Good-bye, Josh and Thank You!

And Welcome Back, Angela!

Great Fall Food Hub (GFFH) Highlights

Community Food Security Project (CFSP)

Brattleboro Time Trade

Fall (Re)learning to Feed Ourselves Workshop Schedule

Community Conversation

Winter Farmers' Market

Editorial: Post Oil at the Crossroads

As it is with any organization—as it is with life—things change. So it is with Post Oil Solutions.

Given the number of projects that we’re involved with, along with the fact that our 3-year contract with AmeriCorps for VISTA volunteers will end in August 2011, we have arrived at a crossroads as we enter our 6th year. Where do go from here? Specifically, how do continue to do what we’ve been doing successfully over the past 5 years?

So we have begun a soul-searching process. Fortunately, we have benefited from a strategic planning exercise that we engaged in with some SIT students this past semester. This helped us to understand our strengths and weaknesses as a community organizing project, as well as providing us with some directions to consider.

Most significantly, we have decided to depart from our 5-year policy of not having any paid staff by agreeing to work toward funding a Program Manager position over the next year. By the 2011 summer, we plan to have Richard Berkfield on board in this capacity. As many of you know, Richard has served Post Oil admirably over the past two years. Along with his fellow VISTA volunteers, he has developed our Community Food Security Project to be second to none of Post Oil’s efforts.

At our strategic planning retreat on 25 July, we also endorsed an Action Plan for the next 12 months around leadership and governance, administrative capacity, programming, and communication. This will hopefully serve to guide us in those areas we need to strengthen as we move forward.

Essentially, however, our ultimate concern is to remain a grassroots, community organizing project, with its emphasis upon citizen empowerment. This is what building sustainable communities is all about; it is the heart of re-localizing our region and communities to be more self-sufficient and socially just; it is how we will continue to develop a resilient community-based regional food system.

At the same time, we recognize that, if we are to sustain and continue our efforts, some work has to be done in those organizational areas where we’re currently weak. We will address these, as well.

Hopefully we will strike the right balance.

Good-bye, Josh, and Thank You!

Josh Davis completed his VISTA service in July as one of Post Oil’s Community Food Security Project (CFSP) organizers. He and his family will be staying in the area until November and, hopefully, we’ll continue to see him. We’ll miss Josh, his winning smile and great sense of humor, but also all the effort he put into a number of CFSP projects. Best wishes to Josh, Tara, and Augie.

back to top
And Welcome Back, Angela!

We lose Josh, but we re-gain Angela Berkfield, who was with us in 2008-09 as a VISTA organizer with the CFSP. She stepped down upon completion of her first year to be full-time mom to Birch, the child she and Richard had last year. Fortunately for us, she has found ways to continue to be the mom she loves to be and is so good at, while returning to Post Oil to grace us with the skills, warmth, and energy she brought to us in the past. Welcome back, Ang!

back to top

Great Falls Food Hub (GFFH) Highlights

- $25,000 USDA RBEG grant awarded to Hub. This, coupled with the $15,000 grants we have received from the Holt Fund and Northeast SARE enables the project to pursue two of the principal goals of its One Year Strategic Plan: the hiring of a Project Coordinator and the completion of a feasibility study.
- Carl Mailler has been hired as the Food Hub Project Coordinator. Carl will assume his responsibilities in August and we’ll have more about him in the October Newsletter. While he will be involved in various aspects of the GFFH, his main responsibility will center on coordinating the feasibility study.
- Infrastructure Committee has developed criteria with which to evaluate the several potential sites that are presently being looked at for the Hub. The Committee also met with Hans Estrin of the Windham Farm and Food Network, to discuss collaboration around the regional distribution system for local food (esp. to the region’s schools) that Hans is developing.
- Market Plan Committee is currently building upon a very interesting market plan presented by a group of Antioch Green MBA students this past Spring, who took the Food Hub on as a project. The document, while not a final work, nevertheless presents the GFFH with credible directions in which to go, including a plan on how the Hub could generate money for an incubator farm.
- Outreach Committee is focusing on developing and making presentations in targeted towns, beginning in Brattleboro and Springfield this fall. These will include appearances on the cable access TV stations, screenings of Fresh, as well as talks before civic, business, fraternal, and religious groups and forums at libraries and schools. The purpose is to familiarize area residents with the GFFH and interest people in working on Hub Committees.
- Marketing Committee is further refining the GFFH’s website, www.greatfallsfoodhub.com, developing a new tri-fold brochure, and tabling display.
- Reconnecting to Our Food Committee is presently making a series of 20 minute videos on the preparation and cooking of various local produce items, and recently completed an 8 session cooking class of easily prepared local food meals. The videos will be screened on local cable access stations, made available at area food shelves, and put on our website. In addition, the Committee is planning an all-day canning event at the Townshend Food Shelf on Sat Sept 11, as a mini-example of what the fully established Hub will be doing on a much larger scale in the not too distant future. All product from this day will be donated to the Townshend Food Shelf, with produce being donated by the Vermont Food Bank/Post Oil gleaning project, and the Townshend Community Garden.
- Research Committee, having completed a farmer survey and several focus groups, is now looking forward to working with the new Project Coordinator to complete work on a feasibility study.
- Interim Working Committee, made up of members from all the working committees, and serving as the decision making body of the Hub, completed a strategic plan to guide the GFFH’s work over the next year; is completing work on by-laws and policies; hired its Project Coordinator; and is working toward creating a Board of Directors and an Advisory Council. It is also developing a collaborative relationship with the Monadnock Farm Community Connection (MFCC) in Cheshire County, New Hampshire.
Community Food Security Project (CFSP) update:

