

METHOW VALLEY CITIZENS COUNCIL



# **VALLEY VOICE**

FALL / WINTER 2024

**Protecting Indigenous  
Foods: An Interview  
with Amelia Marchand**

**The Okanogan Grows  
Lots of Food. Can  
More Stay Here?**



# METHOW VALLEY CITIZENS COUNCIL

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*“I should say that hope for me is distinct from idealism or optimism. It has nothing to do with wishful thinking. It is a muscle, a practice, a choice: to live open-eyed and wholehearted in the world as it is and not as we wish it to be.”*

—Krista Tippet

*“Not just for my Tribal heritage, but for many other native peoples in our region and other geographic regions, there’s this really fundamental recognition that we are not apart from nature, the environment—from Earth. Our survival and existence and the ability to live and survive and thrive comes from nature.”*

—Amelia Marchand, p. 5

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# Harvest



“Roselle” by E. Branam, 2024

BY EASTON BRANAM

When gently,  
fingertips lead knuckles, palms, wrists  
into warmly humming soil

then seeds swell to burst  
drop their radicle anchors  
and jump into light;

unstoppable motions  
ripple across the fields  
blooming against our sticky fingers;

wavelengths redshift  
gentle their undulation  
and we cram our cheeks full.

baskets  
pockets

When there is nothing left to do  
then crows, farmers, gopher, deer  
tenderly nuzzle rended soil,  
to smooth winter sleep.

We all marvel at generosity  
—there is something about a body.

# Letter from the Executive Director

As I sit down to write this letter, I am filled with a mix of emotions. Like many of you, I am a parent, and the future of this world for my daughter is what keeps me up at night.

*The* recent election has brought a wave of uncertainty, and it's natural to feel anxious about what lies ahead. But it's important to remember the places where we had tremendous success: from Lauren McCloy elected as our next Public Utility District Commissioner to Okanogan County soundly voting to retain the Climate Commitment Act. There were many bright spots at the state and local level. Okanogan County wants climate action. I find a huge amount of hope in this outcome.

Methow Valley residents have long held a deep commitment to not only preserving our land, air and water, but to preserving our local agriculture and, more recently, ensuring food sovereignty for the Methow and Okanogan people. Our connection to the land and the food it provides has always been — and continues to be — a cornerstone of our community (p. 12).

It's not just about feeding ourselves; it's about nurturing a relationship with the earth that sustains us. By supporting local agriculture, we are safeguarding our environment and honoring the traditions that have been passed down through generations. This is especially important for our tribal communities, whose food sovereignty is integral to their cultural heritage and future well-being (p. 5).

In these challenging times, it's easy to feel overwhelmed. But I believe in the power of small actions.

Every seed we plant, every local farmer we support, and every effort we make to preserve our food traditions is a step towards a brighter future (p. 10). These actions are not just about survival; they are about thriving and ensuring that our children inherit a world where they can flourish.



I am continually inspired by the dedication, resilience, and creativity of our community as we stand on the frontlines of climate change. Your support and commitment are what make our work possible. Together, we can face any challenge and come out stronger on the other side. Let's continue to support each other, nurture our land, support our farmers, and hold onto the hope that our efforts today will create a better tomorrow for our children.

Let's move forward with hope and determination, knowing that together, we can build a future where our community and our traditions remain strong and vibrant.

With heartfelt gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jasmine Minbashian".

*Jasmine Minbashian*  
Executive Director



# BITTERROOT. SALMON. HUCKLEBERRY. FLY.

Being able to find and afford nutritious food on the Colville Indian Reservation can be very challenging. This is one reason the ability to hunt, gather, fish and harvest remains vitally important for Tribal residents. Photo: Dana Golden

The L.I.G.H.T Foundation’s vital work to protect traditional Indigenous foods and the pollinators that sustain them: An interview with Amelia Marchand



