YELLOW WOOD NOTES

An Occasional Publication for the Benefit of Our Clients, Colleagues, and Friends

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We Welcome Your Comments

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Update On Our Work

USDA Value-Added Producer Grants: Alpaca Businesses
Yellow Wood is excited to begin work with two Alpaca businesses that received money through the most recent round of USDA Value-Added Producer Grants (VAPG). Suri Paco, LLC and Sugarloaf Alpaca Company (SAC) were awarded VAPG grants to assess the feasibility of expanding their current Alpaca businesses. We will be working with Suri Paco in Maine to evaluate the costs and benefits of an expanded wholesale production program, including demand, supply and processing of regional alpaca fiber for bales, woven textile, non-woven felt and yarn designed for technical wear. We will be working with SAC to investigate the feasibility of becoming a value-added producer of alpaca fiber products for retail and an agritourism destination in the greater Washington D.C. area. We are looking forward to working with these great companies and having the opportunity to learn about alpaca.

Mel King Community Fellows Program
Shanna Ratner is delighted to be a member of the 2012 class of Mel King Community Fellows at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The Community Innovators Lab’s Mel King Community Fellows Program is dedicated to the legacy of Mel King, a still-active champion of cities and the communities they comprise. The Community Fellows Program, initiated by Mel King at MIT in 1970, is designed to promote community practitioners’ learning and co-creation of knowledge with the academic community at MIT. The 2012 Mel King Community Fellows Program is devoted to convening leading economic development and community development practitioners from across the U.S. to engage in a collaborative process to define the critical issues faced in integrating environmental sustainability and social equity into the economic development field, and the key research, new knowledge, tools and professional development needed to achieve this goal.

Wallace Center at Winrock International
The Wallace Center has invited Yellow Wood to participate as evaluator and core team member in the National Good Food Network Food Hub Collaboration, an initiative funded by the Kresge Foundation to strengthen regional food hubs and their contributions to food access and improved health outcomes for socially disadvantaged communities. Yellow Wood is also providing evaluation coaching for Wallace’s Beginning Farmer & Rancher Development Program, which aims to improve financial literacy and access to capital for beginning farmers and ranchers through improved training.
USFS Wood Energy
Now in the last year of our contract with the U.S. Forest Service, we are excited to be focusing our attention on our home state. The solicitation for Vermont applications was announced at the Annual Vermont School Woodchip and Pellet Users Conference and we received applications from 34 facilities from across the state representing a wide range of facility types including: public schools, multi-family housing, manufacturing, town buildings and mixed-use complexes. We will be doing a minimum of 10 biomass pre-feasibility studies in Vermont with the potential for a second phase of studies in the summer. We recently completed studies for the five schools in the Orchard Hills Maine School District and the Enchanted Forest Water Park in Old Forge, NY, both of which used the reports to apply for grant funding through the Woody Biomass Utilization Grant Program.

About Yellow Wood Associates & Yellow Wood Notes . . .

Yellow Wood Notes is a twice yearly publication of Yellow Wood Associates, Inc. We publish this newsletter to maintain contact and share ideas with friends, colleagues, and clients. We appreciate your feedback and suggestions.

Yellow Wood Associates, Inc. is a private, for-profit firm specializing in rural economic research and training for community capacity building since 1985. We provide clients with research services including feasibility studies and Green Community Technologies®; training and facilitation services including See the Forest®, You Get What You Measure® and Home Town Competitiveness. Our clients include small towns, nonprofit organizations, federal, state, and county governments, foundations, and the private sector. Yellow Wood Associates are Shanna Ratner, Principal; Melissa Levy, Senior Associate; Samantha Dunn, Associate; Jackie LeBlanc, Project Assistant; and Ginger Weil, Office Manager.
Update On Our Work

Determining the Market for a Commercial/Industrial Park in Johnson, Vermont

After our work last year with the Town of Johnson around a local food enterprise, the Town engaged us again in a market study for a commercial/industrial park in Johnson. The Town of Johnson has an option on a piece of land on which it would like to develop a light commercial/industrial park. The Town has already engaged the services of an engineering firm to develop a site plan for the proposed site.

