



How Clean IS Your Well Water?

with Tami Quinn Hollenbeck

Ever consider what might have gotten into your drinking water? Is your well head surrounded by dirt, or in a little building outside where your pet raccoon or rat has made it's home?

Often your well is out of sight and out of mind. Just because you turn the faucet on and water comes out doesn't mean you are fine.

Take a walk out to the well where the casing comes up out of the ground and look around. Is there insulation falling around the top of the well, spiders, ants, frogs, or mouse droppings? If this stuff is around the top of your casing then, **EWV**, because there is always a chance that it can get into the well & contaminate your water source.

When you get back to the house and can think again - give you favorite Water Well Pump and Filtration Service a call and ask about getting your water tested. It just might be time to ensure that you have safe clean drinking water for your family.

Water is a geological cocktail, so DRINK MORE WATER!



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Pulling together: Is this the moment when Applegate farmers and food producers join forces?

BY CHRISTINA AMMON

On November 7, Applegate farmers and food producers gathered at the scenic event venue, Vista 222. The occasion was a working group meet-up organized by A Greater Applegate (AGA) and the Rogue Valley Food System Network (RVFSN). The timing was right and turnout was good; with the fields nipped by season-ending frost, there was time to put down the shovels and seeds and focus on flip charts and strategy.

Their goal? To breathe life into some of the food- and farm-related ideas outlined in the recently released Applegate Valley Vision Plan. The vision plan is a product of the dozens of listening sessions conducted by AGA over the past three years. Increasing connectivity between farms and consumers was high on the list of priorities identified in the sessions.

"We are homing in on action," announced Megan Fehrman, co-executive director of AGA.

This was the third Food and Farming meeting, with the first two focusing on listening and prioritizing. The question of the night was, "What can we do to maintain and enhance local agricultural food systems?"

Fresh energy and seasoned wisdom...

New arrivals, like Alec Lowe and Alexandria Love Schmidt, from Earth Karma Land Sustainability and Rusty Bucket Gardens, joined long-established farmers, like Don Tipping from Siskiyou Seeds and Maud Powell from Wolf Gulch, at the meeting.

"Some of us have been having these conversations for decades," Megan said.

"It could be tempting to get jaded," said Maud Powell. But despite being part of similar efforts in the past that had mixed results, she sees cause for hope. "Having a strong organization like

AGA tackling these issues is the biggest difference. They clearly have the experience in food systems, rural development, fundraising, and project management."

What could we do?

The attendees sorted themselves among tables flanked by flip charts headed by different topics:

increasing support for farmers markets, increasing local purchasing, improving land and water management, building relationships between producers and consumers, and increasing food system infrastructure. Written in bold on each chart: "What could we do?"

At one table, Sara Marie Hamilton, the Applegate Valley Food and Farm outreach coordinator, led a discussion on how to connect producers and consumers.

Cassandra Olson, a real estate agent from Grants Pass, recalled moving to the valley and being unable to find information about where to buy local food; she ended up at the grocery store. This experience highlighted for her the need for a central communication system in the valley.

Lale Yasemin Kaya, from Suncatcher Food Forest, mentioned the need for consumer education. She noted that buyers can become disgruntled by local food prices. "They don't know how much goes into producing one pumpkin, or how hard it is to grow lettuce in the heat of summer," she explains.

At another table, AGA Co-Executive Director Seth Kaplan led a discussion on farmers' markets. The three markets currently in the valley struggle to maintain consistent customers and vendors. One idea that came up was to offer financial incentives to vendors who sign up for all three markets. Someone also mentioned



"We're homing in on action," says AGA Co-Executive Director Megan Fehrman. Photo: Christina Ammon.

a need for on-site cold storage so farmers could drop their produce off at the market on their own schedule.

Overcoming distance...

No matter the topic, common themes emerged: the problem of distance—farms are often miles apart with geographic barriers between them—and a lack of cohesion in the digital realm. Could there be a website or app to centralize all the farm information? Another problem was how to psychologically unify the Applegate. How could the valley build a brand identity to attract consumers?

Commenting on the many ideas that emerged throughout the evening, Don Tipping said, "I could easily say (about a lot of what we discussed), 'We tried that and it didn't work.' That doesn't mean it's not a good idea, though. We just didn't have the social landscape that was receptive to it. Part of the rural terroir is that relationality is important," he went on. "When you went to the Pennington Farms booth at the farmers market, you saw Cathy and her daughters—that was the draw. It was an authentic family farm experience. It was having an experience with a side of strawberries."

But overall, he was excited: "I just texted two friends," he said, "and told them they should have been here."

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INCENSE-CEDARS

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genus *Cedrus*, are native only to the Mediterranean and Himalayan regions of the world. Incense-cedar grows in montane forests from Oregon south through California to northern Baja California, Mexico, and east to western Nevada. It is an important component of mixed conifer forests in our region, and it can grow on a wide variety of soil types, including serpentine.

This species is very drought tolerant. It can close its stomata to control water, and it can live in areas that receive as little as 15 inches of rain a year. Incense-cedar is a very tough tree and can live to be more than 500 years old.

The **Studhorse Tree** is quite possibly the largest incense-cedar in the world, and it grows right here in the Applegate watershed! This gargantuan tree grows above Studhorse Creek, a tributary of Elliott Creek, in the Upper Applegate, in a very remote, off-trail location. The enormity of this tree was identified in 1947, but the tree was officially measured by Oliver Matthews in 1954 and declared the largest-diameter incense-cedar in the world. This enormous old tree was later determined to be—or thought to be—two trees that fused at the base, rather than one stand-alone tree. This disqualified it from the official champion-tree register, but it does not take away any of its grandeur. Measuring nearly 13 feet in diameter at breast height (DBH), the tree towers to



The O'Connell Creek Tree is now the third largest in the state of Oregon.

Photo: Suzie Savoie.

over 140 feet. Presently, at least one website devoted to documenting the largest trees in the world, monumentaltrees.com, lists the Studhorse Tree as the champion. This healthy old tree grows vigorously in a small, moist forest opening, at an elevation of around 5,000 feet with rich soil, plenty of moisture, and space to keep growing.

Another incense-cedar, the **O'Connell Creek Tree**, is currently listed as the fourth largest in the state of Oregon according to Jerry Black's 2019 book, *Oregon Big Tree*

& *Shrub Measurements*; however, the number one, Tanner Lakes Titan, which grew at East Tanner Lake in the Red Buttes Wilderness, recently burned in the 2020 Slater Fire (from embers catching in decadent wood, not from direct flame), moving the O'Connell Creek Tree up to number three. This tree is located on O'Connell Creek, a tributary of Carberry Creek in the Upper Applegate, not far from Hinkle Lake, in a roadless, off-trail location. The last time official measurements were taken in 2011, the tree was 10.2 feet DBH and 155 feet tall. This enormous tree grows within the riparian area of O'Connell Creek at an elevation of roughly 5,000 feet and has plenty of access to moisture to maintain its health and girth.

If you want to see some impressive incense-cedars from a hiking trail, the groves of giant incense-cedars in Cedar Basin, in the Red Buttes Wilderness at the headwaters of the Applegate River, are a must-see. Located at the top of the Butte Fork Trail, Cedar Basin makes for a scenic stop on the way to Azalea Lake. Although there's not a single tree as big as the Studhorse or O'Connell Creek trees in Cedar Basin, as a whole, the groves of massive trees are just as awe-inspiring.

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