Editorial: Ice Making

I want to thank all of you who expressed supportive comments about our first edition in January. This was most gratifying. Please continue to forward comments, suggestions or ideas you might have—not only about the Newsletter itself, but about projects and activities that you think would help advance our mission of building sustainable communities.

These are exciting times for Post Oil, especially as projects we have been working on are coming together and taking off, sometimes in unanticipated, albeit, wonderful ways. Details about some of this will be contained in the body of this newsletter.

As we approach our 5th anniversary, what is becoming increasingly apparent is that the work of the last 5 years is paying off, not only because of the projects that have developed, but, more importantly, because of the collaborative relationships that are growing. Truly, a regional network of people actively working toward building sustainability, community, and social justice for a post petroleum world is emerging through the efforts of many.

I’ve often compared the work we’re doing to the way ice forms on a pond. First, skim forms around the edges, then some of it appears out in the deeper water. Soon these all come together, fragile initially, but over time growing to several feet deep, strong enough to hold us all. Ice making is alive and well in our region these days!

Community Conversations

Convening the 2nd Wednesday of the month, 7:00 PM, at the Elliot St. Café in Brattleboro, this initiative that began this past January has proved to be a huge success thus far. The Conversations consist of a facilitated, open agenda, framed around the question: How do we work together to make our communities healthier and more sustainable? Though originally intended to be convened in Brattleboro through May before moving on to another location in Windham County, the success has caused us to re-evaluate this plan. As of this writing, our intention is to raise this question before the April gathering to see what Brattleboro folks would like. We are also entertaining the possibility of continuing in Brattleboro, while starting another Conversation elsewhere, one possibility being the Newfane, South Newfane, Dover and Williamsville region, another the greater Bellows Falls area.
Stay tuned, this is definitely a work in progress, and one that we would like to receive of your ideas and suggestions about: info@postoilsolutions.org.

Reminder: Post Oil’s Leadership Council business meeting, 4th Wednesday of the Month, 6:00 PM, Elliot St. Café, Brattleboro. PUBLIC WELCOME.

2nd Annual No Gardener Left Behind Expo

By way of highlighting its campaign to encourage everyone to be gardening this coming growing season, Post Oil Solutions will hold its 2nd Annual No Gardener Left Behind Expo on Saturday, April 24, from 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM, at the Robert H. Gibson River Garden in Brattleboro. Admission is free.

This year’s event will focus on kids and youth, and therefore, also serve as a fundraiser for the area’s community school gardens, with donation buckets throughout the venue, as well as a raffle for seeds, gardening books, and tools. There will be a number of schools present to display their achievements and talk about their future plans.

In addition, there will be hammered dulcimer music by Lerna, and light refreshments sold by the Winter Farmers’ Market highly popular Indian prepared food vendors, Leda and Nash.

Throughout the River Garden, there will be a number of demonstrations and displays including low-cost tools, local brewing, canning, drying, worm composting, cooking with greens, and container planting. Several organizations, such as area community gardens, CSAs, Brattleboro Farm to School, Brattleboro Time Trade, UVM Extension Youth Agriculture Project, and Putney Transition Town, will be present. There will also be gardening resources including High Mowing Seeds, gardening books, food maps, recipes, kitchen tools, Neighborhood Garden Support Group sign-up lists, UVM Master Gardeners, and gardening product sources. Finally, we are hoping to be visited by some of our local legislature representatives.

Brattleboro Farm to School Committee: Full-time F2S Coordinator for Next School year

One of the most exciting projects to report on has been the continuing progress of the Brattleboro Farm to School Committee over the past few months. Under the leadership of Green Street 4th grade teacher, Laura White, a decision was made by the Committee in January that a full-time, paid coordinator needed to be hired for the next school year if the F2S program was going to take advantage of the accomplishments made thus far, and move forward. Having such a coordinator is what distinguishes successful F2S programs in the state, and elsewhere.

When it was realized, however, that there wasn’t enough time to write the necessary grants, Post Oil (whose CFSP community organizers have been part of the F2S committee) contacted AmeriCorps and requested an additional VISTA position to serve in this capacity for the 2010-2011 school year. We were granted a cost-share volunteer position to which we would have to contribute $10,000. The F2S committee agreed that this was a reasonable amount, not only to raise, but also to pay for a
position that, potentially, could advance the program in significant ways. One of the jobs for this person, of course, will be to write grants to fund the coordinator for the following school year.