Now, the Town would like to know whether demand exists for space in a Johnson industrial park as currently designed, what amenities and infrastructure potential tenants demand, and, if sufficient demand exists, what Johnson’s next steps should be in bringing the industrial park into being, including any possible changes in park design to address market demand. Yellow Wood has completed a literature review of the steps to developing a commercial/industrial park, as well as a review of trends around demand in commercial and industrial development in the area, and interviews with economic development professionals to learn more about potential sectors that might have demand for that space. Next steps are to focus the remainder of the work on three sectors. We will conduct additional research on those three sectors, talk to Vermont experts on those sectors, and interview companies in those sectors to learn more about their needs.

Rural Futures Initiative

Shanna Ratner has been invited by the University of Nebraska to participate as a “thought leader” in a discussion of its proposed Rural Futures Initiative (RFI) to be held in early May, 2012. “Thought leaders” are being asked to contribute to a wide ranging discussion that includes institutional and organizational change, social and public entrepreneurship and related topics, as well as the specific opportunities and challenges facing rural areas, especially those in the Great Plains Region.

Rural Futures Lab Blog

Shanna Ratner contributed a blog post called “Making Rural Matter” to the Rural Futures Lab Blog. The blog post argues for re-imagining the relationship between rural and urban areas for mutual benefit. The full text of the post is available at: http://ruralfutureslab.blogspot.com/2011/12/making-rural-matter.html
Update On Our Work

National Climate Change Technical Workshop
Shanna Ratner attended the by invitation only U.S. Global Change Research Program National Climate Assessment Technical Workshop on Rural Communities in Charleston, S.C. The workshop provided an opportunity to learn from academic and government researchers about climate change factors relevant to rural communities and to provide input into the 2013 National Climate Assessment, which will be the first assessment to contain a focus on rural America. Topics discussed included: health and well-being; infrastructure, transportation and energy; governance and finance; natural resource-based economic sectors; and amenity driven factors and employment. There was also discussion about how to engage rural communities in productive discussion of climate change without using off-putting terminology.

Three quick take aways – 1) impacts will vary significantly across the country; 2) increased variability in temperature and weather events is at least as important as movement in trends or averages; 3) more and more people are experiencing increased variability in weather and want to talk about it, regardless of what they perceive to have caused it. More information on the National Climate Assessment is available at: http://globalchange.gov/what-we-do/assessment.

Local Food Value Chain Exploration in Northern Mississippi
Yellow Wood completed work on Best Practices Research on Food Enterprise Options for Local Food Value Chain Exploration in Northern Mississippi, for One Voice, a Mississippi-based non-profit providing non-partisan research, policy training and local capacity development. The report documents examples of successful food system models from around the country and will help One Voice carry out its goal of improving the quality of life for African Americans and other disenfranchised communities in Mississippi. Yellow Wood highlighted innovations from across the country in connecting farmers with employers and institutional markets, training and preparing farmers for wholesale sales, and initiating policies to open up demand for locally-produced foods. In addition to these best practices, the report identifies the next set of questions that need to be answered by One Voice in their pursuit of a local and regional sustainable food value chain and provides recommendations and next steps.
Wealth Creation in Rural Communities

Cross Regional Convening
Wealth Creation in Rural Communities – Building Sustainable Livelihoods Cross Regional Convening was held at the Ford Foundation in New York City, March 20 & 21, 2012. Pablo Fariñas, vice president of the Foundation's Economic Opportunity and Assets program and Frank DeGiovanni, Director of Enhancing Livelihood Opportunities for Poor Households (ELOPHI) initiative opened the conference, along with Wayne Fawbush, Program Officer for Ford’s ELOPHI work in the United States, and Shanna Ratner, representing Yellow Wood as managing grantee. The Cross Regional Convening was the first time since this initiative began funding place-based work in 2010 that all members of Ford’s domestic Wealth Creation community came together to share and learn from one another.

