Aging Agriculture, a Time for Change

Matthew McDermott,
Seattle Tilth Farm Works Manager

Our relationship to food, and the environment it spawns from, has shifted over time. With the advent of agriculture over 10,000 years ago, the domestication of plants and animals has shaped the development of our communities. As we transitioned to fixed communities fed by sustenance farming, our connection to food was more direct, but it also began increasing the impact on our environment.

Fast forward to the industrial revolution of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Dominant themes include plant breeding advancements, the introduction of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, and agricultural economics emphasizing “get big or get out.”

Today’s agriculture is still largely based on Farm Bill subsidies that favor monoculture (lack of plant diversity) and commodity crops grown for processed food, livestock and ethanol fuel. The negative impact on the environment, farmers and consumers is clear. Agricultural census data shows that the aging farmer population is not being “replaced” nearly as fast as it’s being lost. As cityscapes expand, agricultural land is succumbing to development pressure and our overall connection to food and farming systems grows more distant.

Spiking rates of obesity, heart disease and diabetes has been linked to the resulting industrial diet. Access to healthy food and the passing of knowledge about how to prepare and share the harvest have been sacrificed for convenience and price.

In addition, the environment suffers from our agricultural system being out of balance with the ecosystem on which it depends.

Continued on page 2

Rainier Beach Urban Farm Takes Root

Paul Haas, Senior Director of Community Engagement

Seattle’s largest, newest and arguably coolest urban farm is taking shape exactly where you might least expect it… tucked into the Rainier Beach neighborhood. And right now, Seattle Tilth is at the forefront of an emerging capital campaign to transform this eight-plus acre swath of once fenced-off land into a thriving, bustling farm that produces tons of healthy food for a neighborhood that has known more than its share of hunger, obesity and other nutrition-related health conditions.

However healthy food may not be the most important thing to come from this farm. Indeed, the real “bumper crop” is the way this piece of land brings together an unlikely array of neighbors -- immigrant elders with lakefront homeowners, daycare moms with young guerilla farmers, wetlands preservationists with high school students -- around what they share in common and what they can accomplish together.

“We have so much hope for this land,” says Yalonda Masundire, a neighborhood leader who heads the Friends of Rainier Beach Urban Farm and Wetlands and helped spearhead the effort to secure the site.

Which gets to what’s especially cool about the Rainier Beach Urban Farm: that even though Seattle Tilth manages the farm and operates all on-site programming, the farm really belongs to the Rainier Beach neighborhood.

Continued on page 2
The Future of Food

Andrea Platt Dwyer, Executive Director

One of our board members recently shared an article with me about a new food substitute under development intended to supply all of a human body’s daily nutritional needs, made from powdered starch, rice protein, olive oil and raw chemical powders. The benefits of this product called “Soylent,” as explained on the website, are improved health, freedom from time and money spent shopping, cooking and cleaning, and a vastly reduced environmental impact by eliminating much of the waste and harm coming from agriculture, livestock and food-related trash.

It’s an intriguing idea, evocative of more than a few sci-fi stories, and one that has a lot of followers. I can’t say that I am one of them. To me, food is about more than just physical nourishment, though clearly that is essential. Through food, we gain an understanding and appreciation of one another, we share our own heritage and we learn about different cultures. Sharing food is often a social event, whether that be at the family dinner table or at an event like our community dinners. By cooking and eating together, we strengthen bonds within families, neighborhoods and communities.

The act of growing food is a powerful way to connect with nature, whether on a farm, in a garden, or in containers on your balcony. To be successful at growing food sustainably, it’s necessary to know how to build and maintain healthy soil, how to ensure clean, abundant watersheds, and how to care for plants and trees using techniques that are not hostile to the environment.

I can’t predict whether or not products like Soylent will catch on in a big way, but if they do, I believe we would lose something terrifically important, something that defines us as humans and connects us to one another and to the world we live in. What do you think is important for the future of our food? We’d like to hear from you – share your thoughts on our blog or Facebook page when we post this article online.