Photo: Shane Moses

**What** *needs aren't being met? What vital work isn't being funded? These are the questions that drove Amelia Marchand and her husband Joaquin to start the L.I.G.H.T Foundation in 2021. After working for years for Tribal government and interacting with many federal agencies, Marchand saw firsthand how big issues like climate change and habitat loss were addressed with such broad strokes that they often ignored one of the most significant and heart-wrenching casualties: the disappearance of native plants that have provided food and medicine for Indigenous Peoples for thousands of years.*

*When Marchand speaks of native plants and pollinators she names them as spirit relatives. Native foods are far more than simple calories, they are essential nutrients which nourish the body and soul. However, ever since the Methow, Okanogan and other regional Tribes were forcibly removed from their traditional homelands, Indigenous access to native foods has been systematically eroded. As a native-run nonprofit organization, the L.I.G.H.T (Leadership, Indigenous, Guardian, Honor, Teach) Foundation has set out to “center the cultural values of our Indigenous people and those foods that are important to us.”*

*When the L.I.G.H.T Foundation conducted a food security survey in 2023 they found that over 40 percent of people living on the Colville Indian Reservation had little or no access to cultural foods. Through several initiatives, their work focuses on addressing the root of what is preventing more access: the concept of private property and prevalence of no trespassing signs, the degradation and conversion of land and water from native habitat to mono-crop agriculture and the policies and codes that continue to damage and hinder access to traditional foods.*

*Amelia Marchand is descended from a rich heritage that includes Okanogan, Lakes, Moses-Columbia, Palus, Chief Joseph Band of Wal’wama Nimiipuu, Scottish,*

*French, Irish, German, and Dutch ancestry. As a wife, daughter, and granddaughter of U.S. Army veterans—and a descendant of U.S. prisoners of war, the American Indian residential boarding school system, and the relocation program for American Indians—her personal experiences deeply inform her passion for Indigenous rights, environmental justice, and creating equitable solutions for climate adaptation. Her work includes not only serving as the Executive Director of the L.I.G.H.T. Foundation but as a board member for the Center for World Indigenous Studies (CWIS). In 2024, she became the first woman presidentially appointed to the Indian Tribe Member Seat on the Advisory Council of Historic Preservation. Through all these pursuits, Marchand remains dedicated not only to fostering community and reciprocity but also to healing intergenerational trauma and the legacies of colonialism.*

## HOW DO YOU DEFINE FOOD SOVEREIGNTY?

I think to exercise food sovereignty is the ability to access, whether it’s through purchase or trade or direct harvest, those foods which are not just nutrient rich and healthy for your body, but also good for your spirit as well. And for me, it’s not just food, it’s water as well, because you can’t have one without the other. Even in the driest regions of the world, you can’t have one without the other. So it’s access to and availability of nutritious food for your body and soul, and for native peoples it’s also access to those foods and medicines that are vital to your cultural identity and heritage.

An example that will resonate with people in the Pacific Northwest are salmon. But at L.I.G.H.T Foundation although we support all food sovereignty, we recognized that there’s been lots of investment and work on salmon species in particular, and we wanted to focus on those species that weren’t getting attention. So we focus on our native plants and native pollinators that support not only the natural habitats of salmon or deer or elk or moose or anything else, but those habitats that already are impacted and degraded such as commercial timber or mono-crop production.

## HOW DOES CENTERING FIRST FOODS HELP TO MAINTAIN CULTURAL IDENTITY AND TRIBAL SOVEREIGNTY?

Not just for my Tribal heritage, but for many other native peoples in our region and other geographic regions, there’s this really fundamental recognition that we are not apart from nature, the environment—from Earth. Our survival and existence and the ability to live and survive and thrive comes from nature. So there’s this relationship and in many of the



Although Bitterroot is one of the most conspicuous native plants, Marchand emphasized that all native plants are valuable for food, medicine or utilitarian purposes. Photo: Jayne Shrock

# Legend of the Four Chiefs

AS TOLD BY AMELIA MARCHAND

In this legend, the Creator gathered all of the beings together, all of everything in existence and informed them that there was going to be something new coming. Someone new was going to arrive and they were going to need a lot of help to make them. And the new ones were humans, they were people, the first people.