Gleaning is going strong this summer thanks to our partnership with the Vermont Foodbank and the hard work of Theresa Snow. If you would like to visit Harlow Farm or other local farms to harvest extra produce to share with our low-income community members, contact Theresa tsnow@vtfoodbank.org.

The Elliot St. Market Basket project, designed to bridge the gap between new farmers and low-income consumers and make use of Federal Food Stamp dollars, has successfully completed 5 markets. Over 40 people are signed up to pick up their basket of vegetables at the Elliot St. Café parking lot every Tuesday between 4 and 6 pm. 3 farms - Hearts Bend Farm, the SIT Farm, and Amazing Planet Farm! - are joining efforts to provide fresh organically grown vegetables. Participants in the Market Basket qualify for 3squaresVT and they commit to participate throughout the season, until the end of September. It is a chance to build community, support the local food system, and reconnect with food. The market has live music, kids activities, taste tests, and a great community feeling. A volunteer said, "It’s like a birthday party every week!"

Farm to School:

- The May 6th Strengthening Farm and Food Education Conference was a great success, clearly showing the momentum and interest in food and farm education in our regional schools. Over 60 participants, from Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Vermont, engaged in workshops, discussion, and networking around increasing farm and food education in our schools. We even raised $1000 towards funding a full-time Brattleboro Farm to School Coordinator. We are already looking forward to next years’ conference!

Farm to School Coordinator: Through Post Oil’s contract with AmeriCorps, we will be able to provide a cost-share VISTA volunteer to serve as Brattleboro’s Farm to School program full-time Coordinator this coming school year. Katherine Gillespie, who has worked as a VISTA community organizer with our CFSP this past year, will step into this position. She brings a lot of experience and contacts having worked with the F2S program through her work with the CFSP. Post Oil needs to raise $15,000 for this position, and has already realized nearly $6,000. Our campaign will be discussed further in the October Newsletter; however, anyone interested in making a tax-exempt donation to this position is encouraged do so by mailing a check to Post Oil Solutions, Box 431, Townshend, VT 05353. Post Oil is a 501c3 non-profit, and we’ll be happy to acknowledge your gift with a letter of gratitude.

- The Brattleboro Area Middle School (BAMS) and the Newfane Elementary School have started new gardens this summer! Thanks to dedicated teachers and staff, both gardens came together in time for students to enjoy them before school let out. We are excited to support them integrating more farm and food education!
Container Gardens: Once again, Samuel Elliot Towers residents will be growing vegetables in self-watering containers on their balconies this season. If a tomato falls on your head while walking down Elliot Street, you will know where it came from!

Community Meals continue at Morningside Shelter and Turning Point. Both groups are excited to see the summer gleaned vegetables. Kale chips have been the talk of the town!

The SIT Farm and Sustainable Agriculture Initiative continues to pump out beautiful vegetables thanks to the hard work of Steve Hed and new intern Courtney Bauman. They have a small CSA and weekly farm stand for staff and students and also grow for the Elliot St. Market Basket. Two new graduate courses will focus on sustainable agriculture and the farm!