RAINIER BEACH URBAN FARM TAKES ROOT  Continued from page 1

“This is Seattle Tilth at its best,” says Executive Director Andrea Dwyer. “At Rainier Beach, we are working with our community partners to help realize their vision for a better, healthier, more equitable food system.”

The vision for Rainier Beach Urban Farm is absolutely vibrant! Imagine: crop rows bordered by orchards and chicken coops, a covered classroom and outdoor workspace adjacent to greenhouses for year-round growing…and in the heart of it all, a market stand and community gathering space.

To realize this vision, Seattle Tilth is working with our partners, the Seattle Parks Foundation and the Friends of Rainier Beach Urban Farm on a $2.4 million capital campaign. In just the past few months, we have already been working hard to raise roughly half the funds needed to accomplish our campaign goal.

In early 2014, we will be entering the final phase of the Rainier Beach Urban Farm capital campaign, for which we will be turning to our friends, including our donors, members, volunteers and the broader community.

So please stay tuned! And in the meantime, stop by and see the potential for what can happen when a community comes together around creating a better food system.

The mission of Seattle Tilth is to inspire and educate people to safeguard our natural resources while building an equitable and sustainable local food system.
The future of agriculture is at a crossroads. We are standing at the intersection of industrial and local sustainable agriculture. Thirty-five years ago, Seattle Tilth was created to build a food system that benefits the ecosystem, communities and people that are part of it. Our food and farm programs are the latest way that we are investing in the future of a better agriculture -- one farmer, one seedling, one meal, and one person at a time.

The future starts with cultivating new farmers and teaching sustainable methods of small-scale farming. Our three educational farms do just that. Seattle Tilth Farm Works is growing new farmers. Beginning farmers face a variety of challenges from learning how to start a business, accessing land and resources, to marketing, distributing and selling their produce. Over several years in our program, farmers work with us to overcome these challenges, in a supportive environment, to develop sustainable independent farm businesses.

Seattle Youth Garden Works teaches youth from all walks of life about sustainable agriculture. This year-long program begins with harvesting and marketing produce at two local farmers markets and culminates in preparing and planting the farm for the next year's cohort. The work at the farm ties in to the cultivation of life skills and values that the youth are experiencing during this pivotal time in their lives with the power to make a lasting impression.

The Rainier Beach Urban Farm and Wetlands demonstrates intensive urban agriculture that works in concert with environmental restoration. At this 8-acre farm, we are growing, sharing and eating local food all right within the community. Seeing how the wetlands and agriculture work together is the perfect backdrop for illuminating the impact that local food can have on a community. The food that is grown at this farm is cultivated by community members, distributed to local kitchens and eaten at community tables. Food coming full circle in a community, eating and sharing food that we grow right in our neighborhood, that is truly the future of sustainable agriculture.

**AGING AGRICULTURE, A TIME FOR CHANGE**

Water and air pollution from synthetic inputs and concentrated animal operations, erosion from excessive tillage, and greenhouse gasses that negatively impact climate change can all be attributed to industrial agriculture. One of the most imminent and contentious issues of our time is genetically modified organisms in our food system. Here in Washington, the public will vote on I-522 this November, mandating the labeling of GMO foods.

The good news is that alternative systems are abundant. The demand for organic options has resulted in a 10% annual increase of organically managed land since the turn of the century. Urban agriculture and small-scale diversified farms have sprouted in close proximity to cities. Farmer training programs like Seattle Tilth Farm Works are providing resources for new farmers and connecting communities to produce through new aggregation and distribution channels.

Although Farm Bill negotiations continue to stall at the federal level (as of late September), local governments like the City of Seattle are pursuing plans that better integrate farms into local development and policies that help support new growers entering the market. Businesses and institutions have set initiatives to source more local food and organizations are working to preserve farm land.

