

# Western Organizing Review

A publication of the Western Organization of Resource Councils



## WORC Wins 2022 Food Sovereignty Prize

On October 13th, 2022, WORC accepted the U.S. Food Sovereignty Alliance's 2022 Food Sovereignty Prize. The prize honors one domestic and one International organization working for the "right of all peoples to access healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their food, fishery, and farming systems."

"We are honored to receive the 2022 Food Sovereignty Prize, and to work alongside USFSA members for a food system that is just," said Kathryn Bedell, Chair of WORC's Agriculture and Food Campaign team and a rancher from

western Colorado. "We need organizations like WORC to bring independent ranchers like myself together with a broader movement to fight for the policies we need for economic and environmental sustainability."

Now in its 14th year, the Food Sovereignty Prize is given out around World Food Day (October 16th, 2022). The prize is intended as a contrast with the corporate-funded World Food Prize which perpetuates Big Ag's narrative that industrial-scale production or biotech can alleviate the hunger crises around the world and that industrial solutions, like factory-farm gas and pollution trading schemes, can solve the climate crisis.

"Consumers don't realize how vulnerable to climate change our food production system has become," said Gille Stockton, Montana rancher and long-time Northern Plains leader from Grass Range. "A handful of global corporations control critical farm inputs such as machinery, fertilizer, and seeds. Another handful of corporations control the markets for grains, and livestock, also on a global scale. This system does not have the flexibility needed to raise and deliver food under adverse weather and political conditions."

We're hoping that this prize will help draw attention to the importance of taking back control of our food systems for both eaters and the farmers and ranchers who feed them. "Today, a small handful of international corporations dominates the food supply, controls our markets and has

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WORC is a regional network of grassroots community organizations, which includes 19,949 members and 38 local chapters. WORC helps its member groups succeed by providing trainings and coordinating regional issue campaigns.

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## WORC's Network

Dakota Resource Council

Dakota Rural Action

Idaho Organization of Resource Councils

North Dakota Native Vote

Northern Plains Resource Council

Oregon Rural Action

Powder River Basin Resource Council

Western Colorado Alliance

Western Native Voice

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## 2023 WORC Board of Directors

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## WORC Network Reunion

Nearly 70 people gathered in a community college classroom in Sheridan, Wyoming, in June at the network's first in-person Summer Conference since 2019. Organizers, staff, board members, and guests spent three days sharing college cafeteria meals, dreaming up the next decades of our network, sharing skills across our groups, playing rowdy lawn games, and more.

### Highlights included:

- Celebrating, in person, the anniversaries and accomplishments of so many of our organizations, staff, and leaders over the past few years.
- Powder River Basin Resource Council members and staff hosted a tour of their work building a resilient local food system with the Sheridan Food Forest and fighting speculative coal mining proposals which threaten residents' land and water.
- Learning and playing the Swedish lawn game, "Kubb."

During our time together at the conference, we reflected on lessons from the network over the past few years of organizing. On the transitions caused by the pandemic, we recognized that, "Zoom has brought us together across time, distance, and safety," but could not replace the face-to-face conversations that have driven our work for decades. "We are resilient and creative," said staff and members who had found new opportunities to build relationships and hold legislators accountable. It was evident that, "our organizing model works to build power and leadership."

### We were specifically proud of:

- shutting down the National Coal Council
- five new subdistricts won in North Dakota Native communities
- launching a new organizing project in Nebraska
- moving and delivering organizing training online during the pandemic.



## Organizers and Leaders Come Together for In-person POCO

**T**wenty-four organizers and member leaders from across the Mountain West participated in WORC's 2022 Principles of Community Organizing (POCO) Training.

Community organizing is needed now more than ever in our communities. As Dolores Huerta puts it, "the great social justice changes in our country have happened when people came together, organized, and took direct action. It is this right that sustains and nurtures our democracy today. The civil rights movement, the labor movement, the women's movement, and the equality movement for our LGBT brothers and sisters are all manifestations of these rights." Principles of Community Organizing is one of the premiere trainings in the U.S. designed to help participants build powerful community organizations..



Community organizing is just one approach to building power and making change happen. Building a community organization's power and winning on issues are two basic goals of the work we do. Participants not only learned core principles but how they are applied depending on the situation, the place, and the 'music' (what works in one community may not work in another community. The culture, history, relationships, and people are just as important, if not more important than any principle or practice). Cookie cutter approaches to community organizing are discouraged.

"Community Organizing to me is empowering regular people in society to affect decision makers to foster, hopefully, structural change. That's what it is to me. And I think it's important because I think the best way to have a good society is if things are done from the bottom up" - Elliot Huggins

"I am just blown away by how much passion I've seen here. How much kindness I've seen here. People are so open minded, flexible, accommodating. And that is so beautiful to see among strangers. I feel like I'm part of a family." - Mo Bailey

Visit our website to learn more and sign up to be informed when dates are set. <https://www.worc.org/leadership-development/principles-of-community-organizing/>.

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## WORC welcomes North Dakota Native Vote to the network



**A**t its December 3 board meeting, the WORC Board unanimously approved the membership of North Dakota Native Vote (NDNV) to the WORC network. NDNV is the ninth regional group in the network.

NDNV began as a project of Western Native Voice's affiliate, Montana Native Vote in 2018. In 2019, they built out to become a standalone year-round civic engagement and voter protection group.

Since 2018, North Dakota Native Vote has built up the organization to five full time, permanent staff. They've taken on issue work such as rural electric cooperative reform, built out of their rural climate and energy work, and advocated federal policy on victim's rights and federal protections for tribal nations.

North Dakota Native Vote has had multiple legislative wins against bills that have targeted voters and attempts to create extra hurdles for voters already dealing with North Dakota's complex electoral system. More recently, they were able to secure two split House districts on two of four targeted reservations which led to the election of two new Native American legislators.

