Mortgage Lifter Campaign

Nancy Nordhoff’s matching grant challenge us to step up and seize the opportunity to pay off the mortgage on Tilth’s land. This will relieve Tilth of $5,400 annually in mortgage payments that can be used instead to deepen our impact through educational programs and support for local growers and producers.

For those new to Whidbey Island, Nancy, a lifelong philanthropist and longtime Tilth supporter, came to South Whidbey in 1985, when she founded Hedgebrook, a retreat for women writers. Since then, making her home in Langley, she has been instrumental in many community causes, including the creation of Goosefoot, a nonprofit that supports the community in growing local businesses.

As word of our mortgage-lifter challenge gets out, keep an eye on the fundraising bar. You, too, can help spread the news in creative ways (see Mortgage Lifter Lays an Egg, below). Use your Facebook page for a fundraising campaign. Ask friends and family to gift you for your birthday with a donation. Sell those items you have cleaned out of your home on Drew’s List for us. Ask at your workplace for a matching donation to double one of your own. Talk to people who may not know us, tell them about our mission. To donate online, go to southwhidbeytilth.networkforgood.com/projects/109525-mortgage-lifter-campaign

Tilth History Revisited

by Michael Seraphinoff

There are still a few of us old-timers around to offer firsthand accounts of the history of South Whidbey Tilth. Prescott and I got things started back in the spring of 1982 when we paid a visit to the regional headquarters of Tilth, at the time in Arlington, Washington. We learned more about the core principles

Mortgage Lifter Lays an Egg

Not only lovely tomatoes can lift the mortgage. Pam Nodus, who usually doesn’t get excited about fundraisers, got enthusiastic after receiving the Mortgage Lifter fundraising letter in the mail. Convinced that Tilth can achieve its goal, Pam was motivated to sell her newly hatched chicks in two weeks on Facebook as a donation to the campaign. Meanwhile, she is thinking of more things to sell. What can you sell to lift the mortgage?
of the sustainable agriculture movement promoted by Tilth chapters that day, and how we might form a local group on Whidbey Island.

Then, in June of 1982, we announced a chapter formation meeting at the Greenbank Hall for interested people. About 25 people answered the call, and we were launched. For the next few years we met in each other’s living rooms or backyard gardens and shared our knowledge of horticulture, farming and gardening.

It wasn’t too long before we were expanding our activities to include production of a chapter newsletter, offering gardening classes to the public and managing a farmers’ market at Bayview. After a decade and a half of this, we experienced growing pains that resulted in the purchase of the eleven acres at Thompson Road.

This occurred as the new millennia approached. Y2K, as it became known, both excited and frightened people. Sustainability became even more of a concern as people contemplated the prospects for both short- and long-term collapse or transformation of our industrial civilization. Our Tilth chapter, caught up in the excitement of the day, decided it was time for new action to usher in the new era.

I believe that, with the passage of time, our predominantly volunteer, service-minded, nonprofit organization with its years of community engagement, drew ever more help in both volunteer time and material resources from a diverse population of supporters. For a number of years we had been accumulating a modest chapter treasury through booth fees at the Bayview Market. This was fortunate, because at the end of the 20th century, change was in the air at Bayview Corner. The land for the market that we had leased for many years was up for sale, and we had no way of knowing if the new owners would keep us on as tenants.

That is when one of our members, Caroline Gardner, who decided to get some of her savings out of the stock market and into something more to her liking; in this case, agricultural land. (The Y2K scare that year didn’t amount to much, but the tech stock bubble that burst soon after, did.) Caroline bought the 20-acre property at Thompson Road before the stock market decline, and she decided to share her good fortune with Tilth in the form of a generous, no interest, no down payment, $450/month sale agreement on our 11 acres.

Births, as we all know, are never painless, and the birth of our new Tilth chapter’s land ownership was no exception. Just as we were concluding our purchase agreement with Caroline, word came that the Bayview Corner would have new community-minded owners who would welcome South Whidbey Tilth’s continued involvement with the farmers’ market there. However, by then, we were already well on our way to moving the market to the new property at Thompson Road. Our membership split over the move. A considerable part of the membership opposed pulling out of farmers’ market at Bayview. A majority voted at the time to proceed with the purchase and move the Tilth Farmers’ Market to the new land.

