

**Rural Tourism Studio
Agri-Tourism Development Workshop
Travel Oregon**

**9:00 to 4:00pm
Thursday, May 7, 2009
Enterprise, Wallowa County, Oregon**

DRAFT

Workshop Discussion Notes

Notes recorded by:

**Kristin Dahl
Travel Oregon**

Notes edited by:

**David Beurle
Innovative Leadership Australia**

Agri-Tourism Development Workshop

Participants:

- Margie Shaw – real estate broker, City Councilor, community volunteer
- Jaunita Waters – retired school teacher, gopher for farmer rancher husband
- Vanessa Thew Thompson – Owns North End Crossing Bed & Barn, theme and educational center based on pioneer skills, event takes place on June 20th
- Lisa Dawson – NEOEDD. Business finance, planning, organization
- Eric Gray – Aquarius Pump, water irrigation systems
- Vicky Searles – Wallowa County Chamber, interest in being a good partner
- Alice Trindle – Eastern Oregon Visitor Association, 3rd generation farmer
- Dave Carpenter – Aquarius Pump
- Troy Nave – Field Trip and Heritage Program Coordinator at Wallowa Mountain Institute. Sees phenomenal potential for tourism development in the county. Wants to help connect the dots and get the momentum going.
- Julie Mullen – NEOEDD
- Liza Jane Nichols – 4th Generation Rancher. 5th generation daughter wants to come back and cook the food they produce on the ranch. Trying to pave the path for her to do so.
- Sara Miller -- NEOEDD
- Jenny Hawkins Hogrefe – Starting *Source Tours* which will bring people to Wallowa County and other parts of the state to see farms and ranches. Featuring Cory & Dave's Ranch, Beth Gibans Farms, Lynn – Chef leads a culinary session on the itinerary.
- Lynne Sampson Curry – food freelance writer, chef
- Harold Black – Deputy Land Use Planner, on board for Brand Wallowa
- Mark and Donna Beverage from Union County. Just got approval from county to do a homestay on the ranch and farm stand, nature walk (birds, elk, deer), 100 year old house in Union they'll convert into B&B, outdoor weddings. Opening in July. Joshua's Country Store & Inn.
- Doug Perry – Returned local. Would like to help create a community that youth want to return to.
- Patrick Thiel – grows organic produce with father. Market is in Portland. Work in our market year-round and see the potential for
- Jon Jinings – DLCD based in Bend. Works with 17 Eastern Oregon Counties. All jurisdictions are tied to farming and ranching. Many are struggling with prosperity and job creation.
- Ken Wick – Planning Commission Member, Wilderness Outfitter, rancher and provider of natural beer, realtor
- Dave Flynn– Planning Commission Member and owner of the Carman Ranch (with wife) – take grass-fed beef to Portland. Trying to figure out how to bring more people back to the land,
- Lance Daily – Planning Director in the County. Would like to see what we can do at the County level to support these initiatives.
- Linda Andrews – Tourism Development team from Travel Oregon
- Kristin Dahl – Tourism Development team from Travel Oregon

What are local trends that might support or impede the development of an Agri-Tourism Industry (here in Wallowa County)?

Responses from tables:

- Divergent trends, more people going urban and disconnected with their food while becoming more discerning and aware
- Also folks who are highly aware of their carbon footprint. Wallowa County is quite far from major urban centers making it challenging for bringing.
- Makes it challenging for Wallowa County to be a stand-alone destination for AgriTourism. Need to build off of the other reasons why they're here visiting the County.
- Omnivores Dilemma - talking about free-range chickens – some are constrained in a 3'x3' container and still called free-range. Doesn't play out well for grass-fed grain. You aren't going to have industrial free-range chickens that are really free-range.
- Information is diffuse. Need for a central clearinghouse for information – an AgriTourism calendar on the Wallowa County Chamber website?
- Don't be concerned, often the case with industries that are just forming. Just now coming to a critical mass. Studios are a chance for folks to come together and compare notes, find the gaps.
- With grass fed beef they want to see/meet the people who grow the beef. In Slow Food, it's also about the traditional ways of growing food. A real selling point about Wallowa County is that people can have that experience for people to meet the farmer and really learn about where their
- An issue for farmers to make a profit. You're chastised if you raise your prices. Seems that people who came in from a different business model get the value and are fine charging more. People who come from the dirt aren't comfortable with charging what their product is really worth. Perhaps folks in Wallowa County are undervaluing what they have?
- To what extent is being at the end of the road a good thing? It's a liability and an opportunity. It has positioned us uniquely as industrial agriculture passed over the area. Now left with the small farmers and ranchers that can tell a unique story. If you're coming here – folks should stay at least three days if you're coming all the way here.
- We are geographically defined. In one of the most distinguished areas of the country. A beautiful valley with distinct mountain ranges.
- May be some cultural, behavioral things to deal with. To support what we're doing we need to work together.
- Wallowa County likes to pride ourselves on not having a clue on what current trends are. It's hard to stay on top of trends of target markets.
- Surveying local restaurants. One of the barriers right now is getting the USDA inspected beef here. Need to support the regulation to happen locally so producers can connect with the market place. A gap that's been identified.
- 'Commission kill' – one guy, works round the clock. "If he dies, we're screwed."
- Impediment: What's happening with land prices? Growing concentration of land ownership amongst small land owners. Quite a bit also being consolidated. On support side, could see a lot of great things happen if you could bring in partners like the Nature Conservancy.
- Mainstream agriculture is still dominant here. Things like Extension service aren't providing support/resources for the kinds of innovative things they want to do here.
- Challenge – variety! Wallowa has a long list of beef. Not as many for dairy/eggs, produce. How can we support more variety? Could
- What are the gaps – how can we identify those entrepreneurial opportunities.

