



photo by Jeremy Gingerich

## WOLVES AND THE MADISON VALLEY RANGERRIDERS

*A successful local project serves as model for others.*

# Ranchlands Quest

*Working collaboratively to enhance production agriculture, open space,  
resource stewardship, wildlife, and habitat management.*

This will be the fourth year of the Range Rider program in the Madison Valley. It has been replicated in several areas around southwest Montana. The most recent report says there are 68 wolves in the Madison. There have been no reports of wolf/livestock conflicts this year locally. But, we are moving into the season when the potential for conflicts will increase significantly.

The Range Riders have been successful over the past three grazing seasons by minimizing the potential for wolf predation. The Riders keep a consistent presence near the cattle and also harass the wolves when they get close to the livestock. As the elk leave the valley bottom and move into traditional calving and summer habitat locations the wolves will not all follow. If there are den sights in the valley with new pups, they will stay in the valley and look for convenient prey. The Riders keep an eye on this type of situation and assure

*The Riders monitored  
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situations.*

the wolves don't get into trouble which would lead to wolves being killed.

Last June an unknown den and pack were discovered by the Range Riders in the middle of several summer grazing allotments. The Riders monitored the wolves all summer and kept them from getting into any predation situations. It was a great success story.



The Riders also monitor other wildlife movements and activities. They assist ranchers in monitoring livestock and range conditions.

We are in desperate need of funding for the Range Rider program. It costs \$16,000 for the two riders for the four month grazing season. We all benefit when wolf/livestock conflict can be prevented through this proactive non-lethal program. If you have an interest in helping support this valuable program please call the MVRG office at 682-3259.

# The Wolf Delisting Controversy

It is interesting to see the shifting goals of the wolf advocates nearly 13 years after the introduction of the Canadian grey wolves into Yellowstone Park. The wolf was touted as an essential part of the Yellowstone ecology. The Endangered Species Act was implemented to bring back the wolf in 1995. At that time there were established numbers which would identify a successful reintroduction process and a sustainable population. Those numbers were reached in 2002. The wolf numbers have increased surprisingly more quickly than estimated by the wolf biologists.

But, here we are six years later with twice as many wolves as needed to remove them from the Endangered Species List and still multiplying at a phenomenal rate, yet the wolf advocates feel there are still not enough to insure their perpetuation in Montana, Wyoming and Idaho.

*Why is it that the management of affairs in Montana is dictated by lawsuits from people outside of the state?*

In 2007, wolf numbers in Montana increased at a rate of 34%. None of this happens in a vacuum. To drive that significant increase in population numbers at an unprecedented rate requires some very basic biological math. Anyone who has raised livestock or animals of any sort, knows that food drives the process. The more food available means a higher reproduction and survival rate. What are the wolves eating that is so plentiful? We know that Yellowstone Park is home to large populations of elk and bison. We know that there is no hunting in Yellowstone Park. Logically we can recognize that the increase in wolf numbers will continue to whatever level the food supply will bear. If it were that simple there would not be such an in-

crease in wolf numbers outside of the Park. Wolves were leaving the Park long before there was any balance between prey and predators.

Unfortunately, we have many people in our society that have tunnel vision about their personal agendas. Wolves are the focal species for many with that malady. Why is it that the management of affairs in Montana is dictated by lawsuits from people outside of the state? Why would the judicial process even consider litigation when the parameters of the law have been duly fulfilled in compliance with the Endangered Species Act? The federal agency which determines when species should be listed or delisted from the ESA has deemed the wolf ready for delisting.

The supposed concern of these litigants is that maybe the states will not manage the wolf according to the desires of the litigants. In other words, you are guilty until proven innocent. And because the

litigants don't trust anyone, they know that those who are mandated to manage wolves in the individual states will never be innocent or competent. This is an insult to the majority of the population that is in support of delisting and managing wolves at the state level with approved management plans which are already in place.

Let us move on with the management of wolves. Those who thrive on litigious grandstand strategies for their own fundraising agendas are being seen for their narrow and self-serving purposes. They are undermining the credibility of their espoused lofty organizational ideals. They disenfranchise those who choose to work collaboratively at the local community level for common sense solutions. MVRG invites them to join the collaborative process of finding solutions which serve the bigger picture, the whole ecosystem and the diverse communities that make up the whole.

*How do you see wolves?*

As majestic creatures?



OR vicious predators?