And so, the chiefs were the leaders of the different beings. Salmon spoke for the water, everything in the water. Grizzly Bear spoke for all of the creatures of the land. Bitterroot spoke for all of the roots under the ground. Serviceberry spoke for all of the plants above the ground. And they each came forward and said how they would help the new ones coming, what gifts they would give.

The one that gave their gift last was Grizzly Bear. And he said that he would lay his life down for people. And so in this ceremony, he gave his life for the new ones.

At the time all these different beings, these Spirit Relatives, had spiritual power expressed through medicine songs called *sumix* through which they could bring him back to life. So it was a ceremony but also an expression of what he actually would do. And when it came time at the ceremony for the others to bring him back to life, they had their medicine songs and they were singing and they couldn't do it. One by one they each took turns and were thinking, "Oh, my song, my power, my medicine will be enough to bring him back to life." And it never worked. And one by one they all went through their medicine songs and they became more and more discouraged.

And finally, the last one that hadn't yet gone, that hadn't yet sung, was Fly. And when it came Fly's turn, they said, "You're



In Okanogan legend, Grizzly Bear offered his life for the new people who were arriving. When Grizzly Bear died, it was little Fly who brought him back, showing the importance of the small creatures. Photo: USFWS, L. Hupp

so small, how could you possibly bring Grizzly back?! I mean, go ahead and try to sing and bring him back, but Eagle couldn't do it, Salmon couldn't do it, nobody else could do it. What makes you think you're powerful enough to do it?" And Fly said, "I have to try." So Fly sang their medicine song and their song was so powerful that it did bring Grizzly Bear back.

And so the legend of the Four Chiefs, anywhere that you read it, the sacrifice of Salmon, Grizzly Bear, Bitterroot and Serviceberry is mentioned. And it's mentioned that Fly brought Grizzly Bear back to life. But what always struck me about that legend was how it was Fly, how it was the smallest one.

Then thinking about the literal food crisis that's not just happening in some portions of the world, it's happening everywhere with biodiversity loss and pollinator loss—Fly is one of the pollinators. And so in that very distinct, specific way that's been one of the core teachings that I have received from that legend: Not only do we need to protect all those other creatures of the land and water and subsoil and above the ground, but also the little guys too.

traditional teachings, that's akin to a covenant—an agreement that was made thousands and thousands and thousands of years ago and documented in oral histories and Indigenous Knowledge—that we humans will take care of the land, the waters, the creatures within and thereon as long as they take care of us. And so that perspective has a lot of different names or terms depending on whose Indigenous territory you are in. One of the core values that doesn't just shape my personal worldview, but also has helped shape the initiatives of the L.I.G.H.T Foundation, comes from an Okanogan legend of the Four Chiefs.

## HOW DOES YOUR WORK INTERSECT WITH OKANOGAN COUNTY'S COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AND ZONING? WHAT CHANGES WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE IN THOSE DOCUMENTS?

Certainly where possible, all those measures that can better support water protections and avoiding over-allocation of water in the region is very, very important. It really, really struck me that Okanogan County doesn't have any type of permit required for clearing and grading. Coming from a decade or more of doing actual cultural resource work—not just interviewing



Okanogan County has no Clearing and Grading Ordinance. Its absence allows landowners to construct roads without a permit. Although Methow Valley Citizens Council has long pushed for an Ordinance, there is currently nothing to prevent land clearing work from damaging natural and cultural resources. Photo: Lorah Super

Tribal elders, but also cultural resource and archaeological surveys, participating in excavations and trying to remind the federal agencies of what their trust responsibility was to the Tribes—coming from that knowledge, background, and experience and hearing that Okanogan County does not have any type of review for that level of ground disturbing activity... is actually really infuriating.

Not just because of the environmental impacts of erosion and runoff and what it can do to downstream waters and what it does to smaller Spirit Relatives that need to try and traverse a road every now and then. Not just because of that, but because literally the bones of my ancestors are in the earth, and on these areas that are now private land they could destroy graves and don't have to tell anybody about it. And I'm not saying that that's happened, I pray that has never happened, but how would we even know?