Brattleboro Time Trade

BTT has made great strides in the past few months. After months of planning and patiently waiting, we’re excited to announce the hiring of our coordinator, Laura Brooks. Laura has moved here from Homer, Alaska, and is working hard to get to know the Brattleboro area community. Out of a large pool of applicants, Laura stood out for her excitement, experience, and dedication to sustainable communities. In addition to a new coordinator, the Time Trade has recently moved into office space at 5 Grove Street, located just behind the Stone Church off Main Street. Laura will be in the office most weekdays, so feel free to stop by to learn more about the Time Trade. You can also look for us at the August gallery walk, as we begin a push to grow the member base of the organization. For more information, check out our website at www.brattleborotimetrade.org or email us at brattleborotimetrade@gmail.com.

Fall (Re)learning to Feed Ourselves Workshop Schedule

(* denotes fee & registration, see details below)

*Sun Aug 15 Canning Workshop I, with Treah Pichette & Sherry Maher, 1:00 PM, Christ Church, Saxtons River (NOTE: 15 Maximum)

*Sun Aug 29 Garden to Bed Workshop, with Robert King, 1:00 PM, Brattleboro Savings & Loan Community Room

Sun Sept 5, Guilford Fair, 11:30, Herb Walk (Cindy Hebbard); 12:30, Bread & Butter Pickles canning demonstration (Sherry Maher & Tim Stevenson); 1:30, Herb Walk (Cindy Hebbard); 2:30, Herbal First Aid for Families (Cindy Hebbard)

Mon Sept 6, Guilford Fair, 10:30, Refrigerator Pickles canning demonstration (Robert King); 11:30, Herb Walk (Cindy Hebbard); 12:30, Relish canning demonstration (Sherry Maher & Treah Pichette); 1:30, Herb Walk (Cindy Hebbard); 2:30, Natural Therapies for Lyme Disease (Cindy Hebbard)

*Sun Sept 12, Root Cellar Workshop, with Robert King, 1:00 PM, Brattleboro Savings & Loan Community Room

*Sun Sept 19, Canning Workshop II, with Treah Pichette & Sherry Maher, Christ Church, Saxtons River (NOTE: 15 maximum)

Sun October 3, Mushroom Identification & Cultivation Workshop, co-sponsored w/ Vermont Land Trust, with David Wichland; Lilac Ridge Farm, Brattleboro. There is a $10/$20 sliding-scale fee to cover the supplies provided at the workshop; however, no one will be refused for lack of funds. To register, visit www.vlt.org/events.html. Day-of walk-ins will be allowed only if there is room.

*Sun Oct 10, Lacto Fermentation Workshop, with Meg Lucas & Barbi Schreiber, 1:00 PM,
Community Conversation

Post Oil Solutions continue to host its 2nd Wednesday of the month Community Conversation, 7:00 PM, at the Elliot Street Cafe, on the corner of Elm and Elliot Streets in Brattleboro.

The facilitated, open agenda is framed around the question, How do we work together to make our communities healthier and more sustainable? It is our hope that, through these conversations, new initiatives will be launched that will help to make our communities stronger. Light refreshments will be provided.

After introductions, we have an extensive go-around in which everyone who cares to discusses their projects, interests they're pursuing, or ideas that they have about food, energy, transportation, health care, housing, the local economy and so forth. The second part of the evening is devoted to breakout groups, where people can gather either with a person involved with a particular project to explore it further and discover how they might become involved, or initiate their own discussion group. In July, the Southern Vermont Co-op Power group, the Brattleboro Time Trade, and the Brattleboro Mobility Task Force were present to talk about their work. The evening concludes with time for networking.

We would be interested in helping folks in other communities get a Community Conversation going in their town: info@postoilsolutions.org

Winter Farmers’ Market (WFM)

Though Post Oil’s Townshend Common Farmers’ Market (Thursdays, 3:30-6:30, on the Townshend Common through 14 October) is not even halfway through its 3rd season, applications are now being accepted for our highly-successful Winter Farmer’s Market.

As it enters its 5th season, the WFM will have some new features. One of these is that the Market will be open every Saturday from November through March. This is in response to both customer and vender request.

A second innovation is our commitment to working more closely with our prepared food venders to increasingly source local ingredients for their delicious offerings. This is in line with the WFM Market Mission “to support local agriculture by providing a viable off-season direct market outlet while building community and promoting regional sustainability.”

And to continue our efforts at increasing food access throughout the year, the Market will be accepting EBT and debit card sales.

A full text of the WFM’s Rules, Jury Criteria, as well as an Application can be found at http://www.postoilsolutions.org/FarmersMarket.html. Send all general questions/inquiries to farmersmarket@postoilsolutions.org or call Market Manager, Sherry Maher at 802.869.2141. Specific questions related JURYING ONLY can be directed to Susan Dunning at 802.228.3230.
More will be reported in our Newsletter this year about these new and exciting efforts.

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