This led to a period of inevitable hard feelings, competing farmers’ markets, and an unhelpful taking of sides. Some people vowed never to set foot on the Tilth land, others to never set foot in the Bayview Market again. Fortunately, time and a wise decision to move our market to Sundays, thereby no longer being in competition with the Saturday Bayview Market, healed most of the community anger and hurt.

It also provided a good many people in our community the opportunity to wholeheartedly support everything going on at Bayview and on the Tilth land. This has included numerous generous donations of time and money to create gardens, a farmers’ market, restrooms, a café, a classroom, and support for a variety of programs. Nancy Nordhoff, who has always been a strong supporter of worthy causes on Whidbey Island, readily offered her support to Tilth as the Bayview and Tilth competition resolved itself. The generous offer of a matching grant to finally pay off the Tilth land is just the latest in a series of such actions on behalf of our chapter over the years.
Summer Market Comes to a Close
by Kirstin Clauson, Tilth market manager

As we interact more and more online, whether for better or worse, one thing remains clear: we know we still need to have “real” places to go. Sometimes it feels difficult to find real, let alone beautiful, places. When we find them, especially in nature, these places nourish us, though we may not have consciously contemplated or quantified just how much of an effect they have on our well-being. The effects are real and beneficial, and there are studies to prove that being in nature is good for us. When you can combine a physical place with being able to shop for organic fruits, vegetables, meats and cheeses from your local farmers, artisan created goods and freshly prepared food, much of which, if not all, was grown free from harmful chemicals, what do you get? The farmers’ market at Tilth.

A topic often on my mind is my desire to live on a planet where there are beautiful places, where civilization and society are one with the natural world, where there are friendly faces and equal and prosperous exchanges. My vision for Earth might not be everyone else’s vision, and it might not be feasible, or, it may take 1,000 years to happen.

But another thing that remains clear, and was made even more clear this year, is that the farmers’ market at Tilth is one of these places. We, despite some crazy circumstances, were more successful this year than others. New vendors Silva Family Farm selling organic berries from Oak Harbor, Sweet Luxury Cookies, and Lone Creek Farm Flowers, helped contribute to our success. Drop-ins Workin’ Dream Farm and Whidbey Beeswax Candles also helped us start the year off right. I am grateful that Tilth exists and feel so lucky to be able to enjoy the market.

Thank you to all of our volunteers who willingly spent countless hours helping with the more numerous tasks we had. Thanks to everyone who shopped at and supported the market this year. I hope you got what you needed and enjoyed yourself and will continue to do so into the future. Our market feels like a hidden gem in this land of tech giants, fast highways and online streaming: a place of nourishment. In the end, nourishment is ours to create, and we can sustain it with our dollars, energy and exchanges every day to make sure these places exist. See you in 2021!

Ida Gianopulos, owner of Lone Creek Farm Flowers

Hot Food to Go

During these fall days as the weather gets chilly, people are still busy in the kitchen at Tilth preparing hot meals for take-out.

OSM Eats will be at the Tilth market café every Sunday from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. serving hot meals, baked goods and beverages from their popular market fare. The menu is posted on the Tilth Facebook page: facebook.com/SouthWhidbeyTilth.

South End Kitchen, a new arrival at the South Whidbey Tilth kitchen, does take-out and catering, offering an eclectic menu always made from scratch and using the freshest ingredients sourced locally whenever possible. Order meals ahead to be picked up at Tilth Monday through Thursday. For more on how it works and to see the menu, visit southendkitchen.net, or call 425-238-0762.

Wow! Look at Our 2020 Numbers

The 2020 Tilth market was remarkable in many ways, including our sales numbers. As a whole, the market grossed $62,624, which is a 40% increase over 2019 and about double the income of previous years. Tilth’s income from the market was $5,962, which includes 10% of sales (on the first $500 per vendor) plus income from Tilth-grown produce and booth fees. We averaged 12 vendors and 212 customers per market. The Community Produce booth was well-stocked, grossing nearly $6,000. We even track the weather, which most Sundays was pleasant, so I’d give it a 9 out of 10. People- and dog-watching was beyond comparison. Thanks to everyone for a record year!
The heart of the organic movement is our understanding that healthy soil will produce healthy plants. My experience has been that if I keep my soil healthy, my plants will be healthy and have less insect and disease issues. I never use chemicals and seldom use organic methods for controlling pests. I don’t need to.

