

## **Culture of Peace: Nourishing our children and ourselves**

**By Bob Morse Ashland Culture of Peace Commission**

Posted Oct 7, 2017 at 8:08 PM

Updated Oct 7, 2017 at 8:08 PM

“Policy, politics, and profits,” says David French, owner of Griffin Creek Coffee Roasters, is the typical content of conversations about local food systems. Rogue Valley Farm to School’s Executive Director Sheila Carder concurred. “It is unique to be discussing our providing healthy food as it relates to a culture of peace.”

The Ashland Culture of Peace Commission (ACPC) builds upon the foundation of existing groups contributing to the wellness of the world, while seeking broader perspectives to better comprehend local and world affairs. Thus, I initiated a conversation in the ACPC office with local folks who consciously dispense healthy food in our valley.

The daughter of a pediatrician, Carder has always recognized the importance of children’s health. En route to her coming to Rogue Valley Farm to School (RVF2S), she provided educational programs to kids on why it is worth caring for the Earth. Yet in the farming community where Carder worked, the students witnessed spraying, and their parents worked in the sprayed fields. “Experiencing a system that was not working for anyone or the planet turned into a drive to do something better for the kids.”

French only sells organic, fair-trade coffee. “We retailers get the largest percentage of the profit doing little of the work.” French is committed to good connections with the coffee farmers. “Often coffee is grown on terraced land. If not organic, then the chemicals roll downhill.” Besides the health risks, the farmers make so little money that their kids question the worth of staying on the farm.

At 70, Suzanne Willow of Willow-Witt Ranch recognizes that it’s her age cohort that farm. “Sixty-eight percent of farmers in Oregon are above 65 years old,” says Willow. Carder acknowledged that this figure is close to the national

average. “We need to support younger farmers,” added Willow.

Maria DiMaggio creates and sells her passion — Higher Power Raw Foods. DiMaggio’s nutrition-rich food offers an alternative to goods that only serve hunger needs. Some customers consider products made from soaked nuts and raw vegetables too costly. “Saving a dollar or not having a dollar takes its toll on our health.”

“I’ve realized how much there’s an underlying sense of stress when people don’t know where their food comes from and how to grow it,” says Carder. “Our current economic system yields food insecurity.”

In the early days of Willow-Witt Ranch, Willow and her wife, Lanita Witt, ran a B&B. The minimal profit margin from raising exquisite meat and veggies encouraged a shift to hosting “farm stays,” where B&C (Bed and Cook) guests were introduced to the ranch’s organic vegetables and organically fed animals. “People realized that potatoes grow in the soil. All of them went home and planted their first gardens.”

Introducing kids to farms, coordinating school gardens, making a healthy meal together, and providing tasting tables are all features of RVF2S’s education program. “I get excited,” says Carder, “when I can do things on a local level that can create peace and make a real difference—especially when children, eating healthy foods, are able to sit in class and learn.”

To reverse the nationwide trend of unhealthy school-based meals, Oregon is in its fourth year of funding a pilot project that purchases fresh, local farm food and serves it in the schools. “Despite Jackson and Josephine counties being a relatively small region, 26 percent of the statewide funds are spent in Southern Oregon,” says Carder. “Local farmers and schools are dedicated.”

“Similar to educating children on how to grow a potato,” says DiMaggio, “at farmers’ market our customers ask ‘How did you make those?’ and ‘How did you grow those?’ questions. (Unique to this setting), customers can talk to merchants who grow and make the food. We’re not just selling; we’re building relationships.”

Whereas DiMaggio practices the culture of peace value of accountability by sharing with customers her commitment to being organic, Willow's first accountability is taking care of the Earth and the soil.

"I have a hard time, however, with the culture of peace value of inclusivity," admits Willow, reflecting on her ranch. "We grow real exclusive foods. We pay a living wage. We've lost money on our crops, animals, and milk. How do we get good food out to the community?"

"Ashland parents care and send lunches for school," notes Carder. "Schools have very limited food budgets. Funds for feeding children are based on the percentage of students qualifying for free-and-reduced (price) lunch. In Europe, no one pays for lunch. It's seen as part of what kids need for learning, as part of nutrition education."

"We need someone to front load the cash to provide incredible fresh, local food and invite families at the start of the schoolyear to come (taste the wares)," says French. The plan would be to encourage parents to stop sending their kids to school with food and instead directly invest in the local healthy foods program. Willow asks, "Could we become one community in the US (to enact this European model)?"

"Where's the respect for our children, our bodies, our farmers?" questions Carder. "We're raising our children in ways which (challenge) their being at peace with themselves." Making healthy food decisions is a step toward creating a peaceful world.

— Bob Morse is an ambassador of the Ashland Culture of Peace Commission. Email comments and questions to [ashlandcpc@gmail.com](mailto:ashlandcpc@gmail.com). The ACPC website is [www.ashlandcpc.org](http://www.ashlandcpc.org); like the commission on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/AshlandCultureofPeaceCommission](http://www.facebook.com/AshlandCultureofPeaceCommission); follow [twitter.com/AshlandPeace](https://twitter.com/AshlandPeace) on Twitter. All are welcome to join the ACPC's Talking Circle at 11 a.m. each Tuesday and Community Meeting at 4 p.m. each Wednesday, both at the ACPC office, 33 First St., Suite 1, diagonally across Lithia Way from the Ashland Post Office.

---

**SIGN UP FOR DAILY E-MAIL**

Wake up to the day's top news, delivered to your inbox