It’s an exciting time to be involved with evolving food and farm activities! Your support is imperative to the continued development of alternatives. Support your local farmer, demand options that account for environmental and social justice, voice your opinion about the need to label GMO food sources as well as the need for federal dollars to be more evenly distributed across small-scale, sustainable, diversified farm initiatives. Break bread with your neighbor, share the harvest and continue rebuilding our community’s connection to food! From this perspective, it becomes clear to see how integral a healthy food and farm system is to our future.
Meet Environmental Education Supporter Heide Felton

Jen Crouch, Development Director

When Seattle Tilth supporter Heide Felton thinks about children and environmental education she asks, “Is it about me or the next generation? I think it should be the latter. We’re serving the children, and ultimately the environment. Nature is our boss.”

Heide is passionate about children’s kinesthetic learning — particularly environmental education. Heide was instrumental in starting the Rainier Beach Learning Garden in South Seattle and believes that garden-based education programs are vital elements of a strong school curriculum. She has even traveled to Olympia with Seattle Tilth educator Lisa Taylor to advocate for gardening programs in Washington State schools.

How did she become an advocate for environmental education? As a child in Iran, Heide struggled to learn in traditional classrooms. To engage her, Heide's father showed her the power of connecting with nature by planting a seed and watching it grow. She says that taught her everything, including that to teach children about the environment, “You have to take them to nature and you show them.”

Over ten years ago, Heide started the garden classroom at IslandWood, an environmental education center on Bainbridge Island. In 2010, Heide became involved with the Rainier Beach Learning Garden, which was built as a joint project of Seattle Tilth and South Shore School. School-based gardens like Rainier Beach Learning Garden provide children with regular exposure to their connection to the environment and their food. Children visit the garden regularly, learning about soil, science, insects and plant biology, and their teachers infuse curriculum with garden based learning.

In additional to promoting environmental education, Heide is an advocate for free health care for children and mentorship programs for young people. She is the mother to two boys, a former software engineer and a founder of Contagious Compassion, which pairs developing social entrepreneurs with strong mentors.
Finding New Ways to Distribute Local Food

Chris Iberle, Food Hub Manager

Access, awareness and support are growing for local and organic foods in our kitchens, restaurants, schools and communities. According to the USDA’s Economic Research Service, the market for certified organic food in the U.S. has had double digit growth for more than a decade. The number of farmers markets in Puget Sound area has doubled according to the Cascade Harvest Coalition’s website. New farmers are stepping up to meet the demand and feed our communities and incubators like Seattle Tilth Farm Works are providing support. Yet, certified organic food accounts for only 3% of all food sold in the U.S. (USDA).

Farmers markets and community supported agriculture provide a great option for farmers to sell directly to the eater, often fetching the best prices. Even so, most of us eaters, even the most hardcore locavore, do not buy all the food we eat from local farms. So how do we get more local, organic food to consumers?

The emerging “food hub” model sources food from many small producers. By coming together to sell through one central hub, farmers can get fair prices and often maintain their farm’s identity while cooperating with other producers to meet consumers’ demands, like quantity or diversity. The customer gets one transaction and delivery from dozens of farmers at once. Food hubs often provide shared marketing, processing facilities and transportation, which can be challenges for small-scale farmers once their fields are full of tasty veggies.

With local producers scaling up, we’ll see many more options for local food distribution to meet the demand. And you’ll find even more, local, fresh, organic veggies at your grocer, restaurant, or lunch counter. Maybe one day, even soon, all of those veggies will come from our local organic farms.

Thank You for Celebrating With Us

On Saturday, September 7, the Harvest Fair provided a vibrant and joyous celebration, a perfect way to end Seattle’s sunniest summer in memory. Many thanks to our 125 fabulous volunteers, 87 excellent vendors and community organizations and to the 3,000 folks who attended. Visit our Facebook page to see photos of the festivities or post your own!

SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR SPONSORS:

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Fresh organic produce delivered to your door!
Garden To Table: the Warmth of Winter

Leika Suzumura, Community Kitchens Northwest Program Manager

What do dumplings, nuts and spaghetti all have in common? They are all types of winter squash! Whether you like them velvety smooth, sweet, or uniquely textured, the fall harvest brings a treasure chest of winter squash varieties.