# The Elk Management Challenge



The presence of large herds of elk in the Madison Valley is becoming an increasingly contentious situation in need of appropriate management. The numbers of elk wintering in the Madison Valley has gone from less than 200 to as many as 9000 in 40 years. The economic and biological implications demand equitable and science-based strategies be implemented.

A recent proposal by MT FWP has met with virtually no support by local landowners and hunters. The proposal would designate most of the Madison Valley east of the Madison River as a special management area. This area extends from Ennis Lake to Squaw Creek. No one would be allowed to hunt in this area except for 400 special drawn cow tags. There would be a complete elimination of late season hunting, the time when the elk come into the valley. All elk hunting would occur during a five week general season. This area is over objective on elk numbers, meaning there needs to be an increase in harvest. Over the past few years with the use of a late season, approximately 600+ elk have been harvested in this proposed special area each year. The proposal would provide 400 tags with a historical harvest rate of 30%. This means approximately 120 cow elk would be harvested. This is one fifth the historical harvest which has proven inadequate to keep elk numbers within objective.

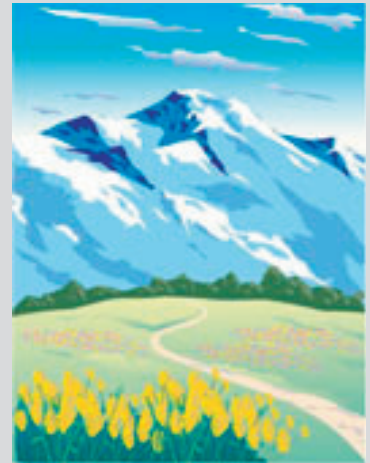
The increasing numbers of elk in the valley are a financial burden to many of the ranches that provide wildlife habitat and open space that benefit all of us. There are three ranches that have outfitted hunting on their land. The income from hunting does not offset the loss of forage to the wildlife but it helps to a certain degree. This proposal by MT FWP would eliminate those outfitting businesses on those ranches.

The risk of brucellosis increases as wildlife congregate in larger numbers. If livestock contract brucellosis from elk, which has occurred in Idaho and Wyoming in the past four years, the ranch with the infection has all of their breeding cattle killed to prevent further contamination. This can easily put a rancher out of business. If a rancher is forced out of business in this situation, the best option is to sell the land for further subdividing. This eliminates critical wildlife habitat and open space which are such a valuable part of the Madison Valley.



There are current efforts to introduce referendums for the fall ballot which would mandate access to private property for hunting and fishing. There is a philosophy among some sportsmen that hunting and fishing rights supersede private property rights. MT FWP seems to be pursuing this same mind set of mandated access. This philosophy is not constitutionally sound nor does it respect a long tradition of community mores in Montana. It is driven by selfishness and a misrepresentation of circumstances. There are articles appearing in various periodicals stating that ranchers are merely in the business so they can profit from wildlife financially. The reality is that very few if any ranchers actually benefit financially from wildlife. There are many ranchers who are being pushed to the point of wanting all wildlife off of their property permanently.

Why would MT FWP propose a special management area in the Madison without meeting with landowners and local hunters first? Why would the MT FWP Commissioners adopt this special management area when it has no local support, in fact is strongly opposed, and there is no science to justify the proposal? Why would MT FWP pursue a course of intentionally antagonizing local residents? It appears there is an agenda being driven which does not respect the collaborative process which has been successful in the Madison or the values of local citizens.



## **NEXT COMMUNITY FORUM**

### **STREAMSIDE PROTECTION: The Science of Setbacks in the Madison Valley**

**April 23, 2008  
6:30 p.m.  
Ennis High School**



# Proposed Initiatives Regarding Private Property Rights



There is something devious afoot that will have a huge impact on farming and ranching in Montana if not addressed quickly. There are three initiatives being circulated in Montana with the intent to have them on the ballot this fall. These three initiatives deal with hunting and fishing on private property. The intent of the initiatives is to change directly and philosophically the Constitution of the State of Montana. In it, Article 9, Section 7, deals with the Preservation of Harvest Heritage and states,

*“The opportunity to harvest wild fish and wild game animals is a heritage that shall forever be preserved to the individual citizens of the state and does not create a right to trespass on private property or diminution of other private rights.”*

