

Willits Economic
Localization

W E L L :

M a k i n g t h e C o n n e c t i o n i n W i l l i t s

Progress Report to the Community 2004–2006



Strengthening our economy
Supporting our community
Stewarding our environment

Willits Economic Localization

75 North Main Street, PMB 234
Willits, CA 95490

Phone: 707.459.1256
Fax: 707.459.0366
E-mail: well@redinet.org
Web:
willitseconomiclocalization.org



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Progress Report to the Community - 2004–2006

*This report has been written
and produced by Jason Brad-
ford, Suzie Gruber and Spring
Senerchia.*

WELL is legally a program of the
Renewable Energy Development
Institute (REDI) a registered 501
(c)3 non-profit in Willits.

The WELL Vision - An enduring local economy
that provides health and security for our
community.

The WELL Mission is to foster the creation of a local,
sustainable economy in the Willits area by partnering
with other organizations to watch for opportunities and
vulnerabilities, incubate and coordinate projects, and
facilitate dialogue, action and education within our
community.

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W E L L :

M a k i n g t h e C o n n e c t i o n i n W i l l i t s

Major Projects Include:

Barn Raising	Marin Street Garden
Brookside Farm	Grateful Gleaners
Medicine Chest Garden	Resource Inventories
Willits Wellness Network	

September 28, 2006

Three years ago one of us (Jason) was at a workshop with Julian Darley of the Post Carbon Institute. Julian was promoting "global relocation" and the formation of citizens groups to advocate for and create a "parallel public infrastructure" that could function without oil and other fossil fuels. Another one of us (Spring) was a student at New College in Santa Rosa with Richard Heinberg. Richard had recently authored "The Party's Over: Oil, War and the Fate of Industrial Societies," that explained the history of our addiction to fossil fuels, overshoot of Earth's carrying capacity, and the impending peak in global oil production. Both of us felt like we were living with a lonely burden—having information that should be widely known, discussed and acted upon, but wasn't.

What has become Willits Economic Localization (WELL) began almost two years ago. It started by showing a movie, "The End of Suburbia: Oil Depletion and the Collapse of the American Dream," and having heartfelt conversations with those in the room. People started talking to each other, and suddenly we were rolling with "something." From small beginnings, big things grow.

Consistently for the past 18 months, WELL has organized and co-sponsored dozens of public forums that have raised awareness among the population. At these events and following them, people talk about what really matters and have a social network in which to organize action. Our ingredients for social change are: providing compelling, relevant information, a place to build relationships, and an organizational structure for continuity and administration of tasks.

We believe we have done a great job raising community spirits. As you will read in this report, many positive changes are occurring, and each time one of these projects gets going it makes it more likely someone will become motivated to follow their own passion and become a leader of something else. From club-like groups collecting apples and pears and distributing them around town to the City of Willits installing photovoltaic panels to support

our water system, WELL has worked in partnership to catalyze meaningful actions.

Over the long term, we need to find ways for all of us to have right livelihood within a sustainable, predominantly local economic system, one that runs on current solar income, recycles all materials, and is secure in the basics of life such as food, water, shelter, energy and health care. WELL currently functions because of motivated volunteers and a part time staff. Now that some of our basic organizational questions have been addressed, we are looking at what it will take to move from a volunteer base to a vocational base and create a thriving model that will help other localities do the same

The passions and actions of WELL have attracted a lot of attention outside of Willits. Phone calls, emails, reporters and publishers from all over the world are frequently asking us to tell them our story. Now the burden we feel is not from the isolation of exclusive knowledge, but the need to manifest our goals. We have matured enough as an organization to step up to this challenge and are striving to make the proper connections that will support WELL and the many projects it is inspiring. It has been a great journey so far, and we are looking forward to a long and rewarding path ahead.

Jason Bradford, co-founder Spring Senerchia, Office Manager



WELL :

M a k i n g t h e C o n n e c t i o n i n W i l l i t s

Leadership is needed from all sorts of people. Have courage and resolve. I ask that those of you worried about the future and upset by the direction of our country, get up and do something about it right where you live.

Jason Bradford—Truthout.org

Report to the Community

Connecting With Purpose

WELL is a relatively young organization with humble beginnings. We have worked hard over the past two years to develop our mission, vision, and structure while also educating and inspiring community members locally, regionally, and internationally, resulting in several tangible new projects functioning in Willits.



Why WELL Exists

Willits is a great place to live for many reasons. We have a strong sense of community, creative and dedicated talent, and surrounding natural beauty.

We want to protect and enhance these local qualities and meet the challenges of the future through economic localization.

