

Oregon Country Fair Project Phase I Report

Background Oregon Country Fair Carbon Neutral Project

Oregon Country Fair has worked with the Institute for Sustainable Solutions at Portland State to consider the aspirational undertaking of creating a carbon neutral fair. In our approach to this work, we consider not only the sources of carbon and possible mitigation efforts that the fair could take on; but more importantly what is required to make lasting change and transform the OCF as an organization to be carbon neutral.

In all situations, transformation requires:

- Clear problem framing and vision
- Collaboration, coalition building, partnerships,
- Considerations of the formal and informal structures where change takes place
- Mobilization and engagement of all actors involved
- Evaluating monitoring learning, reflexivity

During our first Phase of work we conducted research in collaboration with the OCF Carbon Neutral team to help lead them toward transformation around this specific goal.

The big questions we considered during this phase of work were:

- What is contributing to OCF Carbon Footprint?
- How do we make transformative change in the OCF context?

Summary of Activities from February-September of 2020

1. Case study report of other fairs and festivals going carbon neutral: As a starting place we looked to other fairs and festivals to see how they had approached going carbon neutral. See *"Carbon Footprint of Fairs and Festivals"*
2. Team meeting and formation: We worked with the Carbon Neutral OCF team to develop a clear vision for going carbon neutral. This team were our partners in the work and will continue to be champions for this effort moving forward.
3. Interviews with a diverse set of OCF family: We conducted interviews with a diverse set of OCF insiders (Fair Family and employees) to better understand the organizational culture and how change and collaboration occur. See *"Key Interview Take Aways"*
4. Analysis of existing sustainability artifacts, policies, and fair family news: As part of our organizational analysis we looked through organizational artifacts to develop case studies around the Seventh Generation Intention and the Green Ticket Fund. See *"GTFSGIReport"*
5. Town Halls: We conducted three town halls to start to understand some of the opportunities for immediate carbon reduction and further engage the fair family in our work. See *"TownHallOverviewandNotes"*

6. Analysis of transportation impacts of general public: We analyzed tickets data to understand the carbon impact of the general public traveling to and from the fair.
7. Data collection and analysis of transportation impacts of Fair Family: We developed and used a survey to understand the travel behavior and impact of Fair Family.
8. Data collection and analysis of impacts of fair operations: We collected operational data about the energy used for onsite operations, the fair office etc. to understand the rest of the fair's carbon footprint. See "*Oregon Country Fair Carbon Footprint Summary Report*" for items 6,7,8

Key Findings and Recommendations from Phase I

1. *Build a coalition for carbon neutrality through engagement and education*

The Oregon Country Fair values align well with a carbon neutrality goal. A strong vision of the fair as a progressive, educational, and socially/environmentally responsible organization emerged through our work over the past year. This vision should be activated to build a strong coalition of fair family and others who want to further the carbon neutrality goal. Building this coalition will be foundational to your success, change takes place at the fair slowly, when conflict emerges the fair works to understand and educate all involved with the change. There is also a strong desire for fair family to be active participants in the fair community and decision making.

Key components of this work will be:

- Continuing to refine the larger vision for carbon neutrality: connecting this vision to the larger vision for the fair and refining the vision based on the values that underly it
- Working through both formal and informal power structures: Change is institutionalized at the fair through organizational relics owned by the board and fair staff; but ultimately it is passed on through the informal/social structures that exist among fair family
- Education: helping fair family and the public understand what contributes to their carbon footprint and how they can help
- Providing new opportunities for collaboration: going carbon neutral will require work across crews and existing social circles

2. *Create a plan for continued data collection*

Through our data collection and analysis, we were able to estimate the amount of CO₂ that is produced at the fair and start to reveal the relative impact of different activities. The current estimate is 4,498.78 tons of Co₂e. This is equivalent to the annual carbon sequestration of 5,330 acres of forest, or the annual electricity use of 691 homes. To calculate this number significant assumptions were made due to lack of data availability. Importantly, we were unable to collect enough data to characterize emissions from booth operations and had to make significant assumptions about the transport of equipment to and from the fair site. It will be important to collect data both for a good baseline carbon footprint and so that OCF can monitor progress toward the goal. Data collection can also be

an opportunity for education and engagement. For example, a carbon footprint calculator could be used to illustrate an individual, booth, or crew's carbon impact as an educational tool which can also be used to improve the assumptions that go into our total CO₂ calculation.

