Then: This historic photo was taken 1978 by Carl Woestwin and shows community members beginning to build our first “demonstration garden” at the Good Shepherd Center.

35 Years and Growing
Andrea Dwyer, Executive Director

Recently I met with a representative from a local corporate giving program. Our discussion ranged from challenges in getting healthier food into schools, to the city's new Food Action Plan, to Seattle Tilth's activities and our efforts to develop earned income streams. "That's a smart strategy," she remarked. "You will have more options when this wave of interest in funding food-related programs wanes."

Her comment resonated with me. Ever since I stepped into my role at Seattle Tilth, I've frequently wondered -- and worried -- about this same thing.

Back in the late 1970s, there was a surge of interest in going “back to the land.” My sister and her husband enthusiastically embraced the concept. Seeking a way of life that was simpler and respected the environment, where they could produce some of their own food, they found affordable land and set out to raise their family on 80 acres in rural Indiana.

Around the same time my sister was establishing her farm, Seattle Tilth was being founded by a group of like-minded people. Build healthy soil. Grow food organically. Safeguard natural resources. Live sustainably. These mandates have animated Seattle Tilth for the last thirty-five years.

While our community has helped guide and sustain this organization through the years, it hasn't always been easy. More often than not, funding has been scarce. Members, donors, volunteers and program participants have made it possible for us to carry on. And now, somewhat surprisingly, we are experiencing not just a wave of interest in the food system, but a tsunami.
It is exhilarating to think that in 2013, our 35th anniversary, so many more of us have embraced those values articulated decades ago. But we must not be complacent and assume that this interest is here to stay.

Thirty-five years ago there was no guarantee that my sister and her husband, both teachers with no farming experience, would be able to succeed. They have! And there was no guarantee that Seattle Tilth and a great source of inspiration to seize the moment and think strategically about our next thirty-five years. I’d love to hear from you. Send me your memories about Seattle Tilth’s past thirty-five years, and your hopes and dreams for our next thirty-five at andreadwyer@seattletilth.org.