Economic, demographic and environmental trends concern many in our community. Rising fuel costs, climate change, and the importation of most of our essential goods leaves our community vulnerable.

Localizing our economy means that we will produce more of our essentials here in Willits. This behavior models the great American values of self and community reliance.

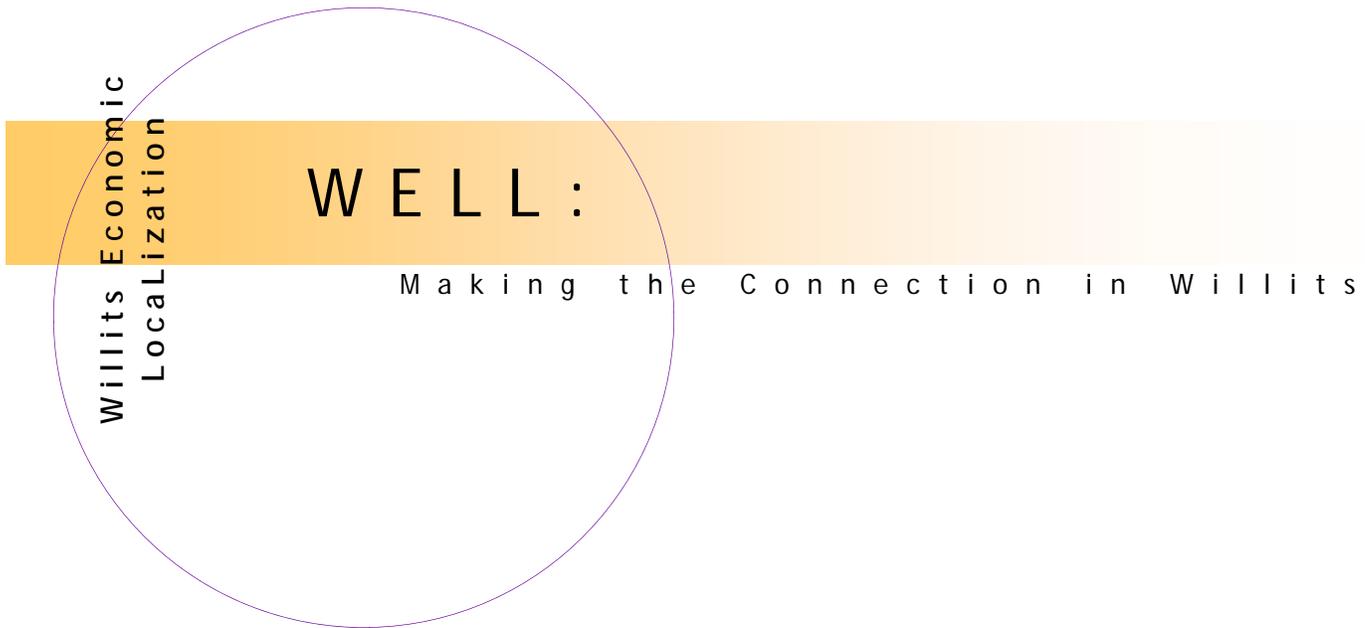
Local food and energy systems will tap the vast wealth of knowledge and ingenuity in our area. Benefits include:

- ◆ Diverse local employment
- ◆ Clean, efficient, and more responsible options for food, energy, and transportation
- ◆ Secure future for our families and children
- ◆ Stronger connection to each other and the natural beauty around us

History of WELL

WELL began with showings of the documentary film “The End of Suburbia” and discussions about “what can we do here?” A series of regular meetings at the community center ensued where concerned and creative individuals formed groups to study our current economic arrangements and envision new ones. To educate and inspire ourselves, we began a monthly speaker series.

Out of these discussions came many projects, some personal and small-scale, and others institutional and grand. A strategy emerged to engage existing local organizations to form partnerships towards our goals. As WELL attracted more attention and potential funding, we decided to create a more formal structure while remaining flexible & dynamic.



Report to the Community

Connecting With Purpose

How We Work

WELL is a membership-based community organization open to anyone living in the greater Willits area (95490 zip code). Legally, WELL is a program of the Renewable Energy Development Institute, a non-profit corporation based in Willits. However, governance of WELL occurs via the members who elect a council that coordinates the volunteers to produce events, conduct research, carry-out projects, and outreach to others.

WELL puts on community forums so that we can learn from and about each other, and organize actions that make a difference. At WELL meetings individuals and small groups may initiate projects that help create economic localization. WELL aims to support these initiatives but does not manage them.

WELL also has groups that focus on outreach to businesses, government, and other community groups to discover their potential role in creating a more sustainable, vibrant, and secure Willits.

