

WESTERN ORGANIZING REVIEW

VOLUME XXIX
ISSUE No. III

FALL
2019

WORC Wins Lawsuit Against Federal Energy Committee

On August 13, WORC's lawsuit challenging the Royalty Policy Committee received a favorable decision in federal court. The judge ruled that the Department of the Interior had ignored many of the requirements under the Federal Advisory Committees Act (FACA) and the Administrative Procedures Act (APA) in setting up the Committee. Because the Committee was unlawful from the get-go, the court barred Interior bureaus from relying on any of the Committee's recommendations to justify future rulemakings.

Our attorneys tell us this ruling is the first that has struck down an advisory committee on the procedural grounds we identified, and only the third time (and the first since 1980) a court has issued a use injunction (enjoining use of recommendations and materials developed by the Committee) in a FACA dispute.

Two years ago, then Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke, re-chartered the Royalty Policy Committee to advise the Interior Department on fossil fuel development and royalty issues. Zinke stacked the Committee with representatives of the fossil fuel industry and pro-development state officials, leaving out the voices



of taxpayers and conservation groups entirely. The Committee made many recommendations favoring the interests of the industries represented, such as speeding oil and gas leasing in the Arctic, hastening onshore drilling permit approval, and giving companies more flexibility to self-determine the value of publicly-owned minerals for the purpose of calculating and paying royalties. In previous rulings in the case, the judge had noted that the Interior's operation of the Committee seemed designed to satisfy the minimum standards in the law while skirting its spirit.

A few things happened to the Royalty Policy Committee following the filing of our lawsuit. First, Ryan Zinke's appointee to lead the Committee, Vincent DeVito, resigned to take a job at BP, the oil company. Then in April, Secretary Zinke's replacement, David Bernhardt, allowed the Committee's charter to expire. This makes it clear that Bernhardt thinks he can advance a deregulatory agenda without even pretending to consult an advisory committee, stacked or otherwise. WORC and its groups will oppose rule rollbacks that we expect to continue. At the very least, the judge's decision deprives the Interior of white-washing its actions by relying on the recommendations of the Royalty Policy Committee.

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The View from WORC

By Linda Weiss, WORC Chair

As we come to the end of an already eventful summer, the last few weeks have been a gobsmack to life as we knew it.

Earlier this summer, news came from coal company Blackjewel LLC that they would be closing their Belle Ayr and Eagle Butte mines in Wyoming. This left nearly 600 miners out of work, unable to access their retirement accounts, and missing millions of dollars of paycheck contributions that the company pocketed rather than putting towards retirement and health savings accounts. The pain these families face will trickle down through our region's economy and across the country. Our allies in Appalachia tell us the situation facing Blackjewel's miners out there is even more dire. We've seen this play out as other extractive industries have collapsed in our states. And while we're working hard on building a framework for creating a just transition away from coal in our states, we're going to have to wait and see what support lies ahead for the families, communities, and region as we all deal with this reckoning.



In a nation of increasing economic uncertainty, political violence, and democratic instability, the divisions in our communities can feel overwhelming. "Us versus them" messages flood us from all angles. It is in this moment that WORC is doubling-down and making new commitments to our mission to "advance the vision of a democratic, sustainable, and just society through community action." WORC's member groups are hiring bi-lingual organizers, and taking on new organizing work that addresses environmental justice issues that disproportionately affect minorities in our region. Meanwhile, WORC staff are evaluating the organization's personnel policies and training curricula through an equity lens, and WORC has created a learning community to provide a space where network leaders and staff can support each other in learning how to build a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive movement.

Then, right as the month was drawing to a close, the Trump Administration proposed rescinding rules on capturing methane that would leave whole sectors of the oil and gas industry virtually unregulated. Methane is 87 times more potent as a greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide, so the move has catastrophic implications for the everyone's health — though poor people and people of color will be hurt most as the climate continues to destabilize.

Our mission to help the people most impacted by these and other environmental injustices is how we keep our network strong and growing. It's the way we build support systems for communities going through crises. It doesn't happen through just one person, or even one issue. It's about getting people from all walks of life to work together and define a collective vision of safety, respect, and prosperity that builds relationships among and within communities. That's grassroots organizing.