For more information on North Dakota Native Vote visit [www.ndnativevote.org](http://www.ndnativevote.org).



# Around the Region

## Dakota Resource Council

DRC members successfully engage County Commissions to oppose eminent domain for the Summit Carbon Solutions Pipeline.



Since April, DRC staff and members have been working with landowners along the Summit Carbon Solutions Pipeline route to get local governments to oppose the use of eminent domain for the pipeline project. DRC staff in consultation with landowners drafted the petition language that has been passed in five ND Counties. To help with these efforts, DRC has been involved in educating landowners about all aspects of the project so that landowners have more information when voicing their concerns at their County Commission Meetings.

To get counties to ban eminent domain for the pipeline, DRC members gathered signatures in Richland, Sargent, Dickey, Emmons, and Burleigh Counties. After gathering signatures, members and concerned landowners' concerns were voiced and conveyed to the various county commissions with an official spot on the meeting agenda. The result? A unanimous vote of 5-0 in each of these county's in opposition to eminent domain for the Summit Pipeline.

DRC is proud of its members' efforts to spread awareness about this project and DRC is also proud to be able to continue to stand up for the rights of North Dakota's hardworking farming and ranch communities.

## Dakota Rural Action

An explosion of mining expansion and mining claims has hit the Black Hills in the past year. Mining exploration permits for gold, Lithium and rare earth minerals as well as a continued interest in uranium mining have impacted every part of the Black Hills.



Dakota Rural Action members are meeting to discuss how to oppose these expansions while facing a confusing and contradictory environment of state and county authority and regulation. The confusion is all designed to make it more difficult for citizens to oppose mining expansion and give power to the mineral extraction industry.

DRA's Homegrown Chapter is collaborating with local urban producers, the SD Department of Health office of Child and Family Services, the Minnehaha County

Conservation District and the City of Sioux Falls to form an Urban Agriculture Coalition to bolster sustainability efforts and expand food access.

## Idaho Organization of Resource Councils

The Idaho Organization of Resource Councils' Eastern Idaho chapter, Portneuf Resource Council, partnered with like-minded organizations to host "Decarbonizing the Northwest". Portneuf Resource Council, Citizens Climate Lobby Pocatello, the Idaho State University Sustainability Club, and The League of Women Voters Pocatello, hosted group-listening sessions for the four-part webinar series from the Northwest Energy Coalition.



Idaho Immigrant Resource Alliance, a project of IORC that came out of needs highlighted at the start of the pandemic, is hosting their second "Heat & Smoke Relief" fundraiser. Funds are being distributed amongst partner organizations to ensure farm workers have adequate protections against record heat and smoky working conditions.

## Northern Plains Resource Council

In On April 27, Grass Range rancher and Northern Plains Resource Council member Gilles Stockton testified before the U.S. House Committee on Agriculture about beef industry corruption. Gilles' fearless testimony described the harm of anti-competitive behavior by the "big four" monopoly meatpackers.

"Monopoly power extracts wealth from rural communities and takes a larger share of the retail dollar away from producers like me," Gilles told the committee. He went on to describe how businesses in his community have "dried up and blown away like a tumbleweed."

Gilles was also featured in a Washington Post story explaining how meatpacker consolidation has diminished cattle values by almost half since he began ranching in 1975. "Out of every dollar consumers spent on beef, 71.3 cents went to the ranchers or feedlots. Now that is 36.4 cents."



Gilles pointed to passing the American Beef Labeling Act to restore mandatory Country-of-Origin Labeling and

reforming the Packers and Stockyards Act to ensure full market transparency as necessary solutions to repair a corrupt system that harms ranchers, consumers, and rural communities.

### Oregon Rural Action

Oregon Rural Action has launched a new campaign, "Safe Water Rural Communities," to address continued high levels of nitrates in the groundwater of Northeast Oregon. Following the results of our initial door-to-door testing in partnership with Morrow County Public Health Department, the County declared a State of Emergency. Community leadership is seeking emergency water, ongoing testing and treatment and long-term change. In addition, ORA continues to work with Oregon Health Authority to promote and host COVID-19 vaccination events for essential farmworkers and their families and has made progress in Morrow County on a food equity initiative to advance systems change in the region's supplemental food system.



### Powder River Basin Resource Council

The City of Laramie recently earned the US Department of Energy's SolSmart Silver designation, furthering the community's commitment to solar power growth as the city strives to reach carbon neutrality by 2050. SolSmart recognizes communities who take key steps to reduce barriers to solar energy growth and streamlines the solarization process for homes and businesses.



Laramie became the first city in the state of Wyoming to achieve this classification. Once again, the city of Laramie is leading the state and paving a path for

renewable energy adoption amongst its citizens. Powder River's Laramie affiliate, the Alliance for Renewable Energy (ARE) continues to work closely with the city, residents, and other stakeholders to grow the city's solar power capacity and reduce emissions.

### Western Colorado Alliance

Western Colorado Alliance has been busy inaugurating their summer-long "deep listening" campaign. They have been knocking on doors in three Western Colorado counties, asking typically ignored residents what kinds of problems they've been facing. They expect to use the data collected in this campaign in an election-cycle "deep canvassing" project later this year. And they just released our 2022 Colorado Legislature Report, which details the key bills their Legislative Committee was working on, and

how local representatives voted.

### Western Native Voice

Western Native Voice held their first-ever Membership Convention in 2022. Attendees took a deep dive into Native history and colonialism and learned how it has shaped the lives of Native communities today. Participants then took what they learned and formed a vision for their future. Western Native Voice provided valuable tools to participants to take action and begin to grow their community.

A Native Youth Summit was held in conjunction with the membership convention. The "Building Native Youth For Success" Summit focused on four programs: education, civic engagement, advocacy, and leadership development. They also provided a number of travel and lodging scholarships to those who needed a little assistance attending.



