

## **OUR BOLDEST STEP OREGON COUNTRY FAIR**

Two years ago, the Oregon Country Fair staff decided it was essential to calculate the carbon footprint of our event to better assess the environmental impact of our yearly gathering. Developing a carbon footprint calculation for our organization was the first step in establishing a framework for the larger community conversation around sustainability and how to move in that direction. The actual exercise of calculating our footprint was extremely valuable in terms of establishing a baseline, which in turn helped us identify priorities.

After completing our first footprint calculations, we had a much better picture of our impact on the world around us and an awareness of the ways that impact is at odds with our shared values as a community. The process raised at least as many questions for us as it answered. It was from that place of realization that we started discussing what could we and should we do about it as an organization.

By nature, festivals and events are difficult to think of in terms of sustainability. Certainly the Fair at its best is a kind of commons where public participation in, and the experience of the event, give expression to our values. It is in this community of choice where the Fair has the greatest opportunity to raise awareness, educate and affect social change. Therein lies the catch, for our commons to thrive and our values to be shared, a certain amount of travel is required to bring fairgoers, volunteers and staff to the event. From the work of our calculations we knew that the travel component was by far the largest segment of our carbon footprint.

We decided that we could educate, raise awareness, affect change and stimulate public participation most effectively through our ticketing process. With the creation of a GreenTicket option, we could involve the largest group of participants and gain some valuable information in the process. We calculated that on average it would cost about .80 cents per attendee to offset travel emissions. So we developed a partnership with our ticketing agency TicketsWest to make available a \$1.00 GreenTicket option for ticket purchasers. This dollar, voluntarily added to their ticket price, would be dedicated to our sustainability efforts. To our knowledge this program is the first of its kind in the festival industry.

Initially we thought that the funds generated by the GreenTicket would go to purchase high quality, documented carbon offsets. However, this was more controversial within our organization than we expected. After working through the issues around offsets with our Board of Directors and Sustainability Task Force, it was agreed that the funds generated should go towards existing OCF sustainability projects in which the organization had

already invested considerable funding. It then fell to the staff to determine which projects would benefit and why.

As we grappled with what made funding sense we saw an opportunity to expand the dimension of the GreenTicket in a new direction. By having multiple project areas we could encourage participation by letting the ticket purchaser decide which area their dollar(s) should go. In our first iteration of this project last year we defined three specific project areas that purchasers could select: Zero Waste/Durables, Alternative Transportation/BioFuels, and Peach Power/Alternative Energy. Each project area satisfied our intention to offer options representing the triple bottom line. By offering participants the chance to choose, the Fair got a chance to gauge the public's priorities, as well as become informed about, and invested in, the Fairs sustainability efforts as a whole.

This year we decided, for many reasons, to replace the Alternative Transportation/BioFuels area with a Philanthropy option. Partly this decision was based on our desire to better emphasize the social equity component of the triple bottom line as an underpinning of the GreenTicket program. Social equity is expressed most clearly through the Fair's philanthropic program. Every year, the Fair gives away about \$50,000 through the Bill Wooten Memorial Endowment fund, dedicated to arts and environmental education programs for youth in our home community of Fern Ridge; the Jill Heiman Vision Fund basic needs grants program dedicated to mostly Lane County non-profits, and the OCF Board donation fund small grants program for mostly Oregon non-profits.

Through the development of our GreenTicket program we are able to reach the largest audience possible and engage the broad range of fair participants in the discussion of what sustainability means to us. Simultaneously this program puts funding into real, working projects that give life and form to that discussion. Internal awareness has also been raised dramatically, as both vendors and volunteers have asked to participate and we are offering that this year through the Fair parking permit system.

We expect that as our GreenTicket program evolves interest and awareness will grow, increasing our capacity for implementing sustainable practices, as well as adding substance to our triple bottom line commitment. Our strength as a community and our impact on society come from the experience of our participatory commons, and it is programs like our GreenTicket that help seed the paths to a sustainable future.