3. Transportation is the main source of emissions

Transportation is far and away the largest contributor to carbon emissions associated with Oregon Country Fair. This is consistent with research we conducted about other fairs. Notably, Fair Family travel to and from the site is the single biggest contributor to carbon emissions. This provides a significant opportunity for reducing carbon emissions and moving closer to carbon neutrality. A map of the places that people come to the fair from also indicates that travel to the fair is concentrated within a few areas, which provides ample opportunity for carpooling and reducing single use vehicle trips. While this may be a good area to start work and experiment with carbon reduction, strategies that address transportation related issues should still align with the rest of our findings and recommendations.

4. Strategies and actions should be decentralized—given autonomy

The majority of change at the fair has been initiated and solidified by people on the ground with concrete ideas and influence within their crew and socially. We recommend that the carbon neutral activities should be institutionalized top-down via the board, but that the strategies and actions should be *developed* from the ground up. This recommendation reflects the fair's values of trust, autonomy, and widespread engagement; and allows for individual creativity—which we found to be an essential element of the fair's identity. While decentralized strategies can be chaotic; the fair has been largely successful at working within this model. The key components to building a coalition (mentioned above) will be important to making this successful. An example of how this could take place would be to set a carbon neutral goal and monitoring program at the board level and within institutional documents; but ask crews to develop the strategies and actions to get there.

5. Activate knowledge and expertise within the fair, but make way for the optimism and energy of youth

Throughout our conversations with Oregon Country Fair, we found equal parts enthusiasm and skepticism for moving towards carbon neutrality. The successful sustainability initiatives that have taken hold at the fair have been built on a combination of values and individual expertise within the fair family. Older fair family members, in particular, recall blazing new ground with solar arrays and land use policies that would set the progressive course for OCF. At the same time, many also noted that some attempts to make change had been commendable but lacked lasting impact. There was concern that excitement and energy for carbon neutrality might be expended for something that aligns with fair values but that efforts for real change would be fleeting—as leadership within the fair changed or held up by those who are resistant to making real change. This skepticism was not seen in

the younger fair members we engaged with. Many saw this as an opportunity to move towards a more specific sustainability goal and were excited to be part of shaping the next generation of progress at the fair. This dynamic suggests that a concerted effort to connect older fair goers who hold both institutional knowledge about OCF and technical expertise with younger fair family who can carry the will for change.

Next Steps

The work completed during this first phase of work provides a foundation for moving forward with the carbon neutral OCF initiative. Overall, we recommend that this project proceed deliberately without hastily jumping to new policies and actions, but remains focused on the individual, organizational and cultural transformations that need to take place in order to make a lasting impact. As such we have developed a set of next steps that address both the conclusions above and the focus on transformation.

1. Refine an approach and develop a set of criteria for selecting strategies and actions for going carbon neutral: These criteria should reflect findings from both the carbon and cultural analysis we conducted during Phase I. For example, the criteria will address both carbon reduction and transformation through education and collaboration.
2. Create a plan for evaluation and monitoring: During phase I we proposed a system for “formative evaluation” that would monitor and assess progress toward a carbon neutral OCF while providing feedback for course adjustment. As the work continues and strategies and projects start to emerge, it will be important to have a responsive evaluation framework in place.
3. Create a plan for and collect data during a “normal” fair year. As mentioned above, continued data collection will allow us to improve our baseline accounting of CO₂ and track progress toward carbon neutrality. Conducting real-time data throughout a “normal” fair year (not a virtual) can do this and be a method for increasing education and engagement around this topic.
4. Consider carbon sequestration, renewables, and offset projects: Our research during this phase focused on the cultural and technical aspects of OCF’s current carbon use. Future research could consider the carbon sequestration capacity of the OCF site, the values associated with different types of offset, sequestration, and renewable energy programs and their feasibility for OCF. While traditional “off sets” may not align with the intention of OCF’s carbon neutral goal, other onsite, local, or community-based projects may be a better fit.
5. Catalytic projects to test strategies, impacts and further coalition building: Starting with some immediate projects—especially around transportation emissions could help keep project momentum going, and provide feedback to the group about effective strategies moving forward. It will be important that these projects should be considered experimental in nature, and ahead of jumping into a project there should be clear criteria for project selection and plan for evaluating the carbon and organizational/cultural impacts of the project.

6. Educational component: Educate the Fair Family and public about options for becoming carbon neutral and steps they can take to help us. Also share what we have learned so other events might explore options to reduce their carbon footprint...