I have two simple ways to keep soil healthy: I apply massive amounts of organic material every year, and I never walk on (compress) the soil where I grow plants.

My wife, Pam Nodus, and I live near Greenbank on five acres. We use about a half-acre to grow nearly all of our food in our spare time. We are a more modern version of the sustainable farmers, growing most of what we eat, but buying things we can’t produce, like oils. We both worked full-time away from our place, I as a realtor and Pam as a schoolteacher (now retired). I used to tell people I typically spend about 18 hours a week growing my food—working with the animals and plants—which, by the way, is about half the average time a person watches a television. I don’t watch a television.

When gardeners see our garden, they are shocked. Often, they say, “I’ve never been able to grow (whatever plant we are then looking at) like you can.” Our garden is an insane explosion of all types of life. I caught a chipmunk in my vole trap the other day and Pam, who has been upset with chipmunks these past couple years for eating all of our sugar-snap peas, asked me if I had relocated it. I said, “No, he lives and eats here, and it would be traumatic to relocate it.” We have birds eating weed seeds and insects, voles eating our root plants, chipmunks eating peas, and, of course, us eating anything we can.

This is my largest compost pile—it’s about 30 feet long and five feet high, probably higher as the land drops off to the left of the pile. I will let this sit for two years totally undisturbed. Standing here in the evening I can feel its vibrations of life. It is alive and thriving. I do nothing to care for it; compost just happens. My chickens love climbing on it and looking for seeds and worms and anything else they see move. Our compost has won Grand Champion at the Island County Fair. Once, I overheard a judge showing a group of people my compost, telling them why it was so superior to the others. I told her it was mine and she asked me how I made it. Before I could answer, she began detailing the work to produce such a product. When she finished, I told her I did nothing but let it sit by itself for two years. Compost happens.

The animals we raise are goats and chickens. We usually have between five and 15 goats, who require clean quarters. Their bedding needs to be replaced weekly, and all of the old bedding goes into the compost pile along with plants from our garden. The goats feed us their milk and bodies. In return, we provide excellent care for them.

We have several piles of compost in different stages of development, which we use in different places depending on the time of year and what we want to accomplish. At the end of the season, we put down about four inches deep raw goat bedding in our growing beds, and then put two inches of finished compost on top. A week before planting the following year, I’ll turn everything over with a garden fork, wait a week and then plant. Our soil is alive and plants love growing here.

Once the plants are up and strong, though still young, I mulch between the plants with my compost that is from a pile that is only a few months old. In this compost pile I’m looking for it to be cool enough that the compost worms have moved in. I put it a couple inches deep around these young plants.

We love to share our raw compost materials. Generally, on Saturday mornings, we clean the goat area and have often loaded trailers and/or trucks as we clean, for free. Or you can come and dig from our pile and take what you want. You can email me at president@southwhidbeytilth.org or text me at 206-718-8938.
President’s Message

by Gary Ingram

We are three quarters through this year and what a year it has been. We already know the current federal administration to be anti-science, but things this year have really made it stand out.

Early on, we found ourselves within a pandemic. The council of trustees made the decision, with the advice of the Island County Health Department, to open our Farmers’ Market on schedule. This was before there was much guidance from our local government.

We made the decision to require all vendors, volunteers and customers to wear masks. This was a bold stance for us to take back then, as a debate was raging about whether or not masks were harmful to wear, and we angered some people.

It now seems that wearing masks is one of the best ways to protect ourselves from spreading the virus.

In September, we breathed the smoky effects of climate change, yet there are still many in power who have their heads in the sand about this. I asked my son how long this bad air will last, and his response was, “Based on events of this year, I say forever.” For once I looked forward to a good Pacific storm.

Every year in January we have our annual meeting. We will probably be holding it on Zoom this year. At the meeting we will elect five council members for new terms. We need more nominees, especially someone interested in chairing the Market committee, so if you have any interest in helping run South Whidbey Tilth, please let one of the council members know.

We continue to hold our monthly business meetings on the third Thursday of the month. We do this on Zoom from 6 to 8 p.m. All members are invited. To get the meeting link, you can email one of the council members.