Western Native Voice and several Native-led organizations and businesses sponsored the first Annual "Big Sky IndigiFest" on July 15-16. The event gathered some of Indian Country's most innovative and inspiring Indigenous artists, performers, designers, community champions, fellow and upcoming business owners, tribal leaders, Native-owned businesses, and nonprofits. Indigenous musicians, performers, and dancers showcased their talents. IndigiFest also featured a fashion show featuring Choke Cherry Creek's Angela Howe Parrish, music by award winning band, Counting Coup, and Montana Native Comedian "Krazy" Kasey Nicholson.

**Visit**  
**[www.worc.org](http://www.worc.org)**  
**for more**  
**information on**  
**what's happening**  
**in our network**





# 2022 Impacts

A look back at our collective achievements

A network provides stability

**\$1,675,000**

2022 Pass-through funding

**\$8,000,000**

Pass-through from 2018-2022



**1281.75**  
hours of member  
group consulting

## Internal Fundraising

Responses to  
email asks up **50%**

Amount given  
by monthly  
sustainers up **10%**

Donor base up **8%**

## Community engagement



**342** Press hits  
**984 Million** Potential reach



**330** Tweets  
**72,918** Impressions  
**330** Mentions by allies



**37** Emails sent  
**2,583** Call-to-action clicks

## Grassroots Democracy



**77**  
Candidates  
endorsed



**\$686,091**  
Spent to elect candidates



Radio Spots  
**7393**



Field  
attempts  
**29,193**



Newspaper ads  
**178**



Digital ad impressions  
**3,283,165**



WORC operates in an interconnected world, and organizes in a way that brings people together to work across issue areas to create a better West

## Interconnected issues

WORC organized the M-COOL week of action, coordinating phone banks that made 414 calls, resulting in 122 members making calls to Senators and sending Gilles Stockton to testify before the House Ag Committee.



Through our participation on the Steering Committee of the Rural Power Coalition, WORC secured new pass-through funding to support the work of five of the member groups' on rural electric cooperative reform.

Started a campaign team to address the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons epidemic centered on the implementation of Savanna's act at the Department of Justice.



Won historic reforms to the federal leasing system, including increasing the onshore royalty rate and establishing a meaningful price on excess methane pollution.

WORC network and Appalachian allies won an extension of the Abandoned Mine Land fee getting over \$11B toward abandoned land cleanup and a permanent extension of the Black Lung excise tax.



## Multi-year campaign win - IRA

Several provisions of the Inflation Reduction Act represented the culmination of decade-long campaigns, with some text the direct result of our member's advocacy.

**\$369 Billion** for energy and climate change projects  
**\$12.8 Billion** to help rural communities invest in clean energy  
**\$440 Million** to tribal communities for electrification, energy development and climate resilience



## Recent network milestones

**Powder River Basin Resource Council**  
(50th Anniversary)

**Northern Plains Resource Council**  
(50th Anniversary)

**Dakota Rural Action**  
(45th Anniversary)

**Western Colorado Alliance**  
(40th Anniversary)

**Western Native Voice**  
(10th Anniversary)

**Oregon Rural Action**  
(20th Anniversary)

**Idaho Organization of Resource Councils**  
(10th Anniversary)

**North Dakota Native Vote**  
(5th Anniversary)

**Nebraska Organizing Project**  
(Organizing committee established)





# Just Label It!

## American Beef Labeling Act

For decades, grassroots leaders, ranchers, and consumers have fought for country of origin labeling (COOL) of beef. We already have identical requirements for other similar products such as chicken or lamb, and this common-sense policy is wildly popular. In a 2013 survey by Consumer Federation of America 90% of respondents supported COOL for beef. So why are we still fighting for it?

COOL legislation was introduced in congress in 2002 and eventually passed in 2008. Almost immediately, Canada and Mexico sued the United States in the World Trade Organization's Dispute Settlement Body. After several amendments and negotiations, the WTO, Canada and Mexico remained unsatisfied and threatened the US with \$1.1 Billion in retaliatory tariffs. And in 2015 the Senate voted to repeal COOL.

But members from across the West know that COOL is good for consumers and producers, our water and grasslands, and for the livelihoods of those of us at home and exploited workers overseas. So, we kept fighting.

Earlier this year, Senators John Thune (ND) and Jon Tester (MT) introduced The American Beef Labeling Act (ABLA). This bipartisan bill has been gathering equal support from Republicans and Democrats, and WORC has been hard at work ensuring that our delegations know about ABLA and will support it fully. Northern Plains member leader Gilles Stockton came to DC this spring and met with staff from Senator Tester's office and Rep. Matt Rosendale to discuss this legislation. The Livestock Competition Team coordinated an MCOOL Week of action where volunteers called fellow members to encourage them to call their Senators' offices and ask them to co-sponsor the bill. At time of publication ABLA sports 10 Senate co-sponsors.

Thune (R) SD	Hoeven (R) ND
Tester (D) MT	Lujan (D) NM
Rounds (R) SD	Lummis (R) WY
Booker (D) NJ	Heinrich (D) NM
Barrasso (R) WY	Gillibrand (D) NY

Despite these efforts, and its strong bipartisan support, ABLA has yet to have a hearing in committee. And with the 117th Congress rapidly coming to a close, it is most likely that ABLA will need to be reintroduced in the 118th congress. Signs in the press and conversations with members of Congress point to that ABLA will become part of the 2023 Farm Bill.

WORC's DC staff will continue to monitor the situation. Although S.2716 did not become law this year, it appears that there's a growing appetite to address the plethora of challenges facing ranchers and our rural communities. Attached to a large "must pass" package such as the farm bill, there is a distinct possibility that mandatory country of origin labeling is on the horizon.

## TAKE ACTION!

Call 202-224-3121 to be connected to your Senator and urge them to cosponsor the American Beef Labeling Act.