The news this summer reminds us that the balance of power is way off. There's no better time than now to recommit to empowering the people of our region to make change for the better.

Linda K. Weiss

WESTERN ORGANIZING REVIEW

The *Western Organizing Review* is published quarterly by the Western Organization of Resource Councils.

WORC is a regional network of grassroots community organizations, which includes 15,190 members and 38 local chapters. WORC helps its member groups succeed by providing trainings and coordinating regional issue campaigns.

WORC'S NETWORK

*Dakota Resource Council
Dakota Rural Action
Idaho Organization of Resource Councils
Northern Plains Resource Council
Oregon Rural Action
Powder River Basin Resource Council
Western Colorado Alliance
Western Native Voice*

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Your support enables us to work on
tough challenges facing our region*

Responding to the Threat of Coal Ash Contamination

Coal ash, the waste byproduct of burning coal for power generation, is one of the nation's top threats to groundwater – and yet the regulatory requirements to stop or address this contamination are falling woefully short of what is needed. The inadequacies of coal ash policy are starting to come to light as utilities are now submitting proposals to address contaminating ponds. Our region is now at the forefront of this fight and the WORC network is working hard to stop utilities from abandoning their cleanup obligations.

Coal ash is one of the largest industrial waste streams in the US and one of the most toxic. There are approximately 1,400 coal ash impoundments and landfills across the country, many of which are unlined pits in the ground. It was only recently discovered by scientists that coal ash leaches dangerous heavy metals and other pollutants into water, including arsenic, hexavalent chromium, lead, mercury, selenium, and radium. This lack of scientific data on coal ash is a direct result of a lack of regulatory oversight. Utilities weren't required to monitor or report groundwater quality data until 2015. Reports to the EPA in 2018 revealed that over 90% of coal ash impoundments are polluting nearby surface and groundwater sources. And yet, regulations do not actually require companies to move the coal ash out of the unlined pits, seeping into groundwater.

At the federal level, the Coal Combustion Residuals (CCR) rule went into effect in 2015 and established technical requirements for landfills and surface ponds under Subtitle D of the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA), the nation's primary law for regulating solid waste. While this rule dictates the management of many coal ash disposal sites around the country, it falls far short of what is needed to address coal ash pollution. For instance, it does not apply to ponds that stopped receiving coal ash before 2015 and it allows companies to cap ponds in place, even if they are sitting in the groundwater. Worst of all, the rule is self-enforced, meaning that cleanup plans do not have to be approved by the EPA or a state agency (unless that state happens to have more stringent rules in place, which very few do). Utilities just draft up a proposal, solicit public comment, and then proceed as they wish.

In July, PacifiCorp quietly released a cleanup plan proposal to essentially abandon their leaking ash ponds at the Jim Bridger, Naughton, and Dave Johnson plants in Wyoming. The CCR rule requires that utilities develop cleanup plans (or Corrective Management Assessments) for the most polluting ash ponds in the country – and the Jim Bridger and Naughton impoundments are in the top ten of that list.

Powder River Basin Resource Council submitted comments to PacifiCorp on the cleanup plans for three polluting plants, arguing that contaminating ponds should be excavated and securely stored in high, dry landfills so the coal ash is no longer sitting in groundwater. As described above, PacifiCorp is required to seek public input on their proposals, but they held just one meeting with no public announcement (unsurprisingly, only industry members were in attendance). WORC and Powder River Basin Resource Council are also working to bring the inadequacies of this regulation to light to the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality. The organizations will be advocating that the state take a stronger stance on regulating coal ash and protect the area's precious groundwater resources.



This is one of the very first CMAs to be submitted by a utility pursuant to the CCR rule and many more are scheduled across the country over the next year. WORC is working with regional and national allies to sound the alarm on the failures of the CCR rule and the toxic groundwater contamination that will result from inadequate cleanup plans.