The amber hues found inside winter squash are telling of their vitamin A content. In addition to the commonly known function of supporting our vision and skin, Vitamin A is a powerful anti-oxidant, strengthening our bodies on the cellular level. Winter squash can be enjoyed in a variety of ways, including baked, roasted and made into soup.

Coconut Curry with Delicata Squash

This delightful stew soothes the winter chill and kicks in the heat right when we need it. Feel free to swap in other squash varieties and use other leafy greens you have available. Makes 6-8 servings.

Ingredients

- 1 tablespoon cooking oil
- ½ medium onion, chopped
- 2-3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 medium Delicata squash, cut into 1 inch cubes, skins on
- 2 carrots, chopped
- 2 cups tofu, fresh or fried, cubed
- 3 cups (2 14 oz. cans) coconut milk
- 2 tablespoons AROY-D curry paste (choose from panang, green, red or yellow)
- 3 cups chard, chopped
- Garnish with Thai basil or green onions

Instructions

- In a large pot, heat one tablespoon cooking oil over medium heat. Sauté onions and garlic until onions become translucent.
- Add squash and carrots, continue sautéing until the squash and carrots soften slightly, about 3 minutes. Add tofu and combine into vegetable mixture.
- Pour in coconut milk and bring to a boil. Lower heat to simmer for about 20 minutes, until squash and carrots are soft.
- Add the curry paste, stir until the paste dissolves evenly into the curry. Turn off the heat and add the greens and mix in gently. Garnish and serve with rice.

Gardening in October

Sue Hartman, Garden Hotline Garden Educator

October brings pumpkins and cooler weather. In Seattle this means it can get as cold as 45° and the glorious warm days of summer are becoming a fond memory. It’s time to finish putting your garden to bed before winter rains arrive. If you planted a fall or winter garden, here are several season extension techniques to protect less hardy crops and help them make it through the winter.

- **Prevent disease** by removing old heat crops such as tomatoes, eggplants, squash and cucumber. If they are diseased, do not compost in your home composting system -- send the plant material out with your yard waste.
- **Cut back peas and beans**, but leave the roots in the ground because they are nitrogen fixers. But don’t pull those snow peas you planted in September. They are just getting started!
- **Plant these food crops**: garlic, fava beans, shallots, snow peas and overwintering grain.
- **Don’t leave a naked bed!** If you aren’t growing food in it, plant a cover crop or cover it with mulch. Healthy plant material you cleaned up from your garden or yard, fallen leaves, straw, compost, manure, and burlap all make great mulches. Cover crop mixes that contain vetch, field peas or favas add nitrogen back to the soil. Grains like rye and barley give the legumes something to grow up and add organic matter.
- **Protect less hardy cool crops** like lettuce and spinach with a cloche. Many cole crops (brassica family) such as kale can take cold temperatures so don’t need a cloche. Floating row cover can help prevent against frost damage and keep the birds from eating the seeds you just planted.

Learn more in our fall classes, Put Your Garden To Bed and Composting 101. Seattle Tilth sells cloche kits and floating row cover. Call or email The Garden Hotline for more information (see page 7).
**Close the Season in Style: Take a Class!**

Two or three prices are listed for each class; the second price is discounted for Seattle Tilth members and the third is a special price for a second member of your household. Become a member through our website or use the form on page 8. Advanced registration and payment are required for classes. Class details and registration information are found on our website under the “Learn” tab or by scanning the QR code. Questions? Call (206) 633-0451 ext. 101.