One of the proposed initiatives seeks more public access to wildlife by inhibiting exclusive or commercial hunting or fishing access to land. This is an effort to eliminate paid hunting on private lands. Another initiative would make it legal for non-profit organizations (sportsmen groups) to conduct lotteries to acquire or enhance access to land and wildlife and habitat for the benefit of all Montana citizens. Thus, the first initiative makes it illegal for the landowner to derive income from the presence of fish and wildlife on private property, and the second initiative would make it legal for sportsmen groups and other non-profit groups to sell the right to hunt or fish through a lottery. The third initiative would be to amend the Constitution of the State of Montana to add a phrase to Article 9, Section 7, which would state that all of the citizens of the state collectively own the wild fish and wild game animals in Montana. This is another step forward in creating a right

to trespass on private property and diminish other private rights.

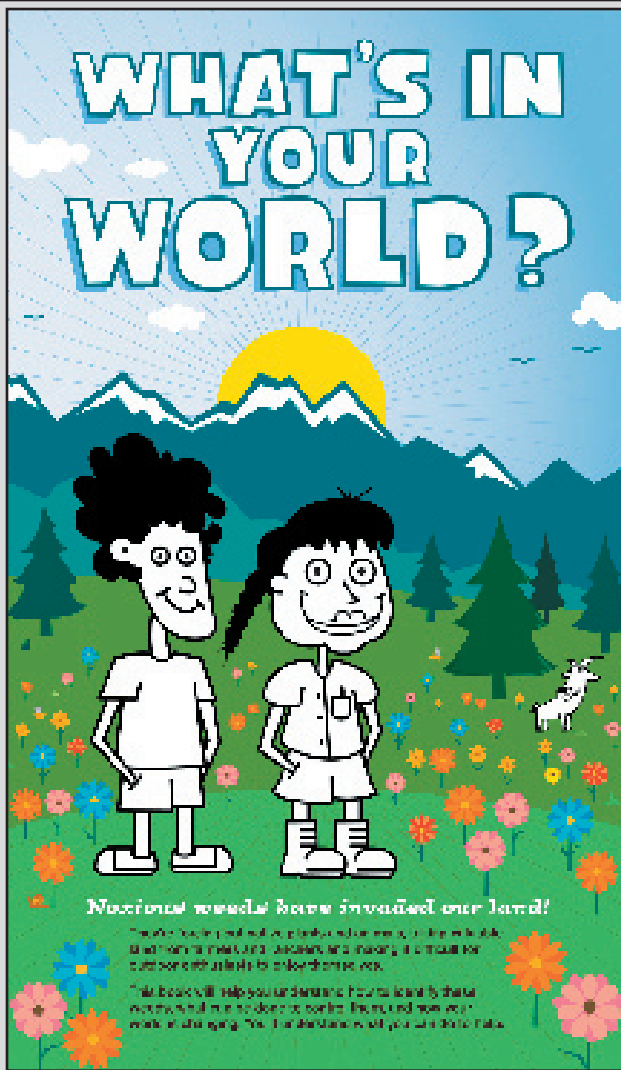
We have huge numbers of people moving to Montana who are motivated by the vast natural beauty and recreational opportunities available. Many corporate employers market the amenities of Montana as part of their strategy to attract a quality labor force. So, we have many new hunters and fishermen who come from states where fish and game numbers were smaller and hunting and fishing opportunities were more limited. When they get here and see the huge populations of wildlife and a vast selection of fishing streams and lakes, they often want to immerse themselves in every type of hunting and fishing available. They often join sportsmen groups in order to meet other hunters and fishermen who can give them information on where, when and what to pursue. These groups have been the breeding ground of ideas that are very foreign to long time hunters and fishermen. The most pervasive of these ideas is that hunters and fishermen are entitled to pursue wild fish and wild game wherever they may be found because the wild fish and wild game belong to all the citizens of Montana. Incidentally, that includes the citizens who own farms and ranches in the state.

