

Hungry for Sustainably Grown Products

Andrea Platt Dwyer,
Executive Director



In March, Nielsen (yes, *that* Nielsen) released data on organic food purchases for in-home consumption from a sample of 100,000 households across the lower 48. The information came from UPC scans participants made at retail establishments. Upon learning that Washington consumers lead the country — 92% of us buy at least some organic food products — I felt a surge of hometown pride.

I was particularly struck by this because I had just read a 2014 statistic from Bayer (yes, *that* Bayer) that 94% of consumers reported having no direct connection to agriculture. I interpreted this to mean that while demand for organic products is high, there are endless opportunities to educate consumers about where their food comes from and the benefits of eating organic and sustainably grown local products.

In fact, the newly-minted Tilth Alliance is already seeing positive results in this arena. This year staff, who had previously worked in three separate organizations before the merger, were able to collaborate to expand the reach of the 2017 Farm Guide significantly.

This year's guide features more farms and farmers markets than ever — nearly 300 — including several from Central Washington (for the first time!) and others whose listings were underwritten by government agencies and businesses. In mid-April, 100,000 copies were distributed to 600 sites,

“The Farm Guide provides a primary link between local farms and the communities they serve. Without question, our customers appreciate the information provided in the guide. It is our hope that it ... will be able to branch out to reach even broader populations who would benefit from education and information regarding local farms and the value they provide.”

Valerie Wall from Whitehorse Meadows Farms

with a consumer reach of 225,000. Eaters can find guides at strategic locations like hospital nutrition education centers. Eaters can also tap into information using our mobile app and website, both of which were designed for expansion across the state, a key goal of our farm and market services.

Getting local products to market will also remain an educational focus of November's Tilth Conference in Vancouver. With our investment in a statewide network of outreach associates (see article, pg 5), we'll have boots on the ground in local communities. Interested partners can create unique marketing strategies so producers have more access to the 92% of us who are hungry for sustainably grown products.

With the president's proposed 21% funding cut to the USDA, and even larger cuts for the EPA, it's a tenuous time for sustainable agriculture. In response, we must build stronger connections on regional and local levels. This can only truly happen if consumers are more knowledgeable about nearby farms and farmers, and how to put local, sustainable meals on their tables.

To get involved in your area, contact Kate Nagle, katenagle@tilthalliance.org. To learn more about The Farm Guide, contact Sheryl Wiser, sherylwiser@tilthalliance.org. I'd love to hear any thoughts you have on these topics! Email me at andreadwyer@tilthalliance.org.

Join the Board Nominations and Application Welcome!



Are you passionate about building a sustainable food culture, ensuring food access for all and supporting farmers statewide? Are you looking for an opportunity to volunteer your time and expertise? Tilth Alliance holds its board election this fall to fill 10 open seats for the 2018-2019 term, and you are invited to apply or nominate a candidate. Board members work to advance the mission of the organization through planning, advocacy and fundraising. The board meets in person quarterly with monthly committee meetings by phone.

You will be asked to submit an application, resume, photo, biography and candidate statement. Qualified applicants will be invited to interview, and a final slate of candidates will be approved by the board in advance of the election. Contact Lauren Foster for more information and application materials: laurenfoster@tilthalliance.org or (206) 633-0451 ext. 123. **Deadline to apply is Sunday, August 27.**