

# What is a Rural Activist?

Submission to Maverick Feb 2016  
By Barbara Hockabout

Travel to any large city and have a conversation with metros who have never experienced living in a small town or a rural setting. I do frequently, and I am amazed at how I am perceived; I am a small farmer who practices self-reliant strategies. To them, I am a "Prepper." Go to your favorite search engine, type in *rural activism*, and you will find a litany of radical, belligerent, rural-based movements beyond your wildest imagination. And it is no longer a matter of red or blue states, city or country residents, or a particular place. Definitions are getting diffused within the same regions of our country. Take for instance, Oregon. I spend a good deal of time in Portland, Oregon, a pocket of progressive, cultured, and tolerant citizens, who live in the same state where one of the more notable standoffs between ranchers and government agents is taking place.

The wide range of perceptions of what a rural activist is intrigued me so much I was inspired to create my own definition that I offer for your consideration. Let me begin by saying that I think lively conversations about terms and stereotypes are healthy in that they help us clarify change for ourselves. (And I think we all agree change is abundant and inevitable.) Second, it is not my intention to dispute other definitions. Rather, I wish to add yet another perception of what a rural activist is at the risk of being considered a Centrist or a Revisionist.

My definition of a rural activist is very literal. I believe **that anyone who seeks to grow as an individual and who in turn pours energy into improving the conditions of their larger community is an activist.** By this definition the panel of local community networkers who have consented to explain the kind of work they do for our communities during the Lodestar Saturday Farmers Market fall under this definition. These folks have the foresight, moxy, and compassion to see the larger picture for their immediate communities.

If you live in the Vernon area and you lost your dog or need a place to live after your house fire, you call Paula Johnson. She has helped foster committees in Vernon and has a sixth sense about connecting people above and beyond her 500+ email list. She is a rural activist. So is Peggy Miner, who in her 2+ years residency in Concho, has inspired the inception of the Concho Garden Club, created a seed library, and works quietly behind the scenes to connect people who can help each other. Her Garden Club predecessor, Co-Director Barbara Abbey, will be part of the panel as well. Allison Hephner, native of Navajo County and now advocate for growers in both Apache and Navajo County, demonstrates the same passion and commitment to improve life here through enhancing our capacity to grow more food. Ascyna Talking Raven formed the White Mountain Freehold which hosts two can drives each year to help feed our communities and operates the Visionary Wellness Co-Op that offers affordable health care to members of our communities. Tony Tangalos, new Resident Manager of the Kerr-Cole Sustainability Center, is walking his sustainable living talk and is afire with sharing Barbara Kerr's Center as a model with others who wish to live a life with a smaller carbon footprint. He is one of many metros who seek a more authentic life closer to nature.

All of these community networkers are rural activists according to my definition—individuals who seek to grow personally and who pour energy into improving their communities. To dump even more ingredients into the soup, consider . . . this same definition is also applicable to local food growers, alternative health workers, artists who use mediums to express what we cannot, residents who support the arts, home school teachers, public school educators, the many volunteers who are the backbone of non-profits and community service programs, homesteaders, farmers market organizers, those who facilitate open debate, discovery, and local wisdom as did the Greeks, those Fathers of Democracy, as did those early Americans in town meetings. There are many aspects to rural activism. The root word in activism is ‘act’ – to care enough, to have energy enough to go beyond our own interests.

Perhaps it is easier to say what rural activism is not. It is not obstructing freedom of expression, judging others, or poisoning your neighborhood with fear and gossip. Before a rural activist speaks or acts he/she asks, “Is this helping to promote a kinder, more just world?” Selected focus is a powerful methodology for an activist. Like the power of the boycott, a very effective political approach is to amp up our energy to support what brings us the greatest joy in our lives. If we turn our backs on unnecessary drama and save our energy for those things we want to thrive and flourish, what kind of world would it be—be it rural or urban? local or international?

The White Mountains and surrounding hamlets in our region are full of rural activists. Meet a few in a **free panel presentation noon February 13<sup>th</sup>** at Lodestar Gardens Learning Center Saturday Farmers Market (located 16 miles east of Show Low, 9 miles west of Concho) and learn about ways you can assist your community to become stronger and healthier. Request directions and a map to Lodestar: [bhockabout@gmail.com](mailto:bhockabout@gmail.com) or call: (928) 587-1660.