Around the Region

A look around WORC's network

Dakota Resource Council

DRC affiliate, Bandlands Area Resource Council (BARC) continues their campaign to relocate the Davis Refinery, proposed for Meridian, ND. In an effort to keep the public informed about what's happening, BARC is planning multiple events this fall. Also, in the works is an informational event at NDSU with a student group. These events are valuable because it's important to keep people informed about the campaign and help recruit members.



DRC is appealing the District Court's decision on issues that include:

- Whether the Public Service Commission (PSC) lacked jurisdiction to hear a formal complaint filed by DRC against Meridian for starting construction of a 55,000 bpd refinery without a siting permit.
- Whether the PSC gave DRC a "fair hearing" as required when DRC's complaint was dismissed without holding any hearing or allowing discovery.

There is a lot of work ahead for BARC members as they keep the issue in the news and make sure that Meridian does everything by the books. Stay tuned for the outcome of the appeal.

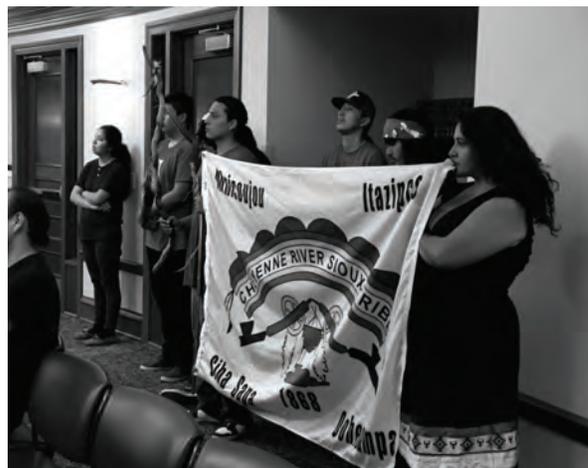
Dakota Rural Action

On July 17th, DRA members participated in the Water Management Board's second Motions and Scheduling hearing regarding TransCanada and other applicants' Water Appropriation Permits for the use of public water for construction of the Keystone XL Pipeline. Due to



a previous ruling by the Board chair, all parties to the proceeding were required to have an in-person presence--and many other concerned citizens made the trip as well. Over 75 people attended the hearing, and 24 citizens provided testimony during the public comment period--including several youth from the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe.

At issue were numerous motions by TransCanada to preclude consideration of the merits of the Keystone XL pipeline, preclude consideration of implied water rights and tribal lands and treaty rights, and to exclude intervenors who reside in Nebraska. While Hearing Officer Rodney Freeman had issued preliminary orders denying all of those motions, the final decision rested with the Board. The Board upheld all of Freeman's pre-hearing orders, and set the final water permit hearings for October 3-4 and October 29-31.



The Idaho Organization of Resource Councils

Idaho Organization of Resource Councils

The IORC Board approved the work on a new bilingual (English/Spanish) chapter in Canyon County in March. Since then, IORC organizer Irene Ruiz has brought together an organizing committee of local members and IORC leaders to develop the chapter's bylaws and begin work on issue campaign goals.

The name of the new chapter is *Visión 2C Resource Council*. Their mission statement is "We are building and advocating for resilient, equitable, and sustainable communities through grassroots leadership." And their vision statement is "We strive for community driven social justice that is multi-generational, multi-cultural, and is representative of the people of Canyon County."

The chapter is expecting to hold a kickoff meeting in fall of 2019.

Northern Plains Resource Council

The Northern Plains Resource Council just wrapped up their fourth annual Montana Local Food Challenge. The event extends from the belief that local foods are

good for our health, our climate, and our community. The Local Food Challenge runs the entire month of August each year. All Montanans are invited to participate in weekly challenges that inspire folks to eat and even grow their own local food.



Participants sign up via a website and are emailed a weekly “challenge.” Participants are encouraged to meet and support the farmers and ranchers in their region as well as the businesses who are selling and serving local food.

Several Northern Plains affiliates across the state also hosted “Local Food Challenge Kick-Off” dinners and potluck events with food from local restaurants and member gardens. The Montana Local Food Challenge is a great example of how digital organizing can lead to real world, person-to-person, strengthening of communities.