The Convening offered an opportunity for place-based grantees using the same wealth creation framework and working in similar sectors but different geographies to compare notes. Regions represented included Central Appalachia, the Deep South, and the Lower Rio Grande Valley. Sectors included green affordable housing, agriculture, forest products, renewable energy & energy efficiency, and community-based tourism. Participants also included consultants, advisors and researchers who have contributed research, technical assistance, and other types of support to the wealth creation initiative. The agenda included discussions of inclusive business, rural/urban connections, wealth creation value chain financing, power, networks, measurement, connections between wealth and livelihoods and much more. Jason Saul of Mission Measurement provided the keynote on how nonprofit value chain intermediaries can connect with private sector investors by selling their impact rather than their activities. More information on the Cross Regional Convening is available at www.yellowwood.org

Wealth Creation with a NADO Mini Grantee
Yellow Wood is using the Wealth Creation in Rural Communities approach with a mini-grantee of the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO), the Alabama Tombigbee Regional Commission and Black Belt Treasures, in Camden County, Alabama. Black Belt Treasures is a nonprofit organization developed to showcase and promote the arts of the Black Belt region, while also developing and retaining the area’s art skills. These elements combine as an economic engine that has resulted in increased sales and recognition for

“I enjoyed meeting people from other place-based work. Very well run by Yellow Wood staff.”
- Cross Regional Convening Participant
area artists, as well as contributing to the development of the tourism industry in the region. Since its opening in September 2005, Black Belt Treasures has grown from representing 75 artists to over 350, from painters, sculptors, potters, basket-weavers, quilters and woodworkers. The mission is to help stimulate the economy in Alabama’s Black Belt region through the promotion of regional art and fine crafts, provide regional artisans a means to promote and sell their products to a larger market, and provide arts education to area residents.

The overall goal of the NADO mini-grant program is to expose NADO members to Wealth Creation in Rural Communities as applied to their own work, while allowing those involved in the Wealth Creation in Rural Communities work to learn how to talk and engage with the conventional economic development sector about this approach. Specifically, we will be providing technical assistance and coaching to Black Belt Treasures as they explore the wealth creation approach and begin to think about their own value chain. Ultimately, the hope is to connect the Black Belt Treasures organization and value chain to the SURREF (Sustainable Rural Regenerative Enterprises for Families) community based tourism value chain, as they are focused on the same region and may be able to benefit each other.

Working with Walton

The Walton Family Foundation has engaged Yellow Wood Associates to work with their nature based tourism grantees using the Wealth Creation in Rural Communities approach, which was initially developed and used with the Ford Foundation. Four grantees in the Lower Mississippi River Delta region have experienced two workshops at which they learned about the wealth creation approach from value chains to measuring seven forms of wealth. Yellow Wood is now coaching these four grantees in the wealth creation approach and assisting with a regional tourism demand study and individual tourism demand studies in each pilot region. The three areas of focus for this region are paddling and water recreation, cultural and historical tourism, and wildlife watching. Yellow Wood is also beginning to work with Walton Family Foundation grantees focused on nature based tourism in the Verde Valley of Arizona. We will be engaging 12 grantees in this region, introducing them to the wealth creation approach, through a webinar and two workshops, as well as some coaching between workshops.
Connecting Rural Communities to Wealth Creation Concepts

In our work with the wealth creation approach, we are learning how to best connect rural communities with wealth creation concepts. We’ve learned to not start with the wealth creation language, but with the experience of rural and economic development practitioners, and then connect it to wealth creation concepts. We start by interviewing practitioners about their work, using questions structured to identify wealth creation-related work without using the wealth creation language. For example:

What are you trying to achieve?
Who are your partners?
Who do you purchase products or services from?
Who do you sell products or services to?
Who are your supporters?
What impacts do you have on human health?
What impacts do you have in developing creativity and new ideas?
How do you bring people and organizations together?
What impacts does your work have on the natural environment?
What impacts does your work have on improving physical and information infrastructure?
How does your work increase revenue in terms of investment?
How do you create voice and power for your constituents?

Through this interview, we ask about their partners - those they purchase from, those they sell to, and supporters (value chain partners); and their impacts in terms of imparting skills and human health (individual wealth), developing creativity (intellectual wealth), bringing people and organizations together (social wealth), improving the environment (natural wealth), improving physical and information infrastructure (built wealth), increasing revenue and investment (financial wealth), and creating voice and power (political wealth).