At present, the Brattleboro and BUHS/BAMS school boards are being contacted and other fund raising efforts are underway. Additionally, Post Oil’s Community Food Security Project community organizer, Katherine Gillespie, who has been actively involved with the F2S committee, has indicated that she would be interested in taking on the coordinator’s position, much to the delight of the committee.

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CFSP Organizes Local Farm to School Conference: “Strengthening Farm and Food Education”

The Brattleboro Farm to School (F2S) Committee and the SIT Farm and Sustainable Agriculture Initiative will host a Local Farm to School Conference entitled, Strengthening Farm and Food Education. This will be held on Thursday, May 6, from 8:30-4:00, at the International Center of the SIT Graduate Institute in Brattleboro.

Organized by Post Oil Solutions Community Food Security Project (CFSP), this conference will also serve as fundraiser for the Brattleboro F2S Coordinator position for the 2010-2011 school year. Therefore, a donation of $10-$20 (scholarships available) is requested. For updated information, and to register: http://f2sconference.wordpress.com/; for questions and comments: fsp@postoilsolutions.org or 802.348.9818.

The purpose of the Conference is to bring together the various F2S activities in Southern Vermont, as well as our neighbors in New Hampshire and Massachusetts, to share, learn, and network in order to strengthen comprehensive F2S programs.

A variety of workshops on curriculum, school gardens, cafeteria and farm visits will be offered to help meet the following objectives:

- to give teachers new ideas and support;
- to build school committees to increase local food in cafeterias, garden programs, and farm visits;
- to give parents opportunities to get involved both at school and at home;
- to build momentum towards F2S Coordinator positions; and
- to initiate “A Garden in Every School” campaign.

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Additional Community Food Security News

Market Basket Project: Having launched a successful pilot program at Westgate in West Brattleboro last year (which will run its own Market Basket this year), the CFSPs organizing another that will be based at the Elliot St. Café. This will include 3 participating farms, with a total of 30 shares, and outreach is being made to the VT AIDS Project, Elliot Towers, and Moore Court, all in Brattleboro.

Farm to School: CFSP has been actively involved in helping to initiate school gardens at the Brattleboro Area Middle and Newfane Elementary Schools, and with Kindle Farm curriculum integration.

Windham Area Food System Collaborative (WAFSC): With a mission to promote a sustainable regional food system that promotes access to healthy food for all, the Collaborative grew out of a Food Security Conference that CFSP held last November. Its primary goal is to start building communication and information sharing amongst individuals and groups working to strengthen the regional food system. It meets the last Thursday of each month, 6:00 PM at the Elliot St. Café in Brattleboro, and are presently gathering information about our food system so as to develop a baseline with which to identify gaps and opportunities strengthening it. All interested parties are welcome.
**SIT Farm and Sustainable Agriculture Initiative:** World Learning has given the project $5000 to support the farmer, Steve Hed, through the end of August; applied for an AmeriCorps Sustainable Environment Entrepreneur position; Post Oil has been approved by AmeriCorps for a cost share ($10,000) VISTA position for 2010-11, similar to the F2S Coordinator position (above), if this is needed and if World Learning will pay the $10,000; working to have several summer internship positions; hopefully will have 5-10 CSA shares for World Learning staff, faculty & stridence.

**Cooking Classes:** CFSP continues to do cooking classes at Morningside Shelter, Brattleboro.

**Community Meals:** co-hosted by and held at Turning Point, Brattleboro

**Great Falls Food Hub**

The project received a 2nd $15,000 grant, this time from SARE that brings the project just that much closer to hiring a full-time Project Coordinator. A committee made up of the Interim Working Committee (IWC) and its partner, the Southeastern Vermont Community Action organization (SEVCA), is currently working on a job description and requirement.

The Food Hub became incorporated.

The IWC and SEVCA are currently engaged in a strategic planning process, working on the Hub’s goals for the next 1-3 years.

Its **Reconnecting to Our Food** committee is initiating a 7 week, “I can’t cook (yes you can!” free cooking class on Sundays, from 5:00-7:00 PM, beginning 11 April, at the Moose Lodge in Brattleboro. The mission of the class is for the participants to learn 2 quick, easy, healthy meals for each day of the week in only 7 classes. The class was completely registered in one week!

The **Reconnecting** committee has also begun work on a local food branding campaign for our region. The committee would be very grateful for any suggestions or ideas as it moves forward: foodhub@postoilsolutions.org.

**Reconnecting** continues to do area screenings of “Fresh,” and is consulting on the development of a Farmers’ Market in Springfield.