Oregon Rural Action

ORA and a coalition that includes Center for Food Safety, Food & Water Watch, Columbia Riverkeeper, Friends of Family Farmers, Animal Legal Defense Fund, and others is calling for a moratorium on new or expanding mega-dairies to safeguard Oregon’s environment, family farmers, and animal welfare.



Since their 2018 win to withdraw the permit for the 300,000-cow Lost Valley mega-dairy, the coalition developed legislation for a moratorium and secured a hearing in the Oregon State Senate.

Some members of the coalition will run a truth-in-advertising campaign to expose egregious greenwashing by companies sourcing from these massive operations yet claim to support sustainable, high-welfare family farms. The ALDF lawsuit against Tillamook will bolster this effort and has already garnered significant media attention.

Powder River Basin Resource Council

Last fall, Powder River Basin Resource Council filed an objection with the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) over Contura transferring the coal mine permits for Belle Ayr and Eagle Butte coal mines to Blackjewel. The DEQ was ready to transfer the permits, despite Blackjewel’s numerous safety and environmental violations. The Wyoming Environmental



Quality Council held a hearing in May, but held off on a decision in order to gather more information.

Fast forward to July 1 – Blackjewel abruptly declared bankruptcy. Employees were sent home, mines abandoned, and gates locked. Campbell County had to provide security for the mines as Blackjewel had literally walked away from them.

If not for Powder River’s objection, the state would have happily transferred those permits from Contura to Blackjewel, and Wyoming taxpayers would have likely footed the bill for the mines’ \$250 million reclamation costs.

Western Colorado Alliance

Western Colorado Alliance has been very busy! After a successful member drive in May and June, we turned our attention to our 39th Annual Conference, which was held on August 24 at Wine Country Inn in Palisade. Over 80 people attended the conference, which was a big success. We had a significant victory recently when a trip to Washington, DC by Alliance members Roger and Tina Carver of Nucla helped elicit two Colorado sponsors for the Reclaim Act. We continue pushing hard on the CORE Act, and have been super-busy with the rulemakings which followed our oil and gas victory in the last legislative session. Our successful West Slope Youth Vote initiative put out their first Western Youth Issues Report to resounding accolades. Finally, we have launched new clean energy work here, with significant electrical co-op election victories in the Delta-Montrose region.



Western Native Voice

With the 2020 Census less than 8 months away, groups across the country are organizing to get as many people counted as possible. In Montana’s Indian Country, Western Native Voice will be one such group taking Census information to communities and inspiring participation.

Western Native Voice has hired Community Organizers across Montana to work in their own communities and be trusted resources for Census information. They’re also connecting with tribal governments and community organizations, other Montana nonprofits and their membership of over 10,000 to keep people informed and engaged in the 2020 Census. “[Our organizers’] Census work we will shape a positive future for the next ten years and build long lasting power in Indian Country.”



The U.S. Census Bureau will begin enumeration in Montana on April 1, 2020.

Recent Coal Bankruptcies Show Market Chaos is the New Normal

Cloud Peak Energy, once the third-largest coal mining company in the nation, filed for bankruptcy protection on May 10. In July, Blackjewel LLC did the same, abruptly closing its Belle Ayr and Eagle Butte mines, putting nearly 600 miners out of work. The effects of these bankruptcies will rock Wyoming and Montana coalfield communities and beyond.

While Cloud Peak and Blackjewel were drastically different companies, the economic realities they faced were similar. The coal industry has been hit hard as electric utilities across the country close their coal-fired power plants in favor of cheaper energy from wind, solar, and natural gas. As coal markets collapsed, Cloud Peak's executives were paid millions in bonuses while the company slashed already modest medical benefits for retirees. Meanwhile at its bankruptcy filing, Blackjewel reported only \$138,000 in its bank account but had debts to its vendors and suppliers of more than \$150 million, not to mention hundreds of millions more in mine cleanup costs.

Miners were hit especially hard by Blackjewel's bankruptcy. Not only did they have no warning of the impending closures, but the company also pocketed payments that employees had directed to their retirement funds and health savings accounts.

