

Tilth Producers Quarterly

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Producers' coop incorporated

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After over a year of planning and discussion, the Tilth Producers' Cooperative has become a reality. At the first annual meeting, held January 15th, Cooperative members concluded the organizational process of ratifying an initial Board of Directors, signing the Articles of Incorporation and the Bylaws, and electing officers for 1978. Serving the new Cooperative as Presiding Officer is Jim Hildt, of Everson; other officers are Tom Casey of Elma as Alternate Presiding Officer, Becky Deryckx, Olyropia, as Secretary, and Gene Kahn, Rockport, as Treasurer. Much of Sunday's meeting was spent discussing planned activities for the Producer's Cooperative during the coming year. As those of you who have read past issues of the Newsletter are aware, the Tilth Producers' Cooperative has been organized primarily to assist in the economic development of farm-scale organic food production in Western Washington.

As its first major project, the Cooperative is undertaking a potato/root facility to serve farmer-members in the Whatcom-Skagit-Snohomish County vicinity. The ability to store, wash, and grade potatoes, carrots, and other root crops has been a limiting factor in market development for area organic growers, one which has until now prevented them from entering serious production of these crops. Creation of this facility-now in the beginning stages-will allow several farms to produce potatoes for the organic market this season; and it will be available for use by additional farmer-members of the Cooperative in the years ahead.

The potato/root crop facility is one of several cooperative efforts which farmer-members are currently planning. Most of the initial members of the Cooperative are farming in the area which will be served by this facility-and this was a prime consideration in determining which project the Cooperative should undertake first. However, the Cooperative is set up to facilitate projects in other locations where groups of neighboring farmers wish to participate in a cooperative effort. Growers in the Southern Puget Sound region are now discussing possible formation of a local chapter there; and additional chapters will develop in response to growing farmer participation and need.

By working together on projects such as the root crop facility, organic farmers in the region will be able to reduce their capital outlay costs and expand both their markets and their production. This in turn will give economic incentive to new farmers and to conventional farmers who have wanted to convert to organic production but who have been hindered by the lack of a market or the support of their neighbors. The Cooperative will assist these new growers in understanding and practicing organic methods; and members hope ultimately to strengthen substantially the position of organic agriculture (and farming in general) in the area.

There has been some understandable confusion about the distinction between the Tilth Producers' Cooperative and the recently organized Tilth Association. The creation of a sustainable agriculture for the region is clearly a long-term goal for members of the Cooperative, and it is also one which farmers cannot and do not want to try to accomplish by themselves. Because a major part of farmers' concern must necessarily be devoted to insuring their own economic survival. Cooperative members support the activities of the separate Tilth Association, which is functioning as a mass educational and cultural organization working to unite people who are interested in all aspects of the "alternative agriculture" movement. Members of each of these distinct groups feel that a whole agriculture must include both gardening and farming, and

increased public understanding of all aspects of food production. By giving each other mutual support, the memberships of the Tilth Producers' Cooperative and the Tilth Association hope to achieve a regional agriculture that is both large and small-scale, urban and rural, and truly self-sustaining.

Tilth will function as the communications medium for both organizations. Future issues will include articles by Tilth Producers' Coop members addressing the unique difficulties of farm-scale organic production and attempt to provide farmers with information which will be of direct assistance to them.

The Tilth Producers' Cooperative is open to membership by all growers who rely on farming for a significant part of their livelihood, and who support the provisions embodied in the Articles and Bylaws of the organization. Anyone interested in membership should write to the Secretary at the address below, requesting copies of the Cooperative's documents and briefly describing your operation and your particular needs as farmers. You will be asked to endorse the Articles and Bylaws, and to pay an annual \$12 membership fee; and after review by the Board of Directors, you will receive a Membership Certificate, a year's subscription to the journal, Tilth, and all rights of membership within the organization. The Tilth Producers' Cooperative needs your participation and support. We particularly encourage growers in Western Washington to join, since our focus is already located here. But the eventual geographical boundaries of the Cooperative are still unknown, and will be determined by the needs and location of all grower-members, and by the projects which we undertake together. By becoming a member, and by encouraging your neighbors to do so also, you will be helping to promote the cause of organic agriculture in the region. The Cooperative has been created to serve your needs as farmers-join us!