More information is available at [www.worc.org/take-action/](http://www.worc.org/take-action/)



According to the U.S. Food Sovereignty Alliance, “The 2022 honorees have fought for years against corporate control of the food system, defending sustainable farming and pasturing, healthy soils, and clean water, building community power, and advocating clean, renewable energy sources.”

Based in the United States, the U.S. Food Sovereignty Alliance is a network that includes food justice, anti-hunger, labor, environmental, faith-based and food producer groups. They believe all people have the right to healthy, culturally appropriate food, produced in an ecologically sound manner. The alliance works to end poverty, rebuild local food economies, and assert democratic control over the food system as well as “connect our local and national struggles to the international movement for food sovereignty.”

The award was presented at a virtual ceremony emceed by Malik Yakini of the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network and included representatives from both Food Sovereignty Ghana and WORC speaking about their successes and challenges promoting Food Sovereignty.

Thank you for  
helping make  
2022 a success!



## Tackling “Fuel Poverty”

Americans are struggling to make ends meet. Inflation is at a 41-year high, gas and food prices are through the roof, and wage growth, although encouraging, is lagging far behind inflation. People in low-income and marginalized communities are especially hard hit.

One critical result is an increasing number of Americans who are facing “fuel poverty” – the inability to afford to heat or cool their homes.

Fuel poverty is caused by a convergence of three factors:

- low-income, which is often linked to poverty,
- high fuel prices, including the use of relatively expensive fuel sources like natural gas, and
- poor energy efficiency of a home through old or inefficient heating and cooling systems, inadequate insulation and weather stripping, etc.

Recognizing this problem, the WORC Clean & Renewable Energy Team set a goal of making solar energy more accessible and affordable for low-income Americans, which should reduce their energy costs and create a long-lasting solution to “fuel poverty.”

After a year of gathering grassroots input from our members, holding meetings with state and federal agency officials, and conducting other strategic research, the team decided that we’re going to organize around two principal federal energy programs that assist low-income Americans in addressing their energy burdens.

The Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) is a federally funded program under the U.S. Department of Energy. It reduces energy costs for low-income households by increasing the energy efficiency of their homes.

The Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) is a federally funded program under the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. LIHEAP helps low income households with their home energy bills.

Readers of the *Western Organizing Review* know that dealing with the federal bureaucracy is always a challenge, and because the WAP and LIHEAP programs are administered at the state level, that adds another layer of complexity.

Nonetheless, the WORC Clean Renewable Energy Team is forging ahead with a campaign to incorporate solar air heat and rooftop solar systems into the WAP and/or LIHEAP programs. The team has identified a number of policy recommendations that would reduce energy costs for families and create good-paying jobs in rural communities, and is planning a multi-state action for later this year.

Finally, the Clean Renewable Energy Team recognizes the folly of putting all its cards on a federal strategy, and that opportunities for people to join together and have a voice in decisions that affect their lives are often greater at the local and state level. WORC’s member groups are filling this gap by running a bevy of innovative and creative campaigns designed to shift their communities and states from an energy mix based on fossil fuels to one based on renewable energy sources.



## Looking for your dream job?

Visit [www.worc.org/who-we-are/career-opportunities/](http://www.worc.org/who-we-are/career-opportunities/) for job announcements and to see career opportunities available throughout the WORC network



# Members Weigh in on The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)

**O**n July 27th, 2022, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and Senator Joe Manchin announced an agreement on a new budget reconciliation agreement entitled the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) of 2022. The IRA passed the U.S. House on a party-line vote and became law in an elaborate signing ceremony on August 16th, 2022. This package contains historic investments to combat climate change and build America's clean energy economy. "The new clean energy programs and funding in the IRA will provide much needed relief to rural communities in South Dakota," said Rick Bell, a Dakota Rural Action member leader.

Westerners from the Great Plains to the Pacific Coast are glad that this package includes programs that will reduce carbon emissions, make communities more resilient to climate disasters, increase taxpayer returns from onshore oil and gas leasing, help ensure timely remediation of new wells, and speed up the renewable energy transition. The bill would invest \$369 billion in funding for energy and climate change projects including:

- Extending renewable energy tax credits until 2025, and establishing new credits for all zero-carbon power generation from 2025-32. The bill also expands the current credits to allow use by rural electric cooperatives, state and local government agencies and other tax exempt entities, and provides larger credits for projects in low-income communities and communities historically dependent on fossil fuels.
- Providing \$12.8 billion to help rural communities invest in clean energy, including \$9.7 billion for rural utilities to enhance the long-term resiliency, reliability, and affordability of rural electric systems.
- Allocating \$440 million to tribal communities for electrification, energy development and climate resilience.
- Improving the onshore oil and gas program by increasing minimum bonds, rental rates, and royalties.

"A benefit of this bill is that it would create direct incentives for co-ops to bolster our investments in grid modernization, renewables, battery storage and other energy technologies," Bell said. "The IRA would also make critical investments in energy security and it develops cost savings

and job-creating clean energy solutions for the future of all our communities—both rural and urban."

Unfortunately for Westerners, it's smaller than the Build Back Better Act passed by the House last year and includes a number of problematic provisions that encourage continuation of fossil fuel production that would exacerbate climate change.

"We are extremely concerned about a requirement to make unspecified changes to permitting that would undermine the National Environmental Policy Act," said Barbara Vasquez, a leader from Cowdrey, Colorado. "And we find it truly perverse to make clean and renewable energy development subservient to a guaranteed level of future oil and gas leasing."

A few of the provisions that concern Western leaders, include:

- Provisions that tie the fate of renewable energy development on federal lands and waters to continued leasing of federal oil and gas, propping up an industry that pollutes water and air, and exacerbating the climate crisis.
- Inclusion of carbon capture as eligible use of funds for energy development projects
- A promise by Senator Schumer to take future action on an undefined permitting reform bill which would severely restrict public involvement in the permitting process.