Thanks to pressure on regulators by Powder River Basin Resource Council, Contura Energy wasn't able to dump the reclamation liabilities on Blackjewel when they sold them the ailing Belle Ayr and Eagle Butte mines. Because Contura never finalized transfer of the mining permits to Blackjewel, Contura has been forced to buy the mines back in order to avoid Wyoming foreclosing the bonds and starting the reclamation process immediately. Had the company been able to sell off the reclamation liabilities, they could have looked the other way while Wyoming taxpayers got stuck with the cleanup costs.

Even that deal has run into legal issues after Contura admitted that it planned on closing the mines in 6-12 months, rather than the 6-12 years that they told the bankruptcy judge as Blackjewel sought approval of the sale. Because Blackjewel racked up a debt of \$60 million in unpaid royalties for mining and selling federally owned coal, Contura is required to negotiate with the U.S. Department of the Interior over how much it will pay of Blackjewel's back-royalties. If the negotiations fall through, the mines could stay closed and reclamation could begin right away. In a perfect example of the thread that most Powder River Basin coal companies are hanging by, Contura may also have to file bankruptcy if it is unable to reach a settlement with the federal government.

Cloud Peak has had its own struggles in bankruptcy. Unable to sell its mines before filing for bankruptcy, the company's assets were put up for a bankruptcy auction. One hundred days following Cloud Peak's filing, the company announced a winning bidder for its mines: the Navajo Transitional Energy Company (NTEC). NTEC will pay \$16 million in cash and some millions more in debt-financing of the sale. For Cloud Peak, which entered bankruptcy looking to get out from under \$300 million of long-term debt, the results may very well disappoint the company's management and creditors.

The long-term outcomes for NTEC and its sole owner, the Navajo Nation, could be even more catastrophic.

In buying the mines, NTEC and possibly the Navajo Nation, would be taking on at least half a billion dollars of



liabilities at a time when market conditions in the Powder River Basin have never been worse. Cheap natural gas and wind energy have squeezed coal plants into retirement, keeping coal prices low and profit margins disapparently thin. Global coal prices are currently too low to profitably export coal from the Spring Creek Mine in Montana. Making matters worse, Cloud Peak's chief competitors in Wyoming, Peabody Energy and Arch Coal, recently announced that they will jointly run their operations, allowing them to lower their costs, reduce competition, and decrease production to meet demand, making them substantially more competitive in the long-term.

Adding potential drama to the situation, NTEC's executives, who are non-Navajo, may have kept the Navajo Tribal Council in the dark about the bid.

There are still plenty of places that the NTEC deal could fall apart. Although Cloud Peak's bankruptcy judge approved NTEC's bid on August 19, court filings suggest the sale won't close until early October. If the sale closes, NTEC will then need to apply to Wyoming and Montana state regulators for transfer of the mining permits from Cloud Peak. At that point, it will be required to produce secure, liquid, and reliable reclamation bonds. That's when the public will see whether the company will shoulder mine cleanup itself or rely on the Navajo Nation to co-sign its reclamation obligations.

Northern Plains Resource Council Staff Director Retiring

Since 1986, Northern Plains' Staff Director Teresa Erickson has been building people power – working with staff and members like you and me -- to protect our water quality, family farms and ranches, and unique quality of life.

Teresa has done her job with tenacity, creativity, humor, and fearlessness. The organization's accomplishments reflect her guiding philosophy that, when neighbors stand shoulder-to-shoulder, they can achieve amazing things.

Her work has involved turning members into extraordinary leaders, building an outstanding staff team, and doing the never-ending work of raising money.

On September 16, Teresa will pass the torch to Olivia Stockman Splinter, a veteran of ten years as Northern Plains' Director of Organizing and Campaigns.

After that date, Teresa will continue to work on a part-time basis to guide Northern Plains' History Project. She will also deliver the keynote speech at the 2019 Annual Meeting this November. If you'd like to help bid her farewell, you can attend the annual meeting and send your best wishes to her.