**(Re)Learning to Feed Ourselves**

**Backyard Animal Raising Workshop Schedule**

All Workshops: Fair Winds Farm, Upper Dummersnon Road, Brattleboro

Sliding scale fee, $10/$20, no one refused for lack of funds.

Pre-registration and payment are required.
Call 877.886.7397, leave brief message: name, telephone number, and workshop desired.
**NOTE:** $20 admission at gate, and only if there is room.

- Sat May 8, 10:00-12:00, Backyard Chickens Workshop
- Sat May 8, 1:00-3:00, Managing Backyard Sheep on Grass
- Sat June 5, 10:00-12:00, Backyard Chickens Workshop
- Sat June 5, 1:00-3:00, Managing Backyard Goats on Grass
(Re)Learning Series Seeks Workshop Presenters

We are looking to expand our (Re)learning to Feed Ourselves workshop series by seeking out community people who have the skills, and would like to do workshops for us later in 2010 and/or in 2011. In particular, we are interested in people who do paid workshops on canning, drying, root cellaring, and other skills around putting food by, as well as gardening skills, including seed starting, transplanting, soil preparation, garden planning, muckhing, pest management, cold frames, and the like. Interested parties should send an outline of their skills and background, along with suggestions as to the kind of workshop they would like to do, to info@postoilsolutions.org. Fee is negotiable. We also would be willing to help train and provide support for promising candidates.

Pilot Neighborhood Greenhouse Project

 Financing by grants Post Oil received at the end of 2009 from the Vermont Community Foundation (VCF) and the New England Grassroots Environmental Fund (NEGEF), Post Oil is collaborating with Transition Town Putney (TTP) around developing an inexpensive greenhouse that can be built and shared by a neighborhood. Post Oil’s, Robert King, is heading up this project. At last count, there were 7 neighborhoods in Putney who had expressed interest. The plan is that, once Robert has completed the design and a trial run, the project will be taken to one of the neighborhoods that is ready to move on this. It is then hoped that TTP will run with the project in other Putney neighborhoods.

Collaboration with Transition Town Putney

Certainly one of the most promising developments in our region is the emergence of Transition Town Putney in recent months. Post Oil has had a number of positive contacts with the group, including a screening of “Fresh,” as well as the pilot Neighborhood Greenhouse project (see above). There will be a meeting in early April with representatives from TTP, the Windham Energy Group/Southern Vermont Co-op Power, and Post Oil to explore the possibilities of collaborating around an energy project in Putney.

Collaboration with Vermont Land Trust

As part of their state-wide effort to help young farmers acquire land, the Vermont Land Trust approached Post Oil Solutions to collaborate on raising $100,000 for a young farming family in their efforts to secure a farm in Athens. Since this kind of effort fits nicely with part #5 of our Regional Food Sustainability Campaign (“Promoting the Growth of Local Agriculture,” www.postoilsolutions.org), we were most willing to partner with the Trust in this endeavor, one that has just begun.

Winter Farmers’ Market

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The WFM has just concluded its 4th and most successful season. Gross market receipts improved by 36.5% over the previous season!

Reflective of this success, and in response to both customer and vendor demand, the WFM will be open every Saturday next season (except Christmas day) from November through March.

Brattleboro Time Trade

Brattleboro Time Trade (BTT) successfully concluded its pilot phase and is open for new members. With technical assistance from Portland Time Trade, BTT now has a dedicated website: http://www.brattleborotimetrade.org/ to allow members to post offers and requests and access records. A Time Trade Potluck was held on March 3 and the executive team is reviewing bylaws and incorporation documents in anticipation of its first official organizational meeting. Members for the hopefully soon to be Board of Directors are being solicited and resumes of prospective VISTA/AMERICORP interns are being studied.

Pioneering Healthy Communities

Post Oil's Richard Berkfield and Tim Stevenson are part of a team of community leaders convened by the Meeting Waters YMCA to head up a 2-year program for Windham County, known as Pioneering Healthier Communities (PHC). A joint partnership of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and YMCA of the USA, PHC’s purpose is to work toward policy and environmental change efforts that support and promote healthy lifestyles. Windham County was one of 21 communities selected to participate in PHC this year, and became one of 101 communities nationwide to participate over the past 6 years. Specifically, the PHC initiative is meant to facilitate active living and healthier eating through policy and environmental changes. The group has just begun its work, and we’ll have updates on its progress in the months ahead.

More will be reported in our Newsletter this year about these new and exciting efforts.

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