To what degree do you think you have the potential or interest in making this a world-class agri-tourism destination?

- We have great potential as we have lots of pieces of it, but not sure if we have the cohesion.
- Potential is huge, enormous! To bring that together, those people need money to do that job, but often falls to volunteers. Coordinator or organization needs \$\$ to do it so that the effort can continue for several years to make it successful.
- Is there an organization that brings these efforts together in the U.S.? Has been a different approach in this country than has been in other countries. Seems to be based around marketing driving – label. Not a lot of work building the ‘values’ underlying the brand. Not building the depth in the passion and desire. Food culture may not be as rich here in the U.S. Food systems are so corporatized here in the U.S. Leaves lots of gaps for innovation.
- How do US health policies compare with other countries? Now with revised food pyramid looking a little better.
- There are very few areas that have the right geographic mix with diverse people and ingredients to do something very interesting with cuisine. Question is, do we have the chefs who need to be part of the equation to present? Not much of a food culture here in the area. There are individuals who have that interest, but not the culture of the area. Opportunity for growth.

What’s your vision now for what you’d like to see in Wallowa County?

- Would like to see it develop in the County and in Eastern in Oregon in general since it’s such a great opportunity.
- In small group found that they were able to look at things in a lot more detail. Served as a good resource and sounding board. Might be a good idea to meet in small groups.
- Have small parties regularly to taste each others’ food and get to know one another and their businesses. Then work together to approach funding sources.
- Always exciting to hear about the businesses that are out there. See a very defined and rich culture and history in the area and the constant theme running through all the business concepts. A lot of the arrows going in the same direction. We have a lot of agreement and cohesiveness in the region.
- In the 8th season of the farmers market – it’s hard work. Still only a handful of growers. Growing consumer base. Working with Wallowa Resources to pursue grants to explore food security and how to support/sustain local growers and local food systems.
- Can help maintain and bolster the culture we have here by showing people the authentic products that we produce and the way we do business (irrigation practices for example). Great opportunity for people who really are curious about where their food comes from. Agri-tourism can serve as a way to bridge the urban-rural divide.
- Would like to see people with an idea pursue it, and would like to see those businesses work together.
- An exciting next step would be seeing local restaurants utilize more local food. Would like to see small local connections being made. Potential is huge since we already are a tourism destination. Adding cultural heritage element to those experiences would be great.
- Networking groups that could talk over stuff that could provide a way for these types of participants. Use those opportunities for entrepreneurs to connect, develop new linkages. Should be led locally by those passionate about the subject.

- Important to keep the region in mind! Need to cross market – for example, when people are staying in Union County share what’s going on in Wallowa County and vice versa – regional marketing.
- Important to bring stakeholders together to get momentum going around the brand/brand value. Communicating that to consumers.
- Need to have a product / pamphlet that shows what we currently *have* in Wallowa County. We already have a lot of businesses that could be immediately enhanced.
- Vision for the region – that agri-tourism is the niche that allows us to protect our culture, our heritage and our way of life. For our ranchers and farmers to continue to live here.
- Wallowa already has some really good products that they have together. Already taking some products to Portland. Is there a way you can get together and look for ways to really enhance that?
- How do we use the Wallowa Brand out in markets like Portland to bring them back into the County?
- To be successful, we must have continued communication. From a marketing standpoint you have the Oregon Bounty campaign (Travel Oregon) – how do we connect into that?
- Regional Wallowa Brand. Represents rural life, stands for quality products in services that live in a neat area. Visit www.brandwallowa.com. It should be used as a regional marketing tool.
- Out of the RDAT Process (Rural Design an Assistance Team) and Economic Action Team is now in the process of developing a Community Development Corporation (non-profit) to provide a County wide economic umbrella. Could be a vehicle to keep the arrows moving in the same direction. The only thing that’s looking at the economy as a whole. Committee to funding an ED for a year.
- We need a catalyst as a start. Need some person entity, coordinator. Need the vehicle, a carriage to pull these efforts together. Potential tactic: Need to educate locals about the cuisine – how grass-fed local beef tastes different than industrial cow. Develop discerning consumers locally.
- In bike tourism workshop a website was proposed (there was a web developer in the room). Proposed asking the web developer if he could create an agri-tourism website.

NEXT ACTION STEPS IN COUNTY:

1. Sara Miller to ask website developer to create a web page on agri-tourism. A page for people who are developing product to connect.
2. Form a working group – people who were interested included:
 - Sara Miller, Northeast Oregon Economic Development Dist.
 - Vanessa Thew Thompson, North End Crossing Bed & Barn
 - Troy Nave, Wallowa Resources
 - Patrick Thiel, Prairie Creek Farm
 - Jenny Hawkins-Hogrefe, Source Tours

Note: Oregon Rural Action may be a good fit – could be a good resource to support a working group. (*Who will inquire?*)

3. Perhaps get some informal tasting groups going – to build food culture and keep networking