Career Opportunities in the WORC Network

Idaho Organization of Resource Councils
*Bilingual Agriculture and Food
Community Organizer, Boise, ID*

Northern Plains Resource Council
*Field Organizer, Billings, MT
Canvasser, Billings, MT*

Oregon Rural Action
Community Organizer, LaGrande, OR

Powder River Basin Resource Council
Community Organizer, Sheridan, Laramie or Cheyenne, WY

WORC
*Organizing and Training Coordinator,
Montrose, CO or Billings, MT
Comptroller, Billings, MT*

*For more information visit
www.worc.org/who-we-are/career-opportunities*

Fort Berthold POWER Have a Long Way to Go to Get Clean Air

Flares danced all the way out to the horizon in every direction among the rolling hills of North Dakota's Fort Berthold Reservation. The six closest flares were clumped only a few hundred feet away, sounding like rockets trying to take flight, but never quite lifting off. Wind shifts did nothing to relieve the constant, heavy scent of petroleum. Distressing, considering that the dangerous chemicals didn't have odors. "The volatile organic compounds and chemical gases flowing in the air are benzene, toluene, ethylbenzene, and xylene," Mandaree resident Joletta Bird Bear said. "These are hazardous gases to human body. Carcinogenic. Not all gases burn in flaring."

Bird Bear, Chair of Fort Berthold Protectors of Water & Earth Rights (POWER), has been fighting the epidemic of flaring and venting (releasing unburned gas directly into the air) of methane for over a decade. "It's worrisome, when you can actually smell the industry, and it's located right in your backyard," Bird Bear said.

"Recently, I was at Elbowoods Clinic for a health check-up, and I asked one of the nurses, 'Do you see a lot of people coming in here for respiratory issues?'" and the nurse responded quickly with, "Oh, yes. We've got people coming in here who've never had any instances of asthma, and are now asthmatic. We've got young people coming in here for respiratory issues."

Capturing the gasses is both possible and inexpensive with current technology. States like Colorado capture 98% of natural gas from wells. Under-regulation and under-enforcement have allowed oil companies to flare or vent 24% of the natural gas produced in North Dakota, polluting the air and wasting a valuable natural resource. On the Fort Berthold Reservation 37% of natural gas is flared or vented. That's millions of dollars in royalties owed to taxpayers up in smoke.

Flaring isn't just contained to the wide-open rural areas on the reservation. Flares burn within the communities as well. "In Mandaree, there are flares located in close proximity to schools, houses, everything," Bird Bear said.

Since the drilling is happening on the Reservation's fee and trust lands, planning and mitigation falls under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). Typically a proposal to drill several thousand wells would require an Environmental Impact

Statement (EIS) to assess the cumulative impact of the development, instead the BIA issued a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). No EIS was conducted to identify the impacts to the lives of

"But because there was no EIS, the doors were flung right open, and we had rapid industrialization of an area containing undisturbed natural resources, habitat and wildlife that's been here for eons, clean air, clean water, and people, of course, who've had an attachment to this land for eons."

people living there. "Had the EIS actually happened, we would have had to look at every potential impact to the land, to the air, to the water, to the economy, to the culture, and to the social structure on Fort Berthold," she said. "It would have added an element of planning into the whole process. But because there was no EIS, the doors were flung right open, and we had rapid industrialization of an area containing undisturbed natural resources, habitat and wildlife that's been here for eons, clean air, clean water, and people, of course, who've had an attachment to this land for eons."

The changes to the area came quickly. Since BIA's Finding of No Significant Impact, more than 500 wells have been drilled and the State of North Dakota estimates 4,395 more will be drilled. It's been estimated that truck traffic bringing fracking materials in and hauling oil out of the reservation has caused over \$100 million in damage to roads.



Capturing the gas and selling it would lead to royalties that might offset some of those costs. It would also limit people's exposure to toxic pollutants known to cause respiratory illnesses and cancer.

The price of oil is rising. More wells are being drilled as the Bakken begins booming again. With those wells, more methane will be flared and vented, or leaked from poorly monitored or neglected pipelines. Fort Berthold POWER's organizing efforts mean that more people are becoming informed of the dangers that oil development poses. "People are talking more about the water, the land, the air, the noise, the traffic, and all health impacts that are coming," Bird Bear said. "They aren't quantified yet, but we know they're coming. Other communities in Colorado, in Texas, Pennsylvania... those communities have already gone through what we're entering into. It's not as if we don't know what's down the road."

