**Saturday, 11 am Panel**

**Transition Stories**

*Ada Smith, Appalachian Media Institute*

*Brendan Smith, former cod fisherman, Newfoundland, Canada*

*Anthony Flaccavento, farmer from Southwest Virginia*

*Martin Richards, Community Farm Alliance*

*Wahleah Johns, Navaho and leader in the Black Mesa Water Coalition*

*Noah Enelow, Ecotrust*

Ada Smith:

This panel is focused on transition stories from across the US; people dealing with their own economic and ecologic transitions and issues. As we listen to these stories, we should think about the lessons learned. What is our own transition story?

Noah Enelow:

Enelow noted that a resilient ecosystem and economy can adapt to change and support well being. He noted that the Pacific Northwest is in the middle of a transition between wide-scale logging to an economy based on forest management, tourism, and agriculture.

Ecotrust identifies key sectors and works to develop them through investment, policy organizing and private/public collaborations. They work on eco-based forest management through things like conservation easements and the carbon market (i.e. being paid for the carbon you “capture” on your property). Forest management can give a bigger rate of return, but it’s a long term investment. They also support the North Pacific Fisheries Trust and support community fishery cooperatives. In these models, communities own and keep the allowable quotas on fish so the interest, equity, and profits stay in the community.

Martin Richards:

Martin discussed the similarities between Kentucky’s transition away from tobacco and the current transition in eastern Kentucky. He noted that the ongoing transition within Kentucky’s farming communities has 3 basic components: Vision (for what the communities will look like and how we’ll get there); Leadership; and Intentional Process with transparency and accountability.

Martin said, “I think people were more afraid of losing their communities than losing their tobacco.” “Like mining, it was good people doing hard work side by side.”

He noted, “Change often happens incrementally but many times there is a moment when change can happen dramatically.” For Kentucky’s tobacco farmers, that moment came between 1998 and 2000. CFA members held town hall meetings to get input on what the plan should be for tobacco farmers going forward. In the end, they passed good legislation that sent about 35 percent of the tobacco funds went directly to communities and community councils which figured out how to use those funds for the benefit of local farmers and local communities.

“There’s much the tobacco and coal communities can share. The moment has never been more important to seize opportunity and create a better future. We must realize we’re all part of the same land and all our roots go deep.”

Anthony Flaccavento:

Flaccavento told five stories about transition.

1. He told about a coal camp that was put on the auction block. In a 3 week period, the town organized to save their community. “Even the poorest, most sort of marginalized communities can do amazing things when they come together.”
2. When tobacco phased out, they worked to get tobacco farmers to come together to pool their products and sell into larger markets. They worked on farmers markets and value chains. Cooperative extension offices and the land grant universities became important partners.
3. They did some work on establishing a forestry and wood products industry. Some wins and some losses but ultimately they impacted the shift in the Appalachian Regional Commission’s industrial recruitment strategy to an asset-based strategy.
4. They worked on establishing an arts and culture economy. It’s creating some jobs and some civic pride. They’re working to connect this with local foods and agritourism. “Maybe we can start building on what we have rather than just try to bring stuff in.”
5. His campaign for Congress. He ran his campaign as pro-coal miner, pro-mining communities. He noted that “the notion that we have to relinquish our environmental beliefs to win is just not true”. He also noted the role of young people in his campaign. “We have to stop figuring out how to plug young folks into our processes, but instead how do we light a spark and then turn them lose to do what they think needs to be done in the way they think it needs to happen.”

Brendan Smith:

Brendan described the transition cod fishermen went through, are going through in Newfoundland. He described the pride fishermen have in their work and their love of the sea. The cod stocks collapsed and the commercial fishing grounds were shut down. It created a long-term fishing crisis and they’re still trying to figure out their transition. He noted 4 things important to their transition story:

1. The fishermen thought they wanted the same things as the big corporate fishing companies. But it was digging their own grave to align with the corporations that fished, employed less, and moved on. It reminds him of what Peabody Coal is trying to do now to retired miners. “We have to find some new friends.”
2. He noted the false choice between saving jobs and saving the environment. We have to do both. “If we’re going to take jobs from workers to save something, we have a moral responsibility to have a plan to replace those jobs.”
3. Good community process matters. If decisions are made elsewhere, folks on the ground, the workers, will not be invested.
4. People misunderstand the nature of the work. There’s pride in it. You can’t simply shut down an industry with as much history and pride as fishing or mining and replace it with some simple factory job. “Work has to be about so much more than making a paycheck. There’s identity in our work.” He said work needs to feed our families and feed our souls.

In terms of a transition, Brendan advised:

1. Know who your friends are. Cooperatives are a good model.
2. Demonstrate that jobs vs. the environment is a false choice. Design work that restores rather than depletes.
3. Frame your messages and legislation around the jobs.
4. Work for jobs with meaning. How can we invest in the kind of work that makes folks proud? Can we turn fishermen into ocean farmers? Oysters, seaweed, etc.

Wahleah Johns:

Wahleah greeted us in her native Navaho language. She noted the similarities between Appalachia and the issues facing her native community. She noted that for the 100 years that her tribe has provided coal and water for a region, it hasn’t worked for their benefit. They still have a 50 % unemployment rate and half of her tribe doesn’t have electricity or water.

“My lands have helped build big cities. Has it really benefitted us? That’s the question we talk about a lot. We’re trying to bring justice and fairness to our communities. Listening to you this morning, it is so very similar to my community.”

Peabody Coal used a huge amount of the Navaho water supply to pulverize coal and send it through a pipeline to power major cities. Eventually, the tribal council passed legislation to protect the groundwater.

Wahleah noted that transition is hard because it means the jobs of your family members and neighbors. Her own family worked in the mines. “We had to come up with ideas about what does that look like. It is a hard process especially when it involves your family.”

As Wahleah’s community works on transition, they ask, “How do we build a vision that gives hope that there is light at the end of the tunnel? That gives hope to job creation. That challenges our communities to rebuild.”

Finally, she noted that the future of her community rests in her community. “The solutions aren’t coming from anywhere else. They’re coming from our own communities.”

Questions:

*There was a question about the importance of water in many of these stories.*

Wahleah noted that water is a critical issue. Brendan weighed in that water jobs have a big return on investment. Martin noted that for the future of farming and food, it’s all about water.

*There was a question/comment about how two important themes are 1) doing what’s best for my children and 2) the camaraderie involved in risky occupations like mining. Can we bring those themes together?*

Anthony noted that the ball is in our court to do just that. “We have the opportunity and the absolute obligation to put the people who live on the land and water at the exact same level as the land and water.”