On balance, the deal appears to have more benefits than drawbacks for the rural West. Vasquez pointed out a few provisions that address oil and gas issues that WORC groups have been working on for years. "The Western Organization of Resource Councils is encouraged that the Inflation Reduction Act holds promising proposals to make long-overdue improvements to our country's oil and gas program, including increasing bonding levels, royalty rates, and discouraging wasteful practices that release harmful methane into the air," she said.



## WORC Members in DC to testify on multiple issues

Things feel like they're getting to a "new normal" in Washington D.C. Conferences, lobbyist happy hours, school trips, and, most excitingly, WORC fly-ins are back. This year, WORC hosted three fly-ins with WNV, Northern Plains, and WCA featuring in-person meetings with members of Congress, agency directors, and staff.

Ronnie Jo Horse, Ta'jin Perez, and Keaton Sunchild of Western Native Voice traveled to D.C. in March for the Nonprofit Alliance Leadership Summit. They arrived a day early for meetings on the Hill. The first was with Rani Williams, Kansas Representative Sharice Davids' Legislative Assistant to discuss the Native American Voting Rights Act and the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act. They then met with Montana Senator, Jon Tester and Montana Senator Steve Daines' Legislative Correspondent, Kirstin Liddell, to talk about voting rights and the implementation of Savanna's Act.

On Thursday the same week, Northern Plains member and Montana rancher, Gilles Stockton, flew to Washington for a series of meetings. Gilles met with Members of the House Agriculture Committee Staff about the April cattle market competition hearing. The House staff members were particularly interested in knowing how "the money moves through the system" and how prices get set. They spoke with USDA Senior Advisory Staff on the upcoming rulemaking process for the Packers and Stockyards Act and the WORC Rule. They also met with Thomas Culver, Jon Tester's Legislative Assistant, to discuss Mandatory Country of Origin Labeling and the Cattle Price Discovery and Transparency Act of 2021.



*Ta'jin Perez, WNV staff, Ronnie Jo Horse, WNV Executive Director, Senator John Tester (MT), Keaton Sunchild, WNV staff, and Sara Kendall, WORC Interim Executive Director talk about voting rights and the implementation of Savanna's Act.*

Gilles Stockton was chosen to testify for the Cattle Market Competition hearing in April, so a few weeks later, he was back on a plane to D.C. with Northern Plains Legislative Organizer, Caroline Canarios. He testified before Congress and then conducted more livestock competition meetings. After the hearing, Gilles and Caroline met with Senate Agriculture Staff where they discussed the Cattle Price Discovery and Transparency Act, which had its first hearing on April 26th. They also briefed the White House Competition and Livestock Staff on the administration's role in moving a Packers and Stockyards Act rulemaking and met with Montana Representative Matt Rosendale on mandatory Country of Origin Labeling.

In November, Western Colorado Alliance member, Barbara Vasquez and Northern Plains member, Edward Barta, flew in to D.C. to urge the Bureau of Land Management to initiate a rule-making that would strengthen oil and gas bonding rules for federal minerals. They met with



*Michael Nelson, WORC staff, Rep. Matt Rosendale (MT), Gilles Stockton, NPRC Member, and Caroline Canarios, NPRC staff in DC to discuss the Cattle Price Discovery and Transparency Act.*





*Edward Barta and Barbara Vasquez in DC to urge the BLM to strengthen oil and gas bonding rules.*

BLM Director, Tracy Stone-Manning, to express their concerns regarding federal bonding rules and explained the need for these rules to be updated quickly to ensure they remain in place through future administrations. Federal bonding rules have not been updated in over 60 years, allowing oil and gas companies to get away with not cleaning up their inactive, orphaned, and abandoned wells and leaving taxpayers with the brunt of the clean up and costs. They also had the chance to meet with staffers from both the House Natural Resources Committee and the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee to discuss opportunities to work together to push forward bonding reform.

Barbara also met up with Representative DeGette's Climate Change and Environment Policy Director, Dr. Nikki Roy, to discuss ways to move forward environmental policy in Colorado and the federal level.

For almost two years, it was unthinkable to ask for a meeting outside of cyberspace, but as federal offices open up, WORC is taking advantage of the opportunity to get our members in front of decision-makers to ensure Western voices are heard.

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## Supreme Court Ruling Limits Agencies on Climate and More

On June 30th, 2022, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled in *West Virginia v. EPA* that "Congress did not grant the Environmental Protection Agency in Section 111(d) of the Clean Air Act the authority to devise emissions caps based on the generation-shifting approach the Agency took in the Clean Power Plan." As stated in our blog post, "Supreme Court Decision Could Have Far-Reaching Consequences for Healthy Communities and Environment" (March 17, 2022), a ruling such as *EPA v. WV* embraces the "Major Questions Doctrine". This is a legal theory that states that Congress must provide specific regulatory authority to an implementing agency concerning far reaching economic and political issues. As a result, *EPA v. WV* weakened EPA's authority to regulate emissions on a systems-wide level (also known as "outside the [power plant] fence"), however the agency retains its authority to regulate individual sites ("inside the [power plant] fence"). The EPA and the Administration at large can still promulgate stricter rules for mercury waste, gas power plants, vehicle emissions standards and more. *EPA v. WV* is but one battle in a long fight for a clean and renewable energy future.

Going forward, we can expect that climate champions in Congress and the Biden administration will continue to put forward legislative proposals and executive actions to bolster the EPA's authority to regulate greenhouse gas emissions.

However, in Congress, without a pro-climate supermajority, and with Senators Manchin and Sinema unwilling to change the rules of the filibuster, most legislative proposals will continue to be a nonstarter. In the administration, the pressure to enact transformative policies that meet climate targets while also being able to withstand legal challenges may slow down or alter current rulemaking processes, like the EPA's proposed methane regulations.