Principles of Community Organizing Hosted by IOIRC

The Idaho Organization of Resource Councils hosted a four day Principles of Community Organizing training July 31- August 3. Twenty five participants from six states representing fourteen organizations gathered in Boise. The lively and interactive training presented foundational principles of grassroots community organizing and provided plenty of opportunities for applied learning and practice. Throughout the training, participants worked on skills like selecting and planning campaigns, speaking to the media, and taking action in a mock city council meeting. Discussions of power-building continued throughout the week both in and out of the training.



There was also ample time for attendees to get out and engage in "team-building" activities. Organizers from different groups spent time after-hours building relationships that will strengthen all of our work moving forward.

Another aspect of building strength within our various organizations involved conversations among trainers and participants about how the curriculum could better reflect a clear incorporation of equity and inclusion in organizing practices. The feedback expressed throughout the event reinforced WORC's commitment to audit and update our curriculum.

Participants left the event energized. "The training exceeded my expectations," one attendee commented. "I've already asked other people to consider attending." The dates for next year's POCO training are yet to be scheduled. Keep an eye on WORC's website for the most up-to-date information on future trainings.

Your Gift Matters

Your financial support allows us to continue our fight for economic fairness for family farmers and ranchers, push for cleaner air and water and reduce environmental threats to human health, and support homegrown prosperity. *And, your donation will be matched by another generous donor.*

You can give three ways:

1. Visit our website at www.worc.org and click the donate button in the upper right corner,
2. Mail a check to WORC, 220 S 27th Street, Suite B, Billings, MT 59101, or
3. Consider becoming a monthly sustainer. Small monthly donations go a long way! Email us at billings@worc.org and we'll get you set up.

Contributions to WORC can be used for grassroots lobbying and are not tax deductible.

Regenerative Farming Good for the Environment and the Economy

In the hills above Sutton Creek, southeast of Baker City, Oregon, a group of Gloucestershire Old Spot pigs trot over sagebrush and bunchgrass-filled pastures towards farmer Amy Young. She stands on a paddock smiling and ready to greet them.

“My pigs are the happiest pigs you’ll ever come across,” Amy says, scratching one of the pigs behind the ears. “They spend their entire lives outside, rooting around being pigs. They are never confined or on concrete and they are never fed any genetically modified organism, corn, or soy.”

Amy’s farm is in stark contrast to the way over 80 percent of pigs in the U.S. are raised.

Amy Young owns and operates Young Roots Farm, a small, woman-owned, ever-diversifying farm. Amy is focused on nourishing the community while regenerating the land.

“People have to have food if they want to survive and how that food is grown determines whether or not the planet is going to survive,” Amy says.

Since starting Young Roots Farm six years ago, Amy has committed her farm to improving the land through rotational grazing and holistic management. Amy longs for a “steward” relationship between farmers and the land. To Amy, stewardship fosters healthy land, sustainability and a healthy end product. She wants consumers to demand that of their farmers and producers.

“Agriculture contributes to so much pollution and so much of the climate crisis,” Amy says, “by practicing agriculture in a way that actually is good for the environment, I’m hoping to inspire and influence others to do the same.”

Amy wants other producers to consider regenerative farming methods and she wants consumers to be conscious about where they purchase food. She says together, we can change the agricultural and food system. There’s a huge opportunity for producers and consumers to support their health, the environment, and their economy. That connection should be at the forefront of our values, Amy says.

Amy’s values and practice are somewhat rare in the hog producing industry these days. Over the last three decades, animal agriculture has changed drastically. The number of independent producers plummeted thanks to contract farming, vertical integration, corporate retaliation, and unfair markets.