WELL has an office in downtown Willits and part-time staff to handle communication and administrative tasks. Volunteers are welcome.

The Future of WELL

For the past six months, WELL has undergone an extensive organizational development process.

We began with a full weekend workshop open to all members of WELL and the broader community. Over the course of these two days, forty people agreed on core values, a Vision Statement and priorities for WELL. They also empowered three committees to work on the following areas: Strategic Planning, Governance and Membership.

Six months later, after many hours of committee work, several drafts and lots of community input, three documents were unanimously adopted and on September 11, 2006 WELL held its first formal election for a Coordinating Committee. These documents are available by request.

A membership drive is well underway—to date we have 155 members, some who are Working Members contributing actively towards localization efforts and some who are Subscribing Members who simply support WELL's vision.

Working Teams outlined in our Strategic Plan are filling up and we hope to achieve our ambitious annual goals.

This process has been challenging and overwhelming at times, but now that we are on the other end of it, WELL has a good framework in which staff and volunteers can work together with a common purpose.

Report to the Community

Connecting The Dots: Educating Our Community

WELL began as a grass roots reaction to a number of growing tensions within the community. As explained in our strategic plan:

WELL is our response to the problems that lie immediately ahead in connection with the end of cheap energy, rapid over-development and sprawl, lack of local job opportunities for youth, overuse of increasingly scarce water supplies, the local effects of a changing climate, loss of biodiversity and habitat in Mendocino County, inadequate health care for most, and the rising cost of food and services that come from outside Willits, among others.

These ideas are often new and can be overwhelming in their implications. Therefore, one of WELL's most significant endeavors to date has been a massive education campaign to educate our own small town about peak oil, climate change, and the benefits of sustainable localization.

To enroll Willits, WELL organizes community forums where information about energy, food, transportation, health care, the environment, local economics, town planning, etc. are discussed in collaboration with outside experts and our own people. We have held these events monthly or bimonthly since WELL's inception, and we get good coverage in the local newspaper and radio, creating a great way to inform the community and build relationships.



Sample of WELL Presenters:

Julian Darley—founder, Post Carbon Institute

Richard Heinberg—Peak Oil expert, author & professor

Ann Hancock—co-founder, Climate Protection Campaign

John Jeavons—founder, Grow Biointensive

Michael Shuman—author, Local Economies

Jessica Prentice—author, chef, Locavore founder

Elder Talk—series of panels with long-time Willits residents

Report to the Community

Connecting Technology & Expertise With Action

Research

To provide good information about the present and help plan for the future, WELL has formally conducted research about Willits' energy and food systems, and has also examined aspects of local shelter, government, social organizations, and health systems.

The most comprehensive reports are the energy report and the food report, both available on our website.

The **energy report** details the mix of fossil fuels, electricity and wood used as primary energy sources, the dollar costs of these, and the resulting carbon dioxide emissions. As a result of this work, the Willits city council established an ad hoc energy committee. This committee recommended that the city install solar panels to offset the electricity used for city services, especially the water treatment and sewage facilities.

The City Council approved the project, and they applied for and will receive energy rebates from PG&E on the order of \$900,000. Currently a Request For Proposal has been issued and will lead to the installation of a grid tied photovoltaic system used to pump water from the city reservoir, through a treatment plant, and into storage tanks for distribution to the town.

The **food report** contrasts the existing supermarket based system with a study of local agricultural potential and existing food production. Prime agricultural land and its historic uses are reviewed. Crops, livestock and their

seasons are summarized, and some gaps in becoming more self-reliant are identified.

As a result of our discussions, multiple community gardens have been established, grants have been submitted towards establishing a local food system, and a one acre school farm is being developed—see page 8.



“Maybe together we can make things happen, make the city energy independent.”

—Councilman Ron Orenstein at the third Willits showing of “The End of Suburbia”



Report to the Community

Connecting People with Farms

cultivate healthy food and relationships, and serve their community.

People need to eat. Often times as people begin to grasp the reality of our energy transition and its implications, food comes to mind first. Luckily, Willits has the climate, soils, and knowledge to begin to produce significant amounts of food in our valley. The food report contains meaningful information about local soils and arable land in and around Willits. Many local residents enjoy working outside and find great satisfaction in producing food. WELL's food group has been one of the most active, as evidenced by the number and scope of food related projects already underway.

Marin Street Community Garden

This garden is in a small downtown back yard and plans to grow enough vegetables for several families with some to give away as well.

WISC Community Garden

Willits Action Group (WAG) develops programs to improve community health with a focus on youth. A project that was discussed initially within WELL's Food Group is now underway, a community garden at the county's Willits Integrated Services Center (WISC).