A Garden Evolves at Tilth

Recently Netsah Zylinsky led a series of three classes, introducing the basic principles and patterns of permaculture design. On September 22, a group of about 12 gathered at Tilth to visit the garden that Netsah has been developing since 2018. She invited us to look with soft eyes and see with our peripheral vision how we might continue the transition of this garden to a self-maintaining food forest. She mentioned the Imagine Permaculture Food Forest (SE Bayshore Drive in Oak Harbor), as an example of a food forest that now requires little maintenance from the people in Oak Harbor who benefit from its bounty.

Tilth’s garden was created by the Calyx Community Arts School with a grant from the Whidbey Island Garden Tour. The project broke ground June 30, 2012 and incorporated permaculture design features. By 2018, the garden had been idle for a few years. Wanting to create a permaculture garden on south Whidbey, Netsah, with other like-minded gardeners, took to designing a plan for restoring the garden. It was renamed the Mary Alice Kois Food Forest in honor of Mary Alice, who tended the garden for many years.

Already productive, the garden has a mix of annual and perennial crops, including everbearing raspberries, grapes and a tree full of ripening quince fruit. With the three permaculture ethics in mind—Care for the Earth, Care for the people, Return the surplus and abundance back to the whole—the group was inspired to continue our learning and practice of permaculture by exchanging ideas and holding meetings and work parties at the garden. Contact Kris Collins if you are interested in joining this group at kreekifer@hotmail.com.
Help Guide South Whidbey Tilth in 2021

Now’s your chance to get behind the scenes at South Whidbey Tilth and channel your energy for constructive, positive change! Every year, four of the eight council positions are opened up for election to a new two-year term.

Each of the eight council members takes on a role, namely president, vice president or secretary, or chairs one of the following standing committees: finance, fundraising/membership/outreach, market, land stewardship or education.

Once the positions coming up for re-election are filled, the council members together decide who will hold which position (with the exception of president, who is elected into that position), keeping in mind the preferences of confirmed council members and nominees. For 2021, we are still looking for someone interested in chairing the market committee. To be on the council you must have been a member of South Whidbey Tilth for at least a year and have demonstrated involvement in the organization. Please indicate your interest to membership@southwhidbeytilth.org.

There are more ways to be involved. You can participate in any of the standing committees, and, in addition, we have important ongoing projects: installing a permanent farm stand, creating a new Tilth website, managing Tilth’s publicity and developing use of the kitchen.

To know more, contact any council member (see listing on the right), and plan to come to a business meeting. The next meeting is November 19 at 6 p.m. Contact Gary for the Zoom link president@southwhidbeytilth.org.
Annual Picnics Past

With so much to celebrate, many Tilth members were disappointed to have to forego our annual picnic. Here is a glimpse of some memories of past picnics to get you looking forward to next year.

Chef Ed Hueneke, 2012

Jodi Blackburn Roehl, Vivian Stembridge, 2013

Peter and Stevie Linton, Wendy Ferrier, 2014

2016

Pete Little and Mokihana Calizar, 2018

2019

2017
What Is Regenerative Agriculture? Part II
The Above-Ground Story

by Janet Richards

Regenerative agriculture, in a nutshell, is a set of farming practices that aim to improve the land that is farmed, most importantly by increasing the soil's carbon content. The article “What Is Regenerative Agriculture?” (Tilth Summer 2020 newsletter) describes the importance of plants and their relationship to soil biology in the process of building healthy soil. That article discusses microscopic animals in the soil, but animals above the ground play an important part in regenerative agriculture. This time we're not talking about microbes, but large animals, or livestock.

Holistic planned grazing is a method of raising livestock to support carbon-rich soil. The method was articulated by Allan Savory after, what he calls, the mistake of a lifetime. As a research biologist and game ranger in what is now Zimbabwe, Savory was trying to solve the problem of grassland desertification in the national parks where he worked. (Desertification is the loss of the ability of land to hold water and support plant life. One third of the Earth’s land surface is grassland ecosystem. Seventy percent of these grasslands are currently degraded.) It has long been thought that overgrazing by animals causes desertification. Savory thought so, too, and called for 40,000 elephants to be culled from national parks. Afterwards, he observed that fewer animals grazing did not relieve desertification, but rather accelerated it.

