

Farm Walks Educate Producers and Others About Organic Farming

Tilth Producers of Washington Farm Walk Program

Tilth Producers' primary goal is to help Washington's organic family farms thrive. Growers who understand how to farm organically—meaning how to maintain soil and water quality, how to maintain biodiversity, how to meet national and state requirements, how to create value-added products, and how to market their products—will have better financial success and greater sustainability.

Since 2004, Tilth Producers Farm Walk program has provided educational opportunities that provide research-based, localized, hands-on training to Washington organic and aspiring organic growers. Organic producers have repeatedly expressed a need for training in different locations around the state to address issues that are locally or regionally specific, such as insects, diseases, crops or climate challenges. They have expressed a preference for hands-on learning that does not take them away from their farm business for days at a time as the Tilth Producers' conference and day-long workshops do. They place the highest value on peer learning and networking.

In Brief:

Tilth Producers of Washington, a non-profit dedicated to organic and sustainable farming education, has spearheaded a statewide program called Washington Farm Walks. Since 2004 thousands of farmers and others have participated in farm walks throughout the state. OFRF sponsored the 2009 Farm Walk program, and more than 500 attended farm walks throughout the state.

Tilth Producers of Washington partnered with the Washington State University (WSU) Small Farms Program to deliver ten half-day educational farm walks to aspiring and established organic farmers in Washington.

In 2009 The Farm Walk series continued to provide unique peer-learning opportunities to Washington growers by convening farmers and researchers to discuss topics identified by organic farmers as a priority for education. All farm walks took place on a farm that demonstrated excellence in a specific aspect of organic farming, processing or marketing; that offered a superior opportunity for exposing conventional and transitional growers to organic production methods; and that addressed subject matter for which there was sufficient research support. Experienced organic farmers shared their successful practices with attendees, supported by



Courtesy of Nancy Allen/Tilth Producers

April 13 Farm Walk—Dick Carkner of Terry's Berries demonstrates hoop house construction during the first Farm Walk of 2009. Eighty-seven people attended despite the rainy day.

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Collaborators: Jules Riske, Blue Heron Farm, Rockport, WA; Marcy Ostrom, WSU Small Farms Program, Wenatchee, WA; Maggie Hoback, Full Circle Farm, Issaquah, WA; David Muehleisen, Evergreen State College, Olympia, WA; Carey Hunter, Pine Stump Farm, Omak, WA **OFRF**

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researchers and agriculture professionals familiar with the subject matter under discussion.

A resource booklet was created prior to each farm walk that included information about the host farm, specific agricultural issues under consideration at that farm and current, relevant research. The booklet was provided to all attendees and made available via the internet for wider dissemination. A follow up “virtual farm walk” workshop was offered at Tilth Producers’ annual conference in order to reach people who could not attend the actual farm walk and further promote the value of the program to growers. The 2009 conference workshop highlights the organic and sustainable practices employed at Let Us Farm in Oakville, Washington.

In 2009, a total of 552 of people attended the ten farm walks and, of those, a large majority were farmers, followed by ag professionals, ag students and interested community members. The total number of attendees in 2008 was almost the same at 561. On almost every evaluation returned, participants stated they had a positive experience and will attend a future farm walk.

Farm Walks sponsored in 2009:

- Terry’s Berries
- Lopez Island Farm
- Monteillet Fromagerie
- Crown S Ranch
- Estrella Creamery
- Let Us Farm
- WSU Organic Farm
- WSU Puyallup
- Alvarez Bilingual Farm
- Blue Dog Farm

Tilth Producers Farm Walk resources:

Farm Walk Booklets are available at:
tilthproducers.org/farmwalks.htm

See video of a 2008 seed saving farm walk at Nash’s Organic Produce in Sequim: tilthproducers.org/farmwalk-vid1.htm *



Courtesy of Nancy Allen/Tilth Producers

April 27 Farm Walk—At Lopez Island Farm, a three-year rotation study using pastured pigs is underway; farmer Bruce Dunlop and Dr. Craig Cogger discussed rotation strategies and soil fertility aspects of the trial.



Courtesy of Nancy Allen/Tilth Producers

June 22 Farm Walk—Kelli and Anthony Estrella of Estrella Creamery hosted a tour of their organic goat dairy and cheese making facility. Highlights included tours of the cheese rooms and attendees helped trim hooves of the 100+ goats.



Courtesy of Nancy Allen/Tilth Producers

August 17 Farm Walk—Sixty-seven participants came to the 120-acre Alvarez Bilingual farm walk, which focused on soil and crop diversity. More than 75% of Don Hilario and Soledad Alvarez’s peppers and 50 varieties of tomatoes are grown from seeds harvested and saved from their own crops. Seed saving techniques were discussed.



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