It is likely that *EPA v. WV* will spark more legal challenges to Biden administration rulemakings far beyond new rules to limit greenhouse gas emissions. The plaintiffs of *EPA v. WV* alleged economic harm from the "Clean Power Plan," an Obama-era climate regulatory framework which never came to fruition. No doubt an adversarial judiciary and constant legal attacks weigh heavily on the President and agency staff.

WORC's campaign teams will continue to fight for methane emissions standards, strong onshore OG rules and expansion of the national clean and renewable energy standard. As the new balance of federal administrative authority is worked out in the courts, state-level action will be increasingly important. As most federal regulations set a floor not a ceiling, local governments and states can often be more ambitious.

*(Continued on page 15)*

# A Small-Scale Meat Processor's Success Story

Even before Lemmonmade Butcher opened in January of 2019, the small-scale processor had three months worth of work lined up and has continued to operate at capacity since. Lemmonmade, named after its roots in Lemmon, South Dakota, has been extremely successful considering corporate consolidation has put 40% of small-scale processors out of business since the 1980s.

Carl Kimmerle's voice echoes throughout Lemmonmade. He knows the names of nearly every person walking through his storefront to buy locally raised meat products. Carl is the owner and operator of Lemmonmade Butcher but his demeanor amongst his staff makes him feel like another member of the crew. Many of his staff have been with him since he opened, which has solved one of the many challenges of starting a processing plant, as it typically takes nearly two years before meat processing employees are able to work completely independent.

Carl knew that farming and agriculture held the key to the lifestyle he and his family were looking for. He also knew that because of the start-up costs and the decreasing payout for ranchers and farmers, there are very few first-generation farmers in the United States. Carl grew up in southern Utah, near a cattle ranching community, but was not born into a farming family. "I was in college when a professor asked me what I would do with my time if I had all the money in the world?" The answer was easy for Carl: agriculture. "I love growing things. I love creating something out of nothing, which is what farmers do. They take nothing and turn it into everything," explained Carl. When he did the math, he figured he could possibly make his mortgage payments if they raised beef and sold it by the pound, but there was no processing capacity in that area of South Dakota. The bottleneck in the

meat packing and processing industry provided him the opportunity to start a business that may later allow him to live out his dreams of farming.

During this time, the COVID-19 pandemic revealed the flaws in the consolidated meatpacking system. Many people began turning towards local food, which proved to be more resilient during the crisis. In turn, a shortage of small-scale processing plants made it difficult for small farms to keep up with demand.

To understand why the success of Lemmonmade is so unique, it's important to look at what makes becoming a small-to-mid-scale processor so difficult. Most of the challenges come from federal regulations and the costs required to meet those regulations. "For the most part, there's really only four companies who can comply with the outrageous terms of the federal government," explained Carl. Most large-scale plants wouldn't bat an eye at costs that would bankrupt smaller scale operations. "Foodborne illness cases from red meat are almost statistically non-existent but the federal government has created a regulatory burden that most small-scale operations can't afford to meet," said Carl.

Building a processing plant with the capacity to process 20 cattle a week costs between 2 and 3 million dollars, according to USDA standards. Getting started is only half the battle of building and operating a new processing business. Smaller



*Carl Kimmerle laughs with his employees while preparing sausages*





operations have to face the fact that they are considerably less efficient than larger-scale plants, which in-turn means charging a higher cost for the service.

Another key component to Lemmonmade's success was understanding the demographics of the area where Carl wanted to establish his shop, and the type of clients he wanted to serve. The majority of people that Lemmonmade serves are bringing a cow or two a year to be processed for their family and friends to eat. "That's our bread and butter, that's our favorite clientele, our favorite customers. And then we get quite a few people who sell quarters and halves of beef," explained Carl. Most small-scale farmers have extreme difficulties getting dates at large-scale processors, especially those only bringing ten cows or fewer per year to slaughter. If they happen to luck out and get a date for processing, most farmers are driving hours upon hours to get to the site of these larger-scale plants. Building more small-scale processing plants opens the door for more options for local farmers to sell their products. This can contribute to smaller

carbon footprints within the food system, keeping the whole process local.

Carl holds no animosity towards the reality that most farmers have to work with the big meatpackers. "They're doing that because that's what the consumer has demanded," said Carl, "but the reality is that a lot of those marketing gimmicks are frustrating." With 99% of pork on the market coming from confinement lots, it becomes more and more difficult for consumers to connect with local producers. "By going to your local butcher, your butcher can put you in contact with your local farmer who is raising the kind of meat you're looking for. I get people in here all of the time asking for recommendations," said Carl. Those close-knit community relationships foster a greater sense of food security and food safety, because you know exactly where your food is coming from. Carl hopes the continued success of his shop will provide him the resources to pick back up his dream of running his own small farm with his family. Until then, Lemmonmade Butcher continues to strengthen its key relationships with local producers, keeping the food system at home in Lemmon, South Dakota.

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*(Supreme Court Continued from page 13)*

The EPA case is one in a series of decisions including *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, which overturned 50 years of precedent established in *Roe vs. Wade*, *NY State Rifle & Pistol Association Inc. v. Bruen*, which limits states' ability to enact gun control, *Kennedy v. Bremerton School District*, weakening of the separation of church and state, and *Oklahoma v. Castro-Huerta*, overturning a 200-year precedent recognizing the rights of Indigenous nations to self governance without interference from the states. These decisions mark a distinctly conservative pattern of decision making which we can expect for the foreseeable future from the Court. This fall the Court will rule on *Brakeen v. Haaland*, which could overturn or weaken the Indian Child Welfare Act, further undermining Indigenous sovereignty and tribal rights.



Over the long term, the network will likely have to grapple with this new judicial reality. This may look like educating staff and members on the role of the judiciary and, for groups that do electoral work, participating in local judicial elections, and raising the importance of judicial nominations in Senate campaigns. DC WORC staff will continue to monitor Supreme Court and district court activities on the issues our members care most about, and stand ready to support member groups and campaign teams in developing strategies to advance our collective priorities.