**Class venues:**
GSC: Good Shepherd Center, 4649 Sunnyside Ave. N., Seattle
BGP: Bradner Gardens Park, 1730 Bradner Place S., Seattle

**Organic Gardening**
**Put Your Garden to Bed, $36/$25/$54**
Saturday, Oct. 5; 2-4 p.m., BGP
Saturday, Oct. 19; 2-4 p.m., GSC

**Composting 101, $36/$25/$54**
Saturday, Oct. 26; 10 a.m.-noon, BGP
Saturday, Nov. 9; 10 a.m.-noon, GSC

**Urban Livestock**
**City Chickens 101, $40/$30/$60**
Saturday, Oct. 19; 10 a.m.-12:30 p.m., GSC

**Permaculture and Sustainable Landscapes**
**Permaculture Design Course, $1050**
One weekend each month for six months
Starts Oct. 12, OmCulture
2210 N. Pacific
St. Seattle, WA 98103

**Kitchen Classes**
**Pickles and Fermentation, $36/$25/$54**
Thursday, Oct. 3; 6-8 p.m., GSC

**Urban Weeds and Wild Foods – Part 1:**
**Identify and Harvest, $36/$25/$54**
Saturday, Oct. 12; noon-2 p.m., GSC

**Urban Weeds and Wild Foods – Part 2:**
**Preparing for Your Table, $36/$25/$54**
Saturday, Oct. 12; 3-5 p.m., GSC

**Garden Educator Workshops**
**Garden Educator Workshop: The Garden Classroom, $60/$50**
Saturday, November 2, 8:30 a.m.-4 p.m., GSC

**Garden Educator Workshop: Schoolyards and Sustainability, $35/$25**
Saturday, November 23, 9 a.m.-noon, GSC

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**Hot Questions from the Garden Hotline**

**Laura Matter, Garden Hotline Coordinator**

**Q. What is the best time of year to add compost to my garden?**

**A.** Any time of year is a good time to add compost! But fall is a great time for several reasons. Compost will help to slow down rain water, preserving existing nutrients, while fresh nutrients and microorganisms will trickle into the soil, nourishing the roots of your plants. In unplanted vegetable gardens you can replenish the soil by simply spreading compost on bare soil and covering it with burlap sacks for the winter. This also helps to minimize compaction of the soil from our winter rains. Spreading compost on top of your planted garden beds as mulch will keep weeds down that germinate in our cool fall weather. And that layer of mulch will also help to moderate soil temperatures as the fall transitions into winter’s colder temperatures. Get the compost down before your trees begin to lose their leaves. Once they fall, leave them in place over the compost as an extra layer of mulch.

**Q. Can you please explain what cover cropping is and why I would want to do it?**

**A.** Cover cropping is a term used to describe the practice of growing specific types of crops on food producing land during times when a field or home garden might otherwise be left fallow. This practice can be done at any time of year but is often employed in the winter to “rest” the soil before the spring planting season begins. Cover crops planted in the fall in the Pacific Northwest are often cereal grains and legumes, which tolerate cool soils and can actively grow in cooler weather. We often use mixes of annual rye, crimson clover and vetch; a colorful and reliable crop. Annual rye can be planted as late as November though it is best to plant earlier in the fall. Cover crops do much more than simply give the soil a rest though. They help to break up tough soil, add organic matter and nitrogen when turned in. They protect the soil from compaction and nutrient loss like mulch would, suppress weeds, soil diseases and pests, improve soil aggregation, and provide winter and early spring habitat for important beneficial insects. Turn the cover crop in when it has matured in the spring and the soil is not too wet to work.
Transform Your Food System

At Seattle Tilth, we are helping to build a better food system – and a healthier environment. Even though we’ve come far, there’s more work to be done. In King County, 1 in 5 kids are hungry. Food bank use has increased by 30% in the last few years. Puget Sound is still threatened by human activity.

Here’s what we’re doing to make things better today. We are:

• Transforming fallow fields into flourishing community learning gardens and urban farms
• Providing land, seeds, tools and farm training to low-income people and immigrants
• Teaching thousands of people to reduce toxins and grow their own food
• Join us! Your gift to Seattle Tilth this year helps us build a better food system and a healthier environment.

Sustain us all year long as part of the Pollinator Society. You can stop and start your monthly gifts anytime. Or, make a one-time gift to help Seattle Tilth today! For more information, fill out the form below, or visit seattletilth.org/support.

Membership, Donations & Books

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