Another important piece of the zone code is the language that's currently included about using the least conflict solar sighting. This is where L.I.G.H.T. also needs to speak up because just because an area is least conflict for wildlife habitat doesn't mean it's going to have no negative impacts for plants like Bitterroot or others, as well as cultural resources that people don't know about. And so stepping back a little bit more, when we first started talking, I mentioned how L.I.G.H.T. Foundation

Learn more about  
L.I.G.H.T.  
Foundation's  
initiatives at  
[www.thepnwlf.org](http://www.thepnwlf.org)



incorporated climate change into our mission. And part of that is recognizing that if our nation wants to reduce fossil fuel energy sources and increase renewable energy sources like solar power and wind power, they have to do it in ways that don't further erode and degrade the rights of Tribal nations and Indigenous Peoples to access sacred sites and access to their traditional foods and gathering areas.

### WHAT WERE SOME OF THE BIG TAKEAWAYS FROM THE FOOD SECURITY SURVEY YOU CONDUCTED ON THE COLVILLE INDIAN RESERVATION?

It was really validating. The data showed that yes, many residents of the Colville Indian Reservation and those in Okanogan County too are classified as living in a food desert, which has all sorts of implications for health and well-being for every age range of our population. That was something that I feel I had known but didn't have the data that said it specifically. The survey also revalidated an earlier survey from the Colville Tribes' Health Division that said an excessive number of residents are food insecure because they don't have the financial means to get healthy nutritious food. So not only is it a food desert with low availability of nutritious foods within the populated community areas, but even when there are nutritious foods available, it is really difficult for residents to financially pay for those foods. And this doesn't just impact Colville Tribal residents or Okanogan County residents, it impacts everybody when there's this kind of depressed economic system.

Flipping this on its head, it also tells me immediately why access to traditional foods and medicines for Tribal residents is so important. The ability to go hunt and gather and fish and harvest, they aren't just things that native people say because we want to be cool. It's not just that they want to be out in the woods and camp. It's that these foods feed their families.

Hopefully the work that we're engaging in and the partnerships that we're making with the Okanogan County Food Council and projects such as the Incheilium Red

Garlic Coalition that we just did at the end of September with a bunch of other partners (highlighted on p. 9) will start a shift and change for the local region to come together and build a food economy that's resilient and respectful and inclusive. ♦



# The Revitalization of Inchelium Red: A Step Towards Food Sovereignty

BY MADELYN HAMILTON, PUBLIC LANDS  
AND WILDLIFE PROGRAM COORDINATOR

*Fun* fact — did you know that our county is home to the oldest variety of garlic grown in North America? It is believed that Inchelium Red has been cultivated on lands that are now the Colville Reservation since before white settlers arrived in the 1700s. Garlic enthusiasts can now find this heirloom strain at farmers markets, grocery stores and seed catalogs throughout the Pacific Northwest.

The health benefits of garlic are many. As one of the world's oldest cultivated crops, this herb has long been used to support digestion, the immune system and the heart. It is high in vitamin B6, iron, manganese, is antibacterial and antifungal, and also contains inulin, an important prebiotic that feeds the gut flora in our large intestines. Although less studied, the health and cultural benefits of eating a more localized strain of garlic are also worthy of consideration.

While Inchelium Red originated in its namesake town of Inchelium, WA, many people in our region are not aware of the history that makes this variety a very old food native to this place. To share the story of this garlic and get more people growing it, Linda McLean at the Colville Reservation Washington State University (WSU) Extension started a project several years ago aimed at its revitalization. Born during COVID and expanding each subsequent year, distribution and planting programs are now hosted by the Inchelium Red Garlic Revitalization Coalition (IRGRC), comprised of the Extension, the L.I.G.H.T. Foundation, the Colville Reservation Conservation District, Conservation Northwest, Blue Sky Minds and the Intertribal Agriculture Council. In late September, community members gathered at a new demonstration site in

Nespelem to learn about the garlic, best practices for growing it and cooking it, and to explore food sovereignty and food security hands-on. Since 2020, over 350 pounds of Inchelium Red have been distributed on the Colville Reservation, and IRGRC's long-term goal is to produce enough garlic to market it (along with any value-added products made) as specifically native-grown on the Colville Reservation.