The eradication of small family hog farmers started in the late 80s and early 90s when Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) or factory farms were introduced to increase productivity. Through contract farming,

many larger companies bought family farms or merged with them by providing pigs in exchange for land and waste management services. As the hog industry moved towards the corporate production model – one already in place for the poultry industry – thousands

“By practicing agriculture in a way that actually is good for the environment, I’m hoping to inspire and influence others to do the same.”

of independent farmers were pushed out of the business. In North Carolina alone, one of the top producing hog states, the number of hog farmers in the state fell from more than 11,000 in 1982 to 2,217 in 2012 -- while the number of hogs grew significantly.

Contract farming isn't the only part of hog production where consolidation is hurting producers. Today, four pork packers slaughter 57% of hogs in the United States. The consolidation of the market reduces competition and hurts family farmers' ability to get a fair price for their pork. This system of hog production is designed to decrease the



number of farmers while increasing pork produced. This hollows out rural communities. This trend of factory farm hog production is devastating local economies, the environment, and the quality of pork.

When marketing her pork, Amy looks at conventional prices at the store and measures all the care she has put into her hogs as well as the added costs of production, and then compares it to what consumers are likely to pay. She says it's this delicate balance of wanting a good price for her work and being realistic about what consumers are capable of paying. Despite the uphill battle, Amy is actively building awareness and educating her community through her innovative practices. The feedback and communication she has with her customers reaffirms she's doing things right.

Read the full story at www.homegrownstories.org.

Department of Agriculture Will Give Up Oversight of GE Crops

This summer, the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), an agency within the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), announced a proposed rule to give up their authority to regulate the development and introduction of genetically engineered (GE) crops (commonly known as GMOs). This would give giant agrochemical corporations such as Bayer-Monsanto, Syngenta-ChemChina, and Dow-Dupont the power to regulate themselves. If the proposal is finalized, these corporations, who will profit by bringing GE seeds to market, will be in charge of determining whether or not their crops are risky and subject to oversight. The current oversight structure is inadequate and this proposed rule would make it even more ineffective, increasing the likelihood of field contamination, and perpetuating a flawed system of pushing GMOs onto consumers who don't want them.

Joining with allies across the country, members in the WORC network submitted 121 comments to the USDA on their plan to roll back oversight of GE crops. Members urged USDA to:

- Strengthen rules and implement rigorous testing for all GE crops before they are introduced and planted into fields,
- Devote more attention to research on the economic, agricultural, environmental, and health impacts of GE crops, and
- Issue stiff fines and penalties for seed companies who illegally introduce GE crops without approval.

Western Colorado Alliance member and WORC Agriculture and Food Campaign Team Chair Wink Davis said, "Why would USDA, or anyone, trust GMO manufacturers? They've proven to be unable to play by the rules when it came to GE wheat, which turned up

illegally in farmers' fields. We need them to be regulated to protect the public interest."

This isn't the first time USDA has attempted to allow giant agribusiness corporations to self-regulate. In the past decade, USDA proposed rules to lift oversight of GE crops but because of public outcry, the rules were withdrawn. In this most recent rulemaking, 80 "stakeholders" were part of the process while the public was kept in the dark. This powergrab is another instance of corporations chipping away at democracy and expanding their control over our public institutions.

With 75% of the global seed supply controlled by just ten corporations, it's critical for the Trump Administration and the USDA to use their power to act as a check on corporate power, rather than a blank check for corporate greed. Wink added, "The USDA needs to work for family farms and ranches, not corporations."

Although the comment period on the proposed rule has ended, the fight isn't over. Next, APHIS must consider the comments that were submitted and prepare a final rule.

If you'd like to see updates on this process and learn how to get involved or to follow updates on our other work, please visit our website at www.worc.org and sign up to receive WORC's action alerts

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DAKOTA RURAL ACTION ANNUAL MEETING
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POWDER RIVER BASIN RES. COUNCIL ANNUAL MEETING
Sheridan, Wyoming.....November 2

NORTHERN PLAINS RESOURCE COUNCIL ANNUAL MEETING
Billings, MontanaNovember 8-9

IDAHO ORGANIZATION OF RES. COUNCILS ANNUAL MEETING
Boise, Idaho.....November 16

WORC WINTER BOARD AND STAFF MEETING
Billings, Montana.....December 6-7