Next, we reframe the information into the wealth creation framework. For example, if we hear that the organization provides training opportunities, we can reframe that as an impact on individual capital. Or if the organization preserves land, we can reframe that as an impact on natural capital. By asking questions in familiar language, we find that rural people are more likely to be drawn in and not turned off. The next step is a webinar, which ties the information they have provided to elements of the wealth creation approach, like the concept of value chains and the seven forms of wealth.

This technique builds a bridge between the work practitioners already do and the wealth creation approach. It begins to create an understanding of the similarities and differences between current practice and the wealth creation approach.
You Get What You Measure®
Featured in Community Development Practice
Shanna Ratner published an article in the Spring 2012 Issue of the Community Development Society's CD Practice. The article, You Get What You Measure®: A Process to Determine and Measure Progress in Community Development, describes a process that integrates participatory planning and systems thinking into the development of strategic measures so that communities can monitor progress toward goals. To read the article, visit: http://www.comm-dev.org/attachments/070_CDPractices.pdf

Measurement Trainings
Yellow Wood continues to respond to interest in our strategic planning and evaluation process, You Get What You Measure®. In April, we held Becoming a Measurement Guide (BMG), our training for facilitators, and held a public workshop to introduce individuals and groups to the You Get What You Measure process.

April BMG Participants: Ben Lesser, Jackie LeBlanc, Michael Hancox, and Greg Hessel

The Nonprofit Outcomes Toolbox Wins Prize

Upcoming BMG Training
The next BMG training is November 7-9, 2012, in St. Albans, VT. For information, contact Melissa Levy at melissa@yellowwood.org or 802-524-6141. To register, visit: http://yellowwood.org/BMGRegistrationFormNovember2012_FillInForm.pdf

Puzzler
The Pardoner’s Puzzle, from Henry Ernest Dudeney’s The Canterbury Puzzles (1907). Beginning with the black square, trace a path using 15 straight lines that touches each white square only once. (You may end on any square. The segment connecting the middle squares in the bottom row is deliberately omitted.) The answer is on page 11.
Welcome Jackie LeBlanc
I joined Yellow Wood Associates in January as a Project Assistant. I am excited about the challenging work that puts my graduate studies in Community Development & Applied Economics at the University of Vermont to good use. I first became interested in community development and sustainability work through my studies at Northeastern University in Boston, where I completed a thesis on the environmental impact of land use patterns in Vermont. After four years in the city, I was happy to return to my more rural roots, in central Vermont where I grew up, to serve as an AmeriCorps VISTA for the City of Montpelier. I helped initiate a long-term sustainable city planning process and an alternative currency time bank. Through my planning work, I became interested in the role that food systems plays in community development and have continued to build on that through my graduate studies.

I live in Burlington, where I’m usually working on renovating my 1916 bungalow. In my free time, I play in local soccer leagues and try to stay one step ahead of my rambunctious dog, Russell.

Melissa Joins VEC Board
Senior Associate Melissa Levy joined the Board of Directors of the Vermont Environmental Consortium (VEC) in the Fall of 2011. Since 2000, VEC brings businesses, educational institutions and state and U.S. government officials together to make Vermont a leader in the green economy. VEC promotes growth and job creation in Vermont's environmental business sector through networking, information sharing and special projects. Melissa was elected Secretary of VEC at the December 2011 Board meeting.

Announcement: 2013 Community Development Society Journal Issue
Shanna Ratner and Deb Markley of the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship will be guest-editing a special issue of the Community Development Society Journal. The issue will focus on Rural Wealth Creation as a Sustainable Economic Development Strategy. The call for papers is open through June 1st. If you’re interested in learning more you can download the call for papers at: http://www.comm-dev.org/attachments/067_Call_for_Papers_Wealth_Creation_Special_Issue_(2).doc
Reading & Puzzler Answer

'The Last Days of Ptolemy Grey' by Walter Mosley
This book paints a remarkable fictional portrait of a 91 year old man and the inner workings of his mind and memory, first as his cognitive abilities are waning and then as his mind sharpens through medical treatment. Ptolemy is an unforgettable character whose world extends in surprising directions. Highly recommended. - Shanna Ratner