The Inchelium Red revitalization project is one small but mighty step towards a food system where food is grown locally by reservation residents for reservation residents. In being highly adapted to this region, Inchelium Red also stands as a strain most likely to successfully navigate an unstable climate future. As a single clove of garlic planted in the fall easily multiplies by spring into multi-cloved heads to be shared and planted again, so may our communities in the Okanogan and beyond continue to expand our interconnected systems of resilience through the creation of new local food economies — sharing seed, knowledge, resources and community care — in service to a more secure and abundant food future for all. Thank you IRGRC for showing us how this is possible. ♦

*Sources: WSU Colville Reservation Extension, Rosalee De La Foret's 'Alchemy of Herbs'*

Since 2020 over 350 lbs of garlic have been distributed on the Colville Reservation.



Community members gather in Nespelem to plant Inchelium Red garlic at a demonstration site. A coalition has formed to revitalize this heirloom variety of garlic with the goal of restoring it as an integral part of the local food system. Photos: Maria Hines





Although a large amount of food is produced in Okanogan County and on the Colville Reservation, the majority is exported as commodity crops. The area produces as many apples as Oregon, Virginia, North Carolina, and West Virginia combined. Unfortunately, with a lack of processing and distribution infrastructure, about 90% of the food we eat here is brought in from outside the region and food insecurity remains the highest in the state. Photo: Lorah Super

# The Okanogan is Flush with Food. Why do we also have Food Insecurity?

BY NICK LITTMAN,  
COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER

*Here* are three facts that together illustrate Okanogan County’s lopsided food landscape: in 2022 the County produced 363 million dollars of food (mostly fruit, almost all for export); approximately 90% of the food the 43,712 people living here consume is trucked in from outside the County; and in 2022, Okanogan County had the highest rate of food insecurity in the state (15.4%) with nearly 15% of the population living in a food desert without access to fresh food.

Why our food system looks the way it does and what we can do to address the disconnect between food production and food accessibility are some of the questions the newly released Okanogan Food System Assessment seeks to answer. The Assessment, released in September, came together after a year and half collaborative process involving nonprofits, local and county governments, and WSU’s College of Business

students. One of the key instigators of this document is Maria Hines, a resident of Okanogan County, the founder of nonprofit Blue Sky Minds and an award-winning chef. I sat down with Hines to learn about the complexity and challenge of making change within a food system.

As a chef, Hines has always focused intently on where her ingredients are sourced from. She was the head chef and owner of Tilth, a certified organic restaurant in Seattle from 2006–2020. Being certified organic, “was a political statement,” said Hines. “I really felt it was important that we do the best we could to support sustainable local agriculture.”

During her time at Tilth she won the James Beard Award for Best Chef Northwest in 2009 and won on Iron Chef in 2010. She also focused on food advocacy, serving as a board member of Washington Farmland Trust, which works to expand distribution access for farmers and keep farmland in production. When she moved to Okanogan County, she wanted to turn her

attention to her local food ecosystem and the dysfunction and inequity that existed there. She knew the first step was understanding the food landscape.

The Okanogan Food System Assessment begins by defining its geographic scope: the study includes all of Okanogan County as well as the entirety of the Colville Reservation which encompasses parts of Ferry County. It was important that the Colville Reservation and Okanogan County be “focused on as a whole instead of separate,” said Hines. “The County and Tribes are both rural areas, they both experience a lot of similar climate patterns and there are strong needs to address the food insecurity and overall health and well-being for our community as a whole.”

As becomes apparent through digesting the Assessment, food systems are complex, multi-faceted, dynamic landscapes that are shaped by infrastructure, policies and practices that range from the national to local scale. Hines points out that organizing and acting at the regional scale can bring opportunities to improve both food access and food insecurity: “If we have the infrastructure here for all our growers then what could that look like as far as keeping more food here in the area to care for our food access issues?”

