Country & City Cousins Celebrate at Seattle Tilth’s Harvest Fair

By Mark Musick

Described as “a country fair in the city,” the first Seattle Tilth Harvest Fair was held in September, 1988, as part of the celebration for Seattle Tilth’s 10th anniversary. The fair featured the city’s first all-organic neighborhood farmers market, combined with gardening workshops and presentations on composting, food preserving, cider pressing and a ceremonial tree planting.

From the beginning the event brought urban gardeners and local environmental organizations together with many of our state’s leading organic farmers. Participants in the first event 25 years ago included Willie Green’s Organic Farm, The Root Connection, Kirsop Farm, Cliffside Farm, Nash’s Organic Produce, Cascadian Farm, and Quilliscasct Cheese. While the Pike Place Market downtown had been a venerable tradition for decades, the Seattle Tilth Harvest Fair was our city’s first neighborhood farmers market and it paved the way for many more to come.

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Originally billed as the “Taste of Organic Seattle,” the first Seattle Tilth Harvest Fair attracted more than 2,000 people. Although the event has doubled in size over the years, it remains a perfect blend of food, music, education and fun. The regional Tilth movement was born out of meeting with Wendell Berry in Spokane in July, 1974, and the Seattle Tilth Harvest Fair embodies his call to unite what he described as “the constituency for a better kind of agriculture.” Today that constituency numbers in the hundreds of thousands, and the neighborhood farmers market is one of their favorite places.

People are drawn to outdoor markets for many reasons. In part it’s the food, the convivial atmosphere and the gathering with friends and neighbors. On a deeper level, it is also a reenactment of a centuries-long pattern in cultures across the planet for people to celebrate the harvest and strengthen our sense of community. This year’s Harvest Fair will build upon that legacy. Highlights will include hands-on activities for people of all ages, including the urban livestock area with chickens, goats and bees, chicken poop bingo, Seattle Tilth Food Preservers showing off canning techniques, a lively music stage, and up to 100 community organizations, vendors and organic farmers. The Harvest Fair is a hive of activity and we welcome you to be part of the buzz.

*Mark Musick is one of the founders of the Tilth movement.*