# Farmers are an Aging Population, One Young Farmer has a Vision for



For years, Patrick Certain has imagined a gathering space for friends and family, where children in the community could come to learn where their food comes from, where all could join in a shared meal harvested from his garden. His farm would come to be called Stone Soup Garden, which began to take form in spring of 2021. About a dozen or so of Patrick's friends and colleagues gathered on a pasture to construct a greenhouse, each taking position to battle the wind for control of the plastic cover. "It's a community effort," explained Patrick. The ground was freshly thawed and the smell of wet leaves carried across the open field that would be transformed over a few weeks' time into a half acre garden. Warm coffee in a thermos was passed around during breaks, while friends and acquaintances shared stories and laughter over dirt-covered palms. Patrick has the kind of friends that show up, rain or shine, and expect nothing in return, but every time walk away with arms full of whatever produce is ready.

Young and beginning farmers face a behemoth of uphill battles when starting out. Capital, land, a client base, equipment, climate, and weather are just a few of the things standing between young people and a dream to provide fresh, local produce to their communities for a living. The average value of an acre of farmland in the U.S. has increased 160% since 2002.



*Patrick Certain and his partner, Claire Overholt, begin planting for the 2022 growing season at Stone Soup Garden.*

For nearly a decade, Patrick worked and apprenticed with other farms in the area, learning from each experience, until he found land. "One challenge is finding a landowner who is willing to work with your crazy ideas," said Patrick. Stone Soup found its roots just outside of Laurel, Montana, on leased land. "In a place like Montana where I feel there is more wide open space than anywhere, it's still extremely hard to find land. And it's expensive," explained Patrick. This dilemma is echoed nationwide: National Young Farmers Coalition found that access to land is the number one challenge new farmers and ranchers face.

In combination with his savings account, a Kickstarter fundraiser, and a loan from an angel investor who is passionate about sustainable agriculture, Patrick was able to get the funds for the equipment and start-up costs. One of the incentives for his Kickstarter campaign was a share of Stone Soup's CSA. A CSA is a community-shared agriculture program that allows consumers to buy a "share" of a farm at the start of the season and then receive weekly or bi-weekly boxes of whatever is ready from the garden. Patrick's hope for the future is to combine sales from a CSA, farmers markets, and selling through Billings' Yellowstone Valley Food Hub, a farmer-run co-op started by Northern Plains Resource Council (NPRC). Patrick is a member of Northern Plains and was involved in the incubation and organizing effort to launch the Food Hub. "Northern Plains and Stone Soup share the ethos of better outcomes through community engagement," explained Patrick. "Working with Northern Plains has illustrated time and time again the power of collective action. I'm inspired to let the farm serve as a gathering space for fellow farmers, ranchers, and Montanans of all stripes to share ideas, struggles, inspiration, a meal, and hopefully build a more resilient food shed for south-central Montana."

This first rendition of Stone Soup Garden is a bit of an experimental endeavor for Patrick. His plan is to take his years of experience from other farms, his connections to people in the community that have specific knowledge with compost and soil, and the community that backed him on Kickstarter to trial run the land. One day, Patrick also hopes to partner with NPRC to host a soil crawl at his farm. A soil crawl is an educational event where farmers and ranchers from around the area gather to learn about the soil health and stewardship practices on other farms, exchanging information and experiences with one another. "Once you strike out on your own, you need to be able to laugh at how inefficiently you're going to end up doing things. If you work for a farmer that's been doing it for 40 years, they've had 40 years to make



a bunch of mistakes and learn from them,” explained Patrick. “I expect that it will be several years before I turn any sort of profit.” Patrick still works a job at the Stillwater Mine and plans to do so until his farm is able to support him full-time. According to the U.S. Census of Agriculture, over 52 percent of farmers have a primary occupation other than farming.

Since the 1980’s, the corporate consolidation of farms has resulted in higher than ever prices at grocery stores, while ranchers and farmers get paid smaller and smaller percentages of the profits. Consolidation has not only put 40 percent of family farms out of business since the 80’s but it has caused more challenges for young people born into farming families, often pushing them to leave the farm and seek work elsewhere, leaving industrial agriculture monopolies to take over their markets. Land access, high equipment costs, razor-thin margins, and other challenges that beginning and young farmers face means that older farmers are working later and later.

Patrick attended Montana State University in Bozeman for a degree in Sustainable Foods and Bioenergy Systems, where he decided he wanted to advocate for farming by doing. Even in a community of people who were studying the field of farming and agriculture, Patrick found that he was met with apprehension. Many students in the program had ambitions of working in the non-profit sector, community nutrition, or another specialization: “There was almost this attitude from some other classmates of ‘oh you just want to be a farmer?’ It didn’t sit right with me. We were being told in our classes that farmers are an aging population and that we needed more of them,” said Patrick. The average age of farmers in the United States is 58 and has been steadily increasing. Only 25 percent of farmers today are below the age of 35.

With most of his family still living in Montana, Patrick knew he wanted to start his farm in the area and saw that Billings had a need for more local producers. “Are you sure you want to do this? Farming is hard,” is a sentiment that has followed Patrick all throughout his journey but hasn’t deterred him. “I enjoy mingling with other folks at the farmers market who are facing the same challenges as me, whether that be pests, wind, or drought. We help each other through those



*Patrick Certain harvests garlic scapes from his garden that he sold through the Yellowstone Valley Food Hub.*

adversities,” said Patrick. A week after his first greenhouse went up, wind took it down. During a summer drought, despite an agricultural use-only moratorium, the irrigation ditch that supplies the farm went dry. From salt in the soil to pests eating the crops and more, farming is indeed hard; but for Patrick Certain, his vision for a place to bring people together for the love of good food makes it all worth it.