A volunteer crew installed a fence and initial plantings, and now a garden coordinator has been hired to develop the site. The goal is to have the garden be a beautiful, rewarding place for adults and youth to come together,

Brookside School Farm

The WELL Food Group estimates that roughly 4000 acres of prime agricultural land growing staples such as grains and potatoes would be needed to feed our local population, a number equivalent to the amount of agricultural land here in Willits. Household and community gardens are great, but farms are essential.

Brookside Elementary School happens to sit on prime agricultural land within the town. The school board has approved a one acre farm at the school to provide educational opportunities, food for the community, and demonstrate local food production, storage and processing. Initial donations from individuals have allowed installation of fencing and an irrigation system. North Coast Opportunities (NCO) is the fiscal agent for this project.

Food System

NCO, WAG and WELL collaborated on a USDA Food Security Grant to support Brookside Farm and a California Endowment Grant to plan for the long-term development of a local food system.

Report to the Community

Connecting Resources With The People Who Need Them

One of the most successful WELL-inspired projects, again involving food, is the Grateful Gleaners. The Gleaners is a network of volunteers organized to collect unharvested fruit and vegetables from local farms and gardens. This produce is shared among the Gleaners and the land owner, and distributed to our local food bank, community kitchen, and other community programs. The Gleaners estimate that this year they will harvest *three tons* of produce that would otherwise go unused.



"This service is a win-win situation all around... We cannot say enough about how well the system works, the Gleaners are well organized, well equipped and arrived promptly."

- Local orchardist Gordon Wagenet

Report to the Community

Connecting Communities

WELL has been influential outside of Willits. Within Mendocino County, five other localization groups have formed following WELL's example: Greater Ukiah Localization Project (GULP), Coastal Economic Localization Links (CELL), CELL South, Anderson Valley Foodshed Project, & Sustainable Laytonville. Because WELL has a small office and a part-time staff person, it is informally serving as a regional hub for communications within the county.

Many other groups have arisen on the West coast and report studying WELL for inspiration. Most of these are registered at www.relocalize.net.

To better understand and solidify this movement, WELL hosted a "Regional Localization Networking Conference" in April 2006. Sponsors included the City of Willits and Post Carbon Institute, which reports that 65% of calls to its office ask about WELL. Thirty communities were represented with over 120 people in attendance.

WELL participants are frequent ambassadors to other communities beginning to organize around localization. Brian Weller has visited Ft. Bragg, Garberville, Pt. Townsend, Bainbridge, Carbondale, Kinsale (Ireland) and Big Sur. Jason Bradford has met with groups in Ukiah, Mendocino, Gualala, Pt. Arena, Occidental, Oakland, and Nevada County. Ann Weller sat with community leaders in Hawaii. WELL members have presented twice at Sol Fest in Hopland, and have led workshops in Hopland, San Francisco, and Oakland.

WELL's efforts have been highlighted or featured in dozens of media reports. Examples include:

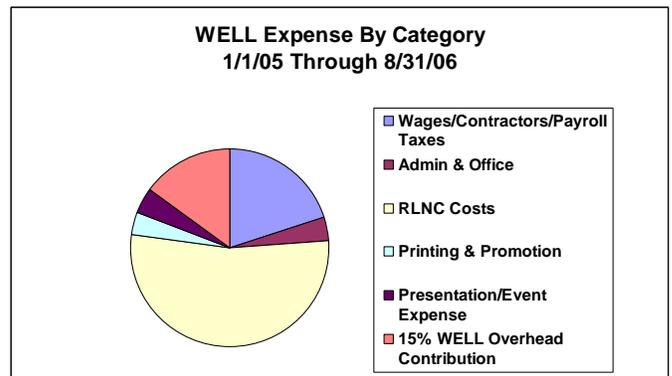
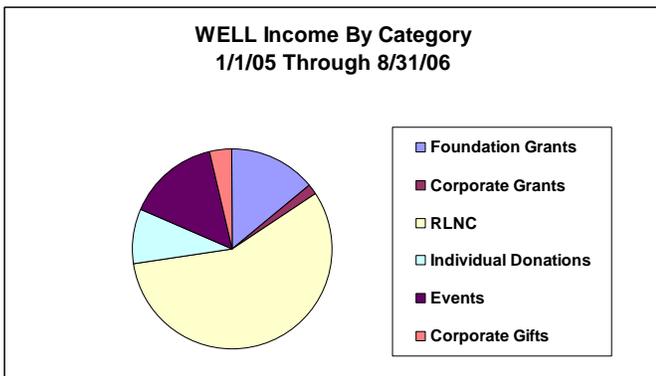
- ◆ "The Good News Is Local" — Jason Bradford's Interview on Truthout.org — September 13, 2006
- ◆ "Escape from Suburbia" — Sequel to "The End of Suburbia" due to be released Fall 2006
- ◆ "Planning for the Future of Farming" — Oakland Tribune — February 28, 2006
- ◆ "Congressman Backs Post-Oil Planning: Thompson Says Willits Can Set National Example" — The Willits News — November 30, 2005
- ◆ "San Francisco in a Post-Oil Future" — S.F. Chronicle — October 1, 2005



