to its traditional role of representing and protecting farmworkers, has recently been working with and assisting U.S. growers and ranchers to come to a mutual understanding/agreement to treat workers fairly while at same time not placing overbearing economic demands on the grower/employer that would otherwise put the employers out of business.
- o Farmers/ranchers who take time and effort to better understand their workers’ needs and concerns, and who attempt to provide good working conditions and fair wages, create better employee-employer relations, and as a byproduct, more productive employees.
- o Niche marketing, that is, specialty crops production is a viable and profitable route for small family farms to make a profit and a living. Similarly, providing local/regional transportation services from farm to market is also money making proposition that in turn benefits small family operations that cannot otherwise access profitable distant markets in the West Side.

o Lumber mills that produce specialty lumber cuts and products, a form of niche marketing, produce greater profitability. Scarcity of lumber mills in general, makes for excessive fuel costs in getting logs to the market, reducing profits to loggers and mills.

o Corporate and governmental regulations regarding distribution practices are costly and create unnecessary and duplicative expense. For example, lumber harvested and milled into plywood in Okanogan has to be shipped to Seattle to the regional distribution center, and then shipped back to Okanogan retail outlets for sale. The Omak mill is prohibited from transporting the plywood a few miles to Home Depot.

o Organic and sustainable/sustainability products and practices are profitable, and lend themselves to small and family farming operations.

o There is a severe labor shortage for growing and harvesting both fruit and vegetable crops in Washington. Employers are caught in the middle between increased ICE (INS) enforcement, apprehension & deportation of illegal and “documented” illegal workers, and bureaucratic hurdles to obtain sufficient numbers of legal alien/foreign workers through U.S. government temporary agricultural worker programs. Need to remember that the agricultural worker is the “low man” on the totem pole in terms of producing food products. When the low man, that is, the foundation of the pole is removed, the entire pole collapses. The same is true for agricultural production.

o Latest technology for alternative fuel sources, including forest slash/biomass, solar, hydroelectric and wind power, make them more accessible to small agricultural enterprises. Unfortunately, in terms of grants and governmental tax breaks, hydroelectric power is not legally considered a renewable resource.

o Transfer of water rights a serious concern in Okanogan County. Farmers/orchardists are selling their water rights to developers downstream, for example, for housing tract usage in Benton County. Selling of these water rights eliminates those orchards/fields from agricultural use. Should be a requirement that when agricultural water rights are sold, should at least be for another agricultural use.

o Washington State government regulates amount of water used per acre by growers. But current allotments based on outdated technology and growing methods, and do not take into account that the same amount of water can cultivate additional acreage. Regs need to be changed.

o The rural agricultural community values and appreciates living on and serving as stewards of the land, of producing food and feeding our State, of protecting our State’s resources, of utilizing renewable resources, and of enjoying the many benefits of rural agricultural living, including having a healthy environment in which to raise a family.

Listing of Forum Presenters and Welcomers include:

Ms. Sharon Smith, Vice Chair, WSDCC
Mr. Luis Moscoso, Secretary, WSDCC
Mr. Michael Blake, Mayor, Okanogan City
Ms. Cindy Gayne, Mayor, Omak City
Mr. Andrew Lampe, Commissioner, Okanogan County
Mr. Don Hover, Commissioner, Okanogan County

Ms. Mary Lou Peterson, Chair, Okanogan County Commissioners
Mr. Frank Rogers, Sheriff, Okanogan County
Ms. Judith Olson, Eastern Washington Director, U.S. Senator Murray
Mr. Marcus Riccelli, Eastern Washington Director, U.S. Senator Cantwell
Mr. Jim Potts, Rural County Lobbyist in Olympia; former Whitman County
Commissioner
Ms. Nancy Warner, Executive Coordinator, Initiative for Rural Innovation &
Stewardship (IRIS)
Mr. Wade King, President, Cattle Producers of Washington
Ms. Elizabeth Phares, Sheep Rancher & Owner, Okanogan Harvest Distributors
Mr. Paul Spencer, Biofuels/Biomass Activist, Skamania County
Mr. Jose Ybarra, Retired Washington State Farm Worker Monitor Advocate
Mr. Erik Nicholson, National Vice President, United Farm Workers Union
Ms. Mariah Cornwoman, Owner, CW Ray LLP Farm & Forest Products
Mr. Dave Demyan, Natural Resource Management Consultant
Mr. Steve Mitzner, President, Mitzner Logging
Mr. Ed Thiele, Cattle Rancher; former Okanogan County Commissioner (also Tour of
Omak Stampede Facility & Suicide Horse Race Site)
Mr. John Wyss, Analyst & Government Affairs, Gebbers (Fruit) Farms
Mr. Larry Potts, Manager, Colville Indian Plywood & Veneer (Tour of Biomass/Biofuel
Plant)

Previous ARC Conferences: ARC has hosted/put on four all day Saturday conferences/forum's since ARC's inception in 2005. Those conferences, with name of County and Chair of host Democrat County Central Committee are as follows:

May 2006: Democrat Candidates Forum, Walla Walla, Walla Walla County, Nina Roth
March 2007: Preserving Farm Lands & Open Spaces, Sequim, Clallum County, Marliyn Pollock
Sept.2007: Immigration in Agricultural Washington State, Moses Lake, Grant County, Ellie Webb
July 2009: Survival of Small Farms and Logging Companies, Okanogan/Omak, Okanogan County,
Jackie Bradley

[This report prepared by Larry Ludwig, ARC Secretary, panludwik@aol.com, is based on his and ARC Vice Chair-West, Di Irons notes.]