If a landowner has resident wildlife on his property he is providing habitat and forage. In some areas of the state the numbers of wildlife are large. Elk are equivalent to .75 Animal Units. If a landowner has 100 head of elk on his property for a month, that is equivalent to having 75 head of cattle for a month. The 100 elk will eat the same amount of forage as 75 head of cattle. Pasture sells for \$18 to \$25 per animal unit month. So, the 100 elk would get from \$1,350

to \$1,875 worth of the ranchers' grass each month. In some parts of the state landowners have several hundred head of elk all winter. Five hundred head of elk can cost a landowner from \$6,750 to \$9,375 per month in lost forage. If the 500 head are there for five months then the landowner has lost from \$33,750 to \$46,875 worth of forage that his own livestock could have benefitted from. It is hard to drive wildlife off of good habitat. We have more wildlife numbers in Montana now than we have ever had. Part of this is due to the huge increase in good quality habitat provided by farmers and ranchers in an effort to make a living in the agriculture business. Most of the Elk Management Units in the state of Montana are over objective, meaning the elk numbers are above the tolerance level of local landowners.

Article 2 of the Montana Constitution pertains to individual rights of citizens. Section 29 addresses eminent domain and states that private property cannot be taken for a public use without just compensation first being given to the landowner. Why are landowners being asked to donate tens of thousands of dollars of their business assets to publicly owned wildlife and then restricted from any activity which would either diminish the loss or compensate for it? From a profit and loss statement standpoint, a landowner who outfits for hunting on his land will hardly ever make enough profit from the outfitting to pay for the lost forage. A common accusation from sportsmen groups is that most ranchers and farmers are only in the business so they can make money from hunting and fishing. They would be much further ahead to run more livestock or raise more crops. The problem is how do you keep the wildlife out of your crops and pastures?

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## What's In Your World?

“What’s In Your World?” is a new environmental education curriculum that addresses noxious weed awareness, identification and control. It was developed by the Statewide Noxious Weed Awareness and Education Program and will begin to be implemented this spring. The MVRG Weed Committee is excited to be one of the first organizations to purchase and utilize this exciting program.

The Weed Committee is looking forward to participating in Bear Creek Days, an event hosted by the Forest Service and Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks. During Bear Creek Days, Madison County students participate in a field day focused on environmental education. Along with funding from the National Forest Foundation, the Weed Committee will purchase “What’s In Your World?” satchels for students participating in Bear Creek Days.

Additionally, in conjunction with a grant from the Montana Department of Agriculture Noxious Weed Trust Fund, the Weed Committee will purchase copies of the “What’s In Your World?” curriculum to be used in schools across Madison County. These educational efforts will work to further the Weed Committee’s goal of promoting noxious weed education by encouraging participation and interaction with both Madison County students and educators.

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## Private Property Rights

FWP and sportsmen groups are pushing an agenda of unlimited access to private lands. These proposed initiatives are stark evidence of that agenda. Constitutional law seeks for equity in dealing with the interactions of citizens. State statutes, agency policies and citizen initiatives must all be under the umbrella of US constitutional law. Landowners, farmers and ranchers must be wary of special interest groups who show disregard for equity under the law. If hunters want access to hunt the increasing numbers of wildlife on private lands then someone must be willing to pay landowners for the lost revenues which the wildlife are causing.

One of the arguments that FWP and some hunters use at this point is that if more access was given then there would be less wildlife numbers. Great theory, but it does not address the reality of wildlife movement and biology. Elk and whitetail deer populations are getting out of hand in spite of very liberal season and quota structures. In looking for solutions to this escalating problem, FWP and sportsmen groups are reluctant to listen to farmers, ranchers and landowners for equitable alternatives.

## Science Fair Winner



**MVRG Weed Coordinator  
Melissa Griffiths presents  
Sarah DeNitto with the  
“Best Noxious Weed Award”  
see story on page 6**



photo by Marni Thompson

## Special Grazing Project

In March, grazing specialist Kathy Voth met with landowners in Madison County who are participating in the Weed Committee's 2008 project, "*Training Cattle to eat Noxious Weeds*". A grazing plan was designed for each ranch, in one case tailoring methods to address bison grazing.

This project is part of a grant project funded by the Natural Resources Conservation Service. This Conservation Innovation Grant helps participating ranchers implement this highly innovative management practice by providing expert advice, materials, labor and monitoring. We will update you on the results of this exciting project later in the year.

# WEED COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES

## SCIENCE FAIR AWARDS

The Weed Committee was pleased to present cash awards to students at the local, regional and state science fairs this year. The committee selects the "Best Noxious Weed Project" and awards \$100 for each winning project. At the local science fair in Ennis, winners were Blake and Madison McKittrick. For their project, Blake and Madison surveyed local people to find out how much they knew about noxious weeds. This was a good project as it highlights the real need for outreach and education.