WELL :

M a k i n g t h e C o n n e c t i o n i n W i l l i t s

Financials



Financial Notes

WELL’s most reliable income has come from a generous grant from the Post Carbon Institute. Other significant revenue sources are the educational events that WELL volunteers produce and individual donations.

WELL’s most significant cost is staff payroll. We also spend a notable amount on our 15% overhead payment to our fiscal sponsor, the Renewable Energy Development Institute (REDI). This money offsets all of the administrative support, office space and equipment REDI offers WELL.

The Regional Localization Networking Conference—RLNC—shows up significantly in both the income and expense categories. WELL did not make a profit on this event; it was offered as a service to the greater Localization movement.

WELL’s funding is currently uncertain. To be a fair coordinator of the entire Relocalization Network, Post Carbon Institute is shifting its funding away from direct financial support of WELL. We are actively looking for grants, donations and ways to support our ongoing expenses.

Staff & Governance

This report is being written during a time of transition for the WELL office staff and our governing bodies. Our only staff is beginning a maternity leave presently. Our volunteer Steering Committee, many members having served since WELL's inception, has just been replaced by a formally elected Coordinating Committee.

Staff

Office Manager: Spring Senerchia

Interim Office Manager: Suzie Gruber

Steering Committee

Jason Bradford

Richard Jergenson

Lanny Cotler

Spring Senerchia

David Drell

Diane Smalley

Suzie Gruber

Liam UiCearbhaill

Marc Grail

Ann Weller

Tim Gregory

Brian Weller



Coordinating Committee

Jason Bradford

Rachel Olivieri

Marc Grail

Ron Orenstein

Ron Greystar

Liam UiCearbhaill

Suzie Gruber

Brian Weller

Freddie Long

Mary Zellachild

Volunteers

WELL's accomplishments are significant, all the more so in light of our relatively tiny budget and staff. WELL is a volunteer based organization. Our staff time pales in comparison with the dedicated efforts of many passionate and generous community members. This list is by no means comprehensive. We recognize here individuals who have spent significant hours on a variety of work for WELL. What we have done and can do together is truly impressive.

Mair Alight
Toni Amelung
A. J. Barrett
Marilyn Boosinger
Jason Bradford
Kristin Bradford
Patrick Burnstad
Ron Cole
Brian Corzilius
Lanny Cotler
Marilyn Darrow
Larry Desmond
Kimball Dodge
Indigo Donaldson
David Drell
Gatsby
Marc Grail

Tim Gregory
Karen Gridley
Suzie Gruber
Phil Jergenson
Richard Jergenson
Laura Liska
Freddie Long
Judy Luria
Patricia Norris
Sara O'Brien
Ron Orenstein
Tony Orth
Gary Owen
Ralph Pisciotta
Spring Senerchia
Ree Slocum
Diane Smalley

Brian Smith
Jan Stephens
Liam UiCearbhaill
Annie Weller
Brian Weller
Ron Woolsey
Andy Wright
Mary Zellachild

Donors

WELL also recognizes the generosity of concerned individuals and one proactive foundation. Individual donors include local residents and far-flung supporters. This list does not include our recent Membership Drive, which has multiplied our support significantly.

Donors

Foundation Grants

The majority of WELL's funding has come from the Post Carbon Institute. Their generous and regular contributions have made it possible to employ a part time office staff, which in turn has enabled WELL to have reliable communication internally and with groups around the globe.

Individual Donors

Jason & Kristin Bradford	Richard & Jan Hincker
Patty Bruder	Richard Jergenson
John Cross	Freddie Long
Tom DeMarchi	Christopher Martin
Patricia Dewitt	Marcia Pratt
Jed & Carlin Diamond	Wolfgang Ronnefeldt
Kimbal Dodge	G.M. Shon
Cathy Glyer	Diane Smalley
Marc Grail	Jan and Gary Stephens
Karen Gridley	Dave & Jenny Watts
Suzie Gruber	Ann & Brian Weller