Anyone who arrives or leaves from the Okanogan understands that we’re a long ways from anywhere. “We’re paying resort prices for food because we don’t have the infrastructure,” Hines explains. “The food goes somewhere else, it gets processed, it comes back here.” When a listening session with local farmers and food retailers was held in the spring of 2024, many producers agreed that we need more processing facilities and shared infrastructure. According to the Food System Assessment, infrastructure needs include, “a shared commercial kitchen space with flexible hours, a wholesale food hub, a USDA meat processing facility, an additional fruit packing plant, shared cold and freezer storage, solar power, and the need for more farming equipment mechanics in the area.” Having more localized processing can reduce transportation costs and help keep costs down for local consumers because the food no longer needs to leave before returning here.

Of course, even with more local infrastructure, there still needs to be a local market to sell the food in. That’s where Hines sees an opportunity for us all to help: “Buy directly

from the farmers, buy local wherever you can, whether you’re at Glover market, at the Mazama store, at the Methow Valley Foodshed or at the farmers market, just buy local as much as you possibly can and grow food.”

This support for local farms is needed now more than ever before. In addition to high costs for processing, distribution and marketing, farmers face the other rising costs many of us confront — more expensive land, housing and healthcare. And then there’s the impacts of climate change on farming. Already there’s an increase in the number of days with extreme heat or smoke, affecting the health of farmworkers and the ability to preserve crops. Making a living wage as a farmer has become exceedingly difficult. Some farmers are deciding to stop farming altogether while others are finding they have no one to pass their farm to when they retire. Farmland that is no longer producing risks permanent conversion to development.

Hines recognizes that cost is often prohibitive to buying local food: “I guarantee you if you asked everyone if they could eat locally-grown, healthy, nutritious food, everyone would say ‘yes,’ but the hurdle is the cost of the food.” However, she also urges us to take into account how local food benefits our health: “When you’re buying it here, locally, it’s so much more nutritionally dense, it didn’t travel a long way. It was picked in the height of the season. It’s got all those micronutrients in it and the quality is better, which increases your health markers.”

With the Assessment completed, and a strong coalition assembled who is committed to improving the regional food system, Hines is looking forward to taking action. The Okanogan Region Food Council has started work on a 10-year Food Action Plan for Okanogan County and The Colville Reservation. They are looking forward to involving the community through a participatory process before the Plan is released in late 2025. The Action Plan will be broken down into five goals that help the region move towards a food system that can “support farmers, community and the land.” As Blue Sky Minds articulates in their vision statement, the aim will be to “eliminate hunger by ensuring that every single

person has access to culturally relevant, locally grown, nutritious food.” If we continue to focus on that goal, someday we just might see a majority of the food we grow here, stay here. ♦

Share your thoughts on our local food system and help inform the Okanogan Food Action Plan by filling out this survey: [https://wsu.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_205m8CCwHzF4OAm](https://wsu.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_205m8CCwHzF4OAm)



# Can the Methow Valley Still Feed Itself?



In a study from 2009 published in the *Methow Naturalist*, the authors determined the Methow Valley could feed itself if every person at the time had .82 acres of farmland working for them. The Methow has long valued self-sufficiency and resiliency. Maintaining sustainable local agriculture remains important. Photo: Lorah Super

BY LORAH SUPER, PROGRAM DIRECTOR

*In* 2009, the *Methow Naturalist* published an article by Dana Visalli, Anaka Mines and Hans Smith with an intriguing title: “Can the Methow Valley Feed Itself?”

Their research was inspired by a growing recognition in the Methow Valley that modern agriculture was unsustainable over the long term due to its over-reliance on fossil fuel inputs, chemicals, and artificial

fertilizers. These inputs were increasingly viewed as contributors to degradation of land and water at local and global scales.

The authors emphasized a particular concern for the ecological carrying capacity of our shared home. They carefully considered the ability of the valley’s arable land, under different agricultural systems, to sustain the existing population (at the time, 5200 full-time residents) without diminishing its ability to nourish future generations. The solution they arrived at centers on a 15-acre (average) crop and livestock rotation system that could grow a complete human diet while increasing soil fertility over time.

