

LCDC Mid-Valley Tour



May 20, 2015

Background

The tour route will take the commission to several locations on French Prairie. The following history is from the Friends of French Prairie website (<http://www.friendsoffrenchprairie.org/area-history.html>). Much more information is available there.

Area History

French Prairie is a term dating back to the 1820's and is most typically used to describe the area of the Willamette Valley bounded on the west and north by the Willamette River, on the east by Canby and the Molalla River, and extending down through St. Louis and Gervais toward Salem. Thus, it includes Champoege State Park and Historic District, the historic towns of Aurora, Donald, Butteville, Gervais, Hubbard, St. Louis, St. Paul and Woodburn, and a number of French Prairie historic churches.

Native Inhabitants

The Calapooya Indians were the earliest known inhabitants of the prairies. They fished at Willamette Falls, hunted game on the prairies, and picked berries in the mountains. Each fall they burned the tall prairie grass to renew their pony pastures and to round up game. Crossings over the Willamette River were few and limited to shallow areas—one such crossing was about three miles north of St. Paul, where the river was narrow during the summertime and a wide gravel bench.

Original Settlers

Based on the work of David Brauner, PhD, professor of archaeology at Oregon State University, we know that the French Prairie was originally populated by the Metis (pronounced "Matee"), mostly retired French Canadian trappers who once worked out of Fort Vancouver and then settled on small French Prairie farm sites with Native American wives and large numbers of

children. His research indicates that more than a decade before the first Americans found their way into the Willamette Valley, the French Prairie farms of the Metis were flourishing.

A significant number of these French Canadian-Metis employees of the Hudson's Bay Company began settling the northern valley after their contractual obligations to the company were over so that, between 1829 and 1843, successful Metis agricultural communities developed in several locations throughout the Northwest. The oldest and largest of these was French Prairie.

The Land and Pioneers

The destination of the immigrant wagon trains from the Eastern United States in the Oregon Country was the land east of the Willamette River and north to present-day Salem – now referred to as French Prairie. This prairie land was fringed with forests, but the prairies themselves had few trees and little brush. According to an early day traveler, Rev. Samuel Parker, the soil was alluvial river bottom; rich, easy to cultivate, sufficiently dry for cultivation, yet well watered by small streams and springs. French Prairie is the largest of these prairies.

The early immigrants found French-Canadian (Metis) Catholic settlements. They were followed by Methodist missionaries looking for converts. Later came the Eden-seekers who arrived in Oregon by wagon train or by ship from across the Isthmus of Panama, or around the tip of South America. Among these immigrants were families not only from the States but also from Ireland, Germany, Switzerland, and Austria. Many of their descendants are still farming here. The first settlers were subsistence farmers, raising what was needed to support a family: gardens, fruit trees, cows, pigs, and chickens.

First Stop, Donald: 1:00–2:00 pm



Photo source: Donald City Website

The city of Donald is a community of 980 people, largely made up of flat prairie lands with no lakes or rivers within the urban growth boundary. Donald is surrounded by agricultural land.

The city has a significant industrial base, consisting of about 300 jobs located in the city's core. The city has recently completed a buildable lands inventory, a housing needs analysis, and an economic opportunities analysis through a technical assistance grant from the department. The studies show that the city needs about 100 acres of residential land beyond what exists in the UGB and has a surplus of six acres of industrial lands. The city expanded its UGB for industrial use in 2008, and since then has seen 85 percent of that land developed.

The commission will go on a walking tour of Donald's core area, led by City Manager Heidi Blaine and other local leaders. Following that, we will meet with the city's largest employer, GK Machines, Inc. This firm specializes in manufacturing agriculture equipment and its products are sold worldwide. General Manager Mike Mader will guide us through their facility and provide information about their current needs and plans for future growth.

Land Use Issues

Donald faces major infrastructure issues (transportation, water and sewer needs) to meet future demand. The city is also faced with adding land for urbanization while surrounded by prime farmland.

City data

- Estimated median household income in 2012: \$53,717 (Oregon median: \$49,161)
- Unemployment in June 2014: 7.0% (Oregon 6.6%)
- Median resident age: 38.9 years (Oregon 36.8 years)
- Most common industries in 2008-2012:
 - Manufacturing (20%)
 - Wholesale trade (13%)
 - Construction (12%)
 - Public administration (9%)
 - Administrative and support and waste management services (8%)
 - Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting (7%)
 - Retail trade (6%)



Second Stop Pacific Foods, Mayfield Farms: 2:15 – 3:15 pm



Photo source: Mayfield Farms Website

<http://www.ecotrust.org/the-unlikely-milk-man/>

This tour will be led by Jim Johnson, land use and water planning coordinator, and Wym Matthews, confined animal feeding operation program manager, from the Department of Agriculture.

Mayfield Farms Dairy is one of four dairies owned and operated by Charlie and Chris Eggert. Mayfield Farms is a certified organic dairy and is grazing-based. The dairy is permitted for a dairy herd of 1,020 animals consisting of 600 milking and dry cows, 220 heifers and calves and 200 goats. The dairy has installed a wastewater filtering and nutrient recovery system, has experimented with a robotic milking machine, and operates a bedding recycling system. The dairy has a traditional grazing and cropping system and recycles the manure nutrients for crop production. The Eggerts also operate Valley Falls Farm, a 591-animal dairy; Country Lane Dairy, a 1,500-animal dairy; and Rock Ridge Farm, a 500-animal dairy, all located in western Oregon.

Land Use Issues

In the past, there have been complaints about farming practices stemming from residents of the nearby rural residential areas/nonfarm dwellings. Farmers in the area are also concerned about the potential encroachment of the Metro urban growth boundary and expanded development at the Charbonneau Exit (Exit 282B).

Third Stop, Aurora Farms: 3: 30 – 4:30 pm



Photo source: Aurora Farms

We will finish off the tour with a stop at Aurora Farms, a 150-acre organic vegetable farm owned by Mike Iverson. His family also owns the tulip farm in Woodburn. Mike will give us a tour of the farm where he grows a wide variety of vegetable crops. He will also show us his open-air packaging shed where he prepares his products for distribution. Mike works with WinCo to sell his produce in their stores. The farm is located near the Aurora Airport and boasts some of the best soils in the country.

Land Use Issues

The land surrounding his farm and the city of Aurora gets consistent urbanization pressures from nearby property owners to be included in the Metro UGB. Currently, the farm does not have any water rights and Mike has paid for their own irrigation system.