

Tilth Producers Quarterly

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Producers Co-op Update

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The organizational process is continuing for the Tilth Producers' Cooperative. About a dozen people have been meeting regularly since early last spring in order to draft the legal documents which will make the Cooperative a functioning corporate entity under Washington State law.

During the course of the summer, Articles of Incorporation have been drawn up and adopted by the group, and a set of By-Laws has been largely completed. Following a final organizational meeting which will be held in early October, the By-Laws will be finished and— together with the Articles of Incorporation— submitted to the state Department of Agriculture for approval and placed on file with the Secretary of State. As far as the law and the bureaucracy are concerned, the Tilth Producers' Cooperative is nearly ready to go.

For those of us who have been closely involved in the formation of this new Cooperative, however, one major concern remains: that the organization be set up in such a way as to most fully meet the needs (either present or future) of food producers in this area. The needs and interests of farmers are the purposes for which the Cooperative is being organized, and we want to be very sure that we have a comprehensive understanding of those needs and interests before we finalize the Cooperative's legal documents. Some of them are of course obvious: the Cooperative is being set up with the express purposes of facilitating cooperative purchases of supplies and equipment necessary for production, of providing farmers with a regular opportunity for exchange with each other about cultural practices and new varieties, and of engaging in any aspect of the production/handling/marketing process which will benefit its producer-members.

But there are also other concerns— concerns which represent equally real needs of producers, but which are somewhat harder to articulate. These have to do with such things as standards of crop quality, cultural practices and attitudes that do or do not contribute to a self-sustaining agricultural system, and the extent to which the Cooperative will interface— educationally and politically— with the communities in which its members live and work. These are the kinds of concerns that may benefit individual producers less directly than the more immediate economic advantages of bulk ordering and equipment sharing, but which will be equally important in the evolution of an enduring agriculture and a secure livelihood for food producers in the Northwest.

The October meeting will be devoted to a discussion of purposes; and if this Newsletter reaches you early enough for you to do so, we would welcome the inputs of those of you who are presently involved in commercial farming but who have been unable to participate in the organizational process of the Cooperative thus far.