For Patrick’s vision, it can’t end with Stone Soup Garden. “It’s a rising tide. More farms beget more farms, which beget more consumers for local food,” said Patrick, “It creates a snowball effect and I invite more people to it, because I think it’ll serve us all to have a larger market that we can collectively provide for.” His dream for a hyper-local market would have a smaller carbon footprint, and benefit his neighbors rather than large-scale industrial agriculture monopolies. It looks like a community of farmers who can share equipment and intellectual property alike, and make bulk orders on seeds, soil amendments, and compost. “We need to make it easier for the consumer to reach over at the grocery store and pick the local option,” explained Patrick. “We can get there through a larger local market.”



Our *Homegrown Stories* narrative project aims to elevate people who do incredible work in our food system. By sharing their stories, we hope to tell the whole truth about American agriculture.

For more information and to read more inspiring stories visit [www.homegrownstories.org](http://www.homegrownstories.org).

# 2022 Midterms: pushing back against the red wave

The recent midterm election resulted in rural and small-town voters choosing leaders who would defend their rights and help them access healthcare and quality jobs, bring down costs, and protect clean air and water. The efforts of groups in our network, who engaged thousands of voters, worked in strong coalition, and developed new leaders to mobilize their communities - mean more families have access to what they need for a thriving future.

Our staff and leaders ran impressively robust, strategic, and effective programs and are proud of their impact during this year's midterm elections. North Dakota Native Vote and North Dakota Rural Voters helped elect Lisa Finley DeVille, a longtime WORC leader who is a founding member of the Protectors of Water and Earth Rights (POWER), to the North Dakota Legislature. Montana Rural Voters Action Fund ran a statewide campaign, alongside coalition partners, to protect Ingrid Gustafson's seat on the Montana Supreme Court in order to maintain a fair and impartial bench. Colorado Rural Voters worked to engage infrequent Indigenous and Latina voters across the Western Slope and won seven of eight priority races. Western Native Voice Action Fund successfully helped reelect all but one Indigenous legislator in Montana.

Our work in 2022 proved again that all hope is not lost in rural communities and when you demonstrate the change that touches people's lives and really listen to voters, they can be persuaded to break apart from national culture wars. We were also reminded that in order to win in rural communities, we must have strong candidates that have deep ties to their communities and are running on the values and issues they share with their communities. One example of this was Paul Tuss, a Democrat running in Havre, Montana, who won with 55% of the vote in a district that overwhelmingly supported Trump in 2020. Paul has spent decades working to help small businesses as the Executive Director of Bear Paw Development Corporation and an officer with the Havre Area Chamber of Commerce. This experience and his relationships mattered when his name

was on the ballot. We also saw that Indigenous candidates representing rural, tribal communities were elected almost across the board, demonstrating again the importance of strong community leaders with a base running for office.

We've seen that through years of consistent investment, we are starting to move the needle and hold off deep red waves in some places, but in order to continue to fight back, we must organize alongside our communities year in and year out. There is still hope for the future in our region, in many places our candidates lost by under 100 votes and with continued investment and year-round work, we will get more of our leaders elected to advocate for our communities.



NEWS

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# A Win in North Dakota for Native Representation, but Still a Long Way To Go

**N**orth Dakota keeps it original when it comes to its election laws and systems and usually not in a positive way. North Dakota is the only state in the country that does not have any form of voter registration and is one of only ten states that has at-large legislative districts. They were most recently recognized nationally when Native American voters appealed a voter ID law to the United States Supreme Court ahead of the 2018 election.

Native Americans have faced generations of voter suppression. Even though Native Americans were granted citizenship in 1924 it took over thirty years before they had the right to vote in every state. And continuing to this day, many face unnecessary, unequal challenges to access the ballot. For example, similar to other rural counties, Sioux County which is 1128 square miles and encompasses the Standing Rock Nation, only has one polling location making distances to the polls egregious. Native communities also often have lower levels of broadband connectivity and face language barriers when trying to vote. The National Congress of American Indians reported that Native Americans have the lowest voter turnout in the country.

North Dakota currently only has 3 of 141 state elected officials that identify as Native American and with the conclusion of the 2020 Census and redistricting on the horizon, Native groups began to organize to change this. Redistricting happens once every ten years and in North Dakota remapping is led by the legislature. North Dakota Native Vote worked alongside the Native American Rights Fund and Tribal Nations to tirelessly advocate at the legislature for Native-majority single-member districts which would allow Native voters a much greater chance of electing their candidate of choice instead of being outvoted by the non-Native neighbors.

In an unprecedented move, the legislature approved a map that included Native-majority single-member districts, also known as split districts, for the Fort Berthold Nation, District 4a, and the Turtle Mountain Nation, District 9a. While this is a huge step in the right direction, Spirit Lake Nation and Standing Rock Nation are suing because the legislature claimed they did not have a high enough population to warrant a split district for their nations. At the same time, the Turtle Mountain Nation has filed a lawsuit against the state because before the sub-districts, their tribe was already populous enough to elect Native legislators to both at-large house districts. But now tribal members are concentrated into one sub-district leaving District 9b vulnerable and reducing the Turtle Mountain communities' voting power. These moves are often referred to as "packing and cracking."

In response to the new Native-majority legislative districts and continued Native civic organizing, North Dakota had seven Native candidates, a record number, running for the state legislature this year. North Dakota Native Vote organized on the ground across the state to get as many of these candidates elected as possible in hopes to double Native representation at the state level. They had field organizers on each Tribal nation that are rooted in their community that worked to host community events and talk with as many people as possible about the election and the power of the Native vote.

All in all, there is still a lot of work to be done to create an election system in which everyone has equal access to participate. The new slate of candidates shows that organizing around equal access can have big impacts.



*Nicole Donaghy, North Dakota Native Vote Director and Verlin Ireland after voting in Standing Rock..*

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