

MERGER UPDATE: TILTH PRODUCERS AND SEATTLE TILTH ADVANCE MUTUAL GOAL FOR DYNAMIC FOOD SYSTEM

Michele Catalano, Tilth Producers Executive Director, Seattle; Becky Warner, 2015 Board President, Seattle

Another growing season is coming to a close. As we complete the final two Farm Walks of the year (focused on renewable energy thanks to a new partnership with NWSEED and funding from EPA), our attention turns to planning the annual conference in Spokane, November 13 – 15, to our next cycle of educational programming, and to our future. For the past year we have focused on 2016 as the beginning of the next chapter of the Tilth movement.

At the annual board retreat in January 2015, a lively discussion focused on creating a “new table” for Tilth Producers. By reframing the current paradigm under which we serve the farming community, Tilth Producers can create a dynamic future that honors our roots while expanding our mission. We firmly believe our merger with Seattle Tilth will do just that.

The Declaration of Intent to Merge signed by both organizations at the completion of the merger exploration phase in April 2015 summarizes our shared, long-term goals in these succinct recitals:

Whereas uniting our two organizations will bring together consumers and farmers, urban and rural people to work toward the creation of a sustainable and just food system;

Whereas Seattle Tilth and Tilth Producers of Washington possess deep expertise about organic agriculture and a similar commitment to experiential, peer-to-peer education as a means to expand the practice of organic agriculture;

Whereas expanding our work to reach more people throughout the Pacific Northwest region and perhaps beyond has great potential to increase production and access to fresh, local, organic food; and

Whereas by working together we may accelerate progress in fulfilling our mission and more quickly achieve our vision of a healthy, just and sustainable food system.

The merger process is now nearing completion. Since May, joint finance, governance and development committees have reviewed and advanced recommendations to the merger negotiation committee for final approval. Through this due diligence process questions have been asked and answered, and no concerns have arisen. Rather, the merger committee has found synergy and excitement for the future as they create the framework for a combined, larger nonprofit to serve the state’s food system. Following a thorough process and timeline, both boards are scheduled to vote on the final merger agreement at their respective meetings in late October 2015. The merger would become effective January 1, 2015.

Implementation of the logistical details for the merger will occur in the first half of next year. A name for the new organization will

also be determined at this time. Guiding this transition will be a new board with eighteen initial members, including six each from Tilth Producers and Seattle Tilth. Andrea Platt Dwyer, current Executive Director of Seattle Tilth, will continue in that role, while Tilth Producers Executive Director Michele Catalano will assume leadership of the new organization’s farm and environmental programs, including the educational programs currently offered by Tilth Producers.

Due to the need for a board to be named as part of the merger agreement (as with any new nonprofit) there will be no Tilth Producers board elections this year. The new organization’s board will serve staggered terms of one or two years, with board elections resuming sometime during the first 12 to 15 months. In the spirit of regional grower involvement, the new bylaws include provisions for a minimum of 30% farmer members, and 30% non-King county members. Current members of both Tilth Producers and Seattle Tilth will continue to receive membership benefits under the new organization.

Member services, educational programming, advocacy, and the future will be discussed at our annual meeting next month. Join in the conversation at the annual conference in Spokane on November 15.

We have been impressed with the dedication and hard work of the many volunteers from both boards, and with how a conversation regarding the need for a larger, more impactful regional nonprofit has been transformed into clear vision. The new entity will not only advance its exciting mission but also better serve the members and communities currently a part of each organization.

Michele Catalano, Tilth Producers Executive Director, is excited about the future of the Tilth movement. 206-632-7506, michele@tilthproducers.org



Becky Warner, Tilth Producers Board President, is co-owner and manager of City Grown Seattle. In addition to her involvement with Tilth Producers, Becky is a founding member of the Washington Young Farmers Coalition. 206-604-7241, rwarnert2@gmail.com

We want to hear from you

Direct your Letters to the Editor to Sarah Stoner, editor@tilthproducers.org