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## Unconventional Farmers: Simple Ingenuity in the Pacific Northwest

Categories: [Energy](#), [Food](#), [Green Living](#)  
 By [Lisa Hamilton](#) June 19, 2009, 10:46 AM



Farmers Conservation Alliance. (Photo by Aaron Hewitt)

One of the great battles in 21st-century environmental politics is between farmers who draw from rivers for irrigation and the fish who live in those rivers—or rather, the people who care about keeping those fish. So on a recent trip to Oregon, I was surprised to come across a glimmer of hope—peace, even—in an ingenious invention with a humble name: the farmers screen. A [system](#) for diverting water out of a river that allows fish to pass through unscathed, the screen is based on such simple, common sense it's a wonder nobody thought of it sooner.

As it happened, the farmers of the Hood River Irrigation District came up with it first. After a decade of perfecting the system they patented their idea, and for several years they have been marketing it to irrigation projects throughout the Pacific Northwest. (You can hear their story [here](#).) Now this is the part I really like: They have used the proceeds to establish and run a nonprofit organization called [Farmers Conservation Alliance](#), whose work benefits local rural communities. They educate farmers about saving energy and water, and in turn money. They educate the larger public about rural people and issues; among their projects are these great [slideshows](#) that tell the stories of particularly innovative individuals. They're also developing more green tech for rural areas, such as low-impact hydro-electric power. With that project their goal is threefold: green energy production, stimulus for local economies, and more profits to grow the non-profit so they can do even more in the future. All in all, a great model of how rural communities can ride the "green wave" in a way that promotes rather than sacrifices their self-interests and identity.

*Lisa M. Hamilton is the author of the recent [Deeply Rooted: Unconventional Farmers in the Age of Agribusiness \(Counterpoint\)](#).*

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