At the Regional Science Fair in Butte, winners were Candace Dunagan and Sarah DeNitto. Candace is an 8th grade student from Hamilton Middle School. Her project was titled, "Weeds? Got Questions? I've got Answers". Candace sprayed a number of different herbicides on various weeds, in various environments. She monitored the efficacy of each spray, and tried to determine if the environmental differences had an impact.

Sarah DeNitto is an 11th grader from Big Sky High School in Missoula and her project studied the "Effects of extracts of leaves from *Centaurea maculosa* (Spotted Knapweed) on germination of seeds of

grasses native to Montana and Eurasia". Cnicin is a toxin released by spotted knapweed that can stop or inhibit the germination of native seeds. Her project was quite interesting as it attempted to determine whether native Eurasian grass species are better adapted to germinate in the presence of this toxin than are Montana native grass species.

Candace and Sarah were also awarded "Best Noxious Weed Project" at the State Science Fair in Missoula. Congratulations to all the Science Fair winners!

## UPCOMING WEED PROJECTS

This summer is bound to be a busy one as the Weed Committee gears up to work on a variety of exciting projects.

As part of a grant from the National Forest Foundation, several landowners in the Bear Creek area will be eligible for special cost-share to assist them in controlling noxious weeds. Also, the committee will help implement Bear Creek Days, an educational event sponsored by the Forest Service and MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

Thanks to funding from the Missouri-Madison River Fund and PPL MT, the committee will hire a commercial applicator to spray weeds along the Madison River below Ennis Lake as well as host an educational boat-wash day this summer.

The River Project funded by the Dept. of Ag's Noxious Weed Trust Fund will continue, although it was funded at a reduced level. Money from this project is used by the County to hire a commercial applicator to treat the Madison River corridor and to provide cost-share to landowners.

The Pilot Sheep Grazing Project will continue again this summer. This project has become a showcase project in the state of Montana, with phenomenal results.

The committee is also working with the Madison Conservation District and NRCS to implement a special weed initiative in the Norwegian Creek Area. This project is somewhat unique in that participating landowners will receive cost-share for 7 consecutive years. This lengthy commitment on behalf of the agency and the landowners will allow for a real difference to be made in this area.

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**DATES TO REMEMBER:**  
*May 13, 2008 - 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.*  
 Farm Applicator Training (Weeds)  
*August 23, 2008*  
 10th Annual WEEDS PARTY!

# Growth Issues - Streamside Protection Ordinance Proposed

Last September there was a Water and Growth community forum held at the high school in Ennis. Duncan Patten, an ecologist from MSU, spoke about the dynamics and realities of living in the type of watershed which we do. John Lafave, a hydrogeologist from Montana Tech, gave a presentation addressing the relationship between ground water and surface water. After those presentations, the attendees broke into small groups to discuss what they see as concerns regarding growth and water. The top concern out from all of the three breakout groups was streamside protection. Specifically, there is a 500 foot set back on the Madison River and 100 foot on all tributaries. These setbacks were the result of a 20 year effort by local citizens to assess and address threats to the integrity and health of the Madison and its tributaries. In 1993, these setbacks were adopted as part of the subdivision review process in Madison County. Since then all new development going through the subdivision review process is required to adhere to these requirements. What the folks at the September forum were concerned about is the fact that if buildings are occurring outside of the subdivision review process, then there is no protection for the river or streams. People can build anywhere up to the river's edge. The community process from 1973 through 1993 specifically placed a higher value on streamside protection and thus supported a regulation to protect the integrity of the streams.

In October, several citizens who had participated in the forum process met with the County Commissioners and requested an ordinance be developed which would address the community concerns. The commissioners assigned the newly hired Planning Director, Charity Fechter, to prepare an ordinance. In January, another community forum was held to present a draft ordinance and to look at the science behind streamside protection. Janet Ellis from the Montana Audubon Society gave an in depth presentation on

streamside protection around Montana and the increasing interest and support that is occurring. At this forum there were a few who expressed grave fears of what an ordinance would do to them. All of the forum participants were given sticky notes to write their response to the proposed ordinance. They were asked to tell what they liked about a streamside ordinance and what concerns they had. The most common response was that they liked the concept of fairness in streamside protection. They were in favor of some kind of ordinance to assure that equity. They also agreed that any ordinance would need non-compliance language and a variance process.