At the time the report was drafted, support for the concept of local autonomy and sustainability was strong, fueled by growing awareness that industrialization of the national food supply was increasing, peak oil would soon be reached, and our energy-intensive food system couldn’t last.

Without realizing it, the community was leaning again into the same values of resiliency, self-sufficiency and concern for the human impact on ecology that have guided Methow residents in their advocacy through many turning points in our modern history.

These same values guided community members in the 1970’s to weigh in with their concerns that overdevelopment of the valley would lead to future shortages of water for local agriculture — which in those days was a source of pride and self-sufficiency. Strong participation in public conversations about the future of water, land and farming led to adoption of the Methow Instream Flow Rule in 1976, a law that still governs our water use today. The Methow Valley Citizens Council formed the same year, as an emerging expression of the community’s values of self-sufficiency, sustainability and the desire to care for each other and the natural world.

The early achievements of Methow Valley Citizens Council, buoyed by strong community support,

included the valley's first Comprehensive Plan, and special zoning via the Methow Review District, which set the valley apart from the rest of Okanogan County for the first time, and allowed for local autonomy in land use decisions. The valley's unique zoning, with its emphasis on focusing commercial development in towns, supports the wide-open spaces needed to support local agriculture and healthy wildlife habitat.

The Methow Review District, with its unique set of rules protecting local values, was still intact in 2009 when the *Methow Naturalist* study was conducted. It was possible at that time for the authors to map out nearly 12,000 acres of arable, irrigated farmland, located primarily on the fertile valley floor outside of towns, that was available to support a sustainable, nutritious crop rotation system capable of supporting all 5200 of the valley's full-time residents.

"Can the Methow Valley Feed Itself" remains a remarkably relevant snapshot into the considerations required for the Methow Valley to truly sustain itself, if that is still our goal.

Is it still our goal? Based on recent queries into the values shared in our community, resilience and sustainability are still showing up as very high priorities, especially as we reckon with increasing climate impacts. Growing our own, sustainable food supply is still something many in our community aspire to do, given half a chance.

Will it still be possible for the valley to feed itself in the future? The valley's full-time population has grown to over 7,000 residents today, and some previously available farmland was converted to homes during the pandemic land rush. Land values have climbed so steeply in recent years that housing alone for many current residents is no longer affordable, much less farmland. Recent changes to the Methow

Review District zoning proposed by the county also threaten to allow the fertile ground on the valley floor to be converted to commercial sprawl along the highway, instead of farms, gardens and open spaces where wildlife can flourish.

The changes that have taken place in the last 15 years present major challenges to the study's original goal of setting aside .82 acres of farmland per resident for growing a sustainable food supply. Thankfully, major challenges are not deal-breakers in our neck of the woods — they are firm reasons to double down on protecting our shared values by raising our voices and claiming the future we believe in.

For nearly 50 years the volunteers, members, staff and board of the Methow Valley Citizens Council have played a critical role in advancing—and guarding—the vision and values of our communities in county policy and state law. Protecting the ability to grow and harvest food in a sustainable manner is one of the primary drivers behind MVCC's efforts to influence water law, the designation of agricultural land in the Comprehensive Plan, and the regulation of land use through the Zone Code.

If we are still serious about feeding ourselves locally, making our footprints on the land lighter, and sharing in a way that supports rather than exploits our ecological heritage, we won't back down from protecting the valley's special zoning or finding innovative ways to protect farmland and the natural world. As they say, where there's a will, there's a way — it is time, once again, to demonstrate our collective will. ♦

If we are still interested in feeding ourselves from local farms, protecting the valley's zoning and finding innovative ways to make land less expensive for farmers will be essential. Photo: Nick Littman





The practice of flail mowing returns nutrients to the soil while cutting down on the amount of smoke entering our local airshed. Photo: Getty Images

# FRESH FALL AIR

## The Flailing Program for orchardists reduces smoke and improves soil health

BY ANNA JONES, CLEAN AIR  
METHOW COORDINATOR

*In* September, I sat down with Dylan Streeter of the Okanogan Conservation District (OCD) to learn more about their flailing program. From an air quality perspective, fall signals a transition from wildfire smoke to the “other” smoke. This includes smoke from prescribed burns, wood stoves for home-heating, and outdoor burning. Every fall, Clean Air Methow partners with the OCD to host free chipping events at the Twisp Transfer Station, which gives the community an opportunity to dispose of their yard and woody debris for free, instead of burning it. The chipping event complements another program that the Conservation District has developed to help local fruit farmers “dispose” of their trimmings from their orchards.