There will be another community forum on April 23rd at the Ennis high school foyer to consider changes and suggestions to the proposed streamside protection ordinance. This forum will begin at 6:30 pm. All of these forums are open to the public. The purpose of the forum process is to provide all citizens the opportunity to gain information and share opinions about current issues. Additional growth puts a bigger burden on Madison Valley residents to participate in the

decision making process.

There have been some letters and emails circulated which contain a large amount of misinformation regarding the community process as a whole and the proposed streamside protection ordinance specifically. We enjoy the benefits of living in a free land with a democratic type of governance. President Abraham Lincoln noted in his Gettysburg Address that government and governance is by the people, of the people, and for the people. That is the beauty and the genius of our prosperity and freedom. The more involved the citizenry are in discussing issues and seeking equitable solutions, the better the solutions are. It is through the public process that elected officials learn what the public feels are the best decisions. The more good information which the public can consider pertaining to any issue, the better are the chances that good results will occur. But it is also critical that as many as possible of a community's members choose to be involved in addressing issues. That helps to assure equity is achieved. So, choose to be involved. Participate in the community forums and vote in each election.

## *Will you join us in our efforts?*

**The Madison Valley Ranchlands Group works to protect the ranching way of life and the biologically healthy open spaces on which ranching depends.**

Yes! I want to help the Madison Valley Ranchlands Group.

Please accept my tax deductible contribution of :

\$25 - \$100     \$125 - \$250     \$275 - \$500     \$1,000  
 \$5,000     \$10,000     \$25,000     other

*\*annual membership dues are \$25*

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE \_\_\_\_\_ EMAIL \_\_\_\_\_

*PLEASE MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO:*

*MVRG - P.O. BOX 330 - ENNIS, MT 59729*

*(406) 682 - 3259    MVRANCH@3RIVERS.NET*

*The Madison Valley Ranchlands Group is a 501(c) 3 nonprofit organization  
and deeply appreciates your financial support!*

# The Root of the Matter

by *Cindy Owings*



In old English times the saying, “come at pudding time,” was synonymous with dinnertime. Today we might use the saying when we invite friends to a feast meaning, “join us for supper.” Now pudding time has been elevated to mean a happy or fortunate time.

A diverse group of folks in our area are arriving at the pudding time of a conversation about food! Ranchers are trying to find ways to process and sell meat within our region. Fishing and hunting lodges want fresh, locally grown salads and steaks on their client tables. Madison Valley newcomers are excited to learn how to grow vegetables in their own Zone 3 yards.

People who, up to this point, have never given the idea of growing their own food a second thought are making that very thought their priority. They are acting on their desires to eat fresh!

In late March two events were packed with interested Madisonians. Fifteen or

so new and experienced gardeners showed up at Wild Thymes Greenhouse in Ennis to hear Kendra Gosse talk about starting and growing plants straight from a seed. On Saturday four-dozen enthusiastic gardeners, eaters, and growers packed the Elling House meeting room in Virginia City to visit about food.

What’s happening? There is palpable, sizzling energy in our community whirling around the seat of our desires to have fresh, sustainable, naturally grown local food.

Many who are passionate about food issues confronting our country today can tune into a national conversation driven by recently published books and articles. Last year the Governor’s Conference on Food and Food Security generated on-going interest in our own state’s food issues by establishing an informational network and committees to examine policy.

Tasty reading is three books that examine various aspects of the food conversation. “Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants,” is Michael Pollan’s answer to the question, what should we eat? He goes on to explain the shortfalls of the Western diet and nutritionism (his word) in his new book, “In Defense of Food”.

Nina Planck, a thirty-something mother of a toddler thought the food topic timely enough, she wrote, “Real Food”. Before becoming a mother Nina was so concerned about local food availability she gave up a promising journalism career to start farmers’ markets in London, Washington DC, and Brooklyn.

Barbara Kingsolver moved from Arizona to her husband’s family land in southern Appalachia to live off the land, as we would have said in the ‘60’s. She and her family committed to growing and raising as much of their own food as possible on this parcel for one year. She wrote a wonderfully descriptive book about the experience: “Animal, Vegetable, Miracle, A year of food life”.

As the old adage goes, we are what we eat! The time is now to examine for ourselves how we can support local growers and producers by defining what fills our grocery bags. We can stimulate a local economy, in the long run enriching our entire community.

The proof is in the pudding. We live in fortunate times. Now we have choices. In the future, we may not always expect to arrive at pudding time.