The flailing program (named for the flail mower that is used) is designed to reduce smoke emissions from orchard burning while improving soil health. Funded through an Ecology Prevent-Nonattainment grant, this funding offers a set payment per acre through a cost-share agreement, providing orchardists with financial incentives to choose an alternative to burning.

Most farms participating in the program are between 4 and 30 acres in size and grow a variety of different fruit. The Conservation District hopes to eventually involve larger operations as well. Flail mowers use a horizontally mounted spinning drum on which knives are mounted that shred materials during operation. Orchardists prune and rake the trimmings from the trees and stack them between the rows. The flailer then comes through and shreds the organic material, re-distributing it onto the ground around the trees. While OCD does not provide flailing equipment, the grant helps offset the costs associated with these practices that orchardists already use. By supporting an existing practice, the program makes it easier for orchardists to avoid burning.

Flailing offers significant environmental and economic benefits as well. While burning orchard debris creates smoke, flailing converts pruned branches into mulch, which decomposes naturally, improving soil health and increasing water retention. This is especially valuable in our dry Okanogan County climate, where water management is essential for tree fruit production.

Participation in the program is open to any orchardist in Okanogan County, with many farms between Malott and the northern part of the Okanogan Valley already involved. Contracts are typically sorted during the winter months so that farmers can start flailing operations in the spring.

The flailing program is one more solution to addressing the larger air quality issues in the region. With each program that Clean Air Methow, the Okanogan Conservation District and other partners implement, more particulate matter is kept out of our air and we’re able to enjoy the fresh, clean air of fall! ♦

MEET & GREET

# chu'ma, Douglas Marconi, Jr., New Board Member

e'he oy'kalo (hello everyone, in the nimiipuu dialect),

My name is chu'ma (sounds like: choo-ma), Douglas Marconi, Jr., I was born and raised in Nespelem and Coulee Dam, with cultural ties to land, place, family and community. I am enrolled nimiipuu (Nez Perce) ka (and) palus (Palouse) on the Colville Indian Reservation. I also have lineal descendance from the Nez Perce Reservation in Lapwai, Idaho. I currently work as one of two Grant Development Coordinators in the Colville Tribal Planning Department at Nespelem. Honorable United States Marine Corps military service, coupled with extensive natural resource field experience, as a tribal forestry technician and wildland firefighter, led to a master's degree in Natural Resource Management from the University of Washington in Seattle.

My professional natural resource career started as a classically trained forester for the Bureau of Indian Affairs, then as the Tribes' Environmental Code Compliance Coordinator, which organically led to the Watershed Program Manager within the Environmental Trust Department.

I hope to bring a perspective that is grounded in our traditional teachings with forward thinking and action that is informed by deep consideration and guidance from my many



elders and teachers here in Nespelem. I'm most proud of being a father and mentor to my two children. My #heartwork has revealed this opportunity to serve the Methow People through the work of Methow Valley Citizens Council; I've only just begun to build a relationship with the homelands of the Methow People — grateful.

Respectfully,  
chu'ma

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*How can we support the  
right to food sovereignty  
and strengthen the local  
food system?*

Our local Tribes have gathered, fished, hunted and stewarded the land and rivers here for thousands of years. Over the last half century, the Methow Valley Citizens Council has worked to protect our rural farms, open spaces, and precious water. Through this work, we are collaborating with Indigenous communities to support their right to food sovereignty and traditional hunting and gathering practices.

*Photo: Nick Littman*