Why did land that was allowed to rest from grazing continue to degrade? Confronted with this paradox, Savory has spent his life researching answers. The big clue came from nature.

The American plains, which we know were covered in carbon-rich grasslands, were also covered with massive herds of herbivores. These wild herds had predators, so the animals, often different species, remained tightly bunched for protection. The grazing was intense and short-lived. Staying away from predators was paramount, and herds moved on, often at a fast clip. Lewis and Clark referred to the bison they saw as a “moving multitude” that “darkened the whole plains.” What the herds left behind were grasses stimulated by grazing to regrow, soil surfaces disturbed by their hooves, allowing water to enter more easily, and natural fertilizer from their waste and ground-in dead plants. Then the area was allowed to rest before animals returned again to graze. The plants in the grassland ecosystems of our planet evolved with this pattern of grazing and resting. The plants need the periodic disturbance of animals to thrive.

Savory’s solution was to mimic nature using livestock in the place of wild herds and human intervention in the place of predators. The idea that over-resting rather than overgrazing caused desertification was a paradigm shift. Savory has been criticized by scientists; many are not convinced by his anecdotal evidence, and perhaps also because he claims that by reintroducing massive numbers of grazing livestock, we can counter global carbon dioxide emissions. This is a difficult claim to prove, and some ecosystems may respond better to total rest than holistic grazing.

Holistic grazing is a planning system very specific to the place and time. The key is making and changing your plan according to what the plants need. A plan changes every year, and sometimes during the year, depending

What’s Your Beef?

Recently there has been attention given to the idea that adopting a vegan diet is better for the planet. This is not necessarily true as many vegetable crops are grown with methods that cause land degradation and loss of biodiversity. As described in the related article, “Regenerative Agriculture Part II,” raising cattle using regenerative methods can help put carbon back into the soil and have a net benefit for our ecosystems.

There are many reasons to adopt a vegan diet, but if we are weighing the decision about what’s best for the planet, then, rather than looking at what we eat, we need to look at how it is grown or raised. Understanding what kind of agriculture is involved in producing our food is not always easy information to come by, but a good place to start is buying farm-raised food, often local, where you can find out who the farmer is, or the values of the farming coop that is marketing the food.
Join, Renew or Donate to Tilth’s Projects

☐ Join South Whidbey Tilth. A single household membership is $25 and $10 for each additional adult household member who wishes to join. One newsletter is emailed or mailed to each household. Please list each member’s name.

Enclose $25 (for one) + ___ (number of additional adult household members who wish to join x $10) = $_________. Membership renewals are June of each year. If you missed this year’s date, please renew now.

I am interested in volunteering: ☐ event planning, ☐ gardening or landscaping, ☐ other

☐ I/we also want to make a $______ donation to help with the goals of South Whidbey Tilth, a nonprofit corporation, EIN #91-1456495. ☐ Contact me about estate donations to South Whidbey Tilth’s Sustaining Fund.

☐ Please keep my/our donation anonymous. ☐ I/we authorize publication of my/our name(s) as a donor.

Name_____________________________ Email ________________________________

Name_____________________________ Email ________________________________

Name_____________________________ Email ________________________________

Mailing address ___________________________________________ Town_________ Zip __________

Phone _____________________ Mobile ___________________ I want to receive: ☐ email updates ☐ newsletter online

Please mail to: South Whidbey Tilth Association, P.O. Box 252, Langley, Washington 98260, or send via PayPal.

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on local conditions. You might say the best grazing requires the rancher’s shadow.

Soil ecologist Christine Jones champions the idea that the healthiest soil, which is most rich in carbon, is supported by living plants. She says that controlled grazing, or managing the relationship between animals, plants and the soil, can regenerate grasslands and improve livestock production. Carefully managed grazing allows for intermittent grazing, which prunes roots and stimulates root growth that feeds the soil biota, and also resting, which allows time for plant regrowth.

Jones also confirms that grassland needs grazers. Often the degradation caused by unmanaged grazing (sometimes called “set” grazing, where livestock is allowed to graze continuously), leads land conservationists to permanently stop all grazing. But grasslands co-evolved with herbivores over millions of years, and research shows that when grasses are allowed to sit and are never grazed, the health of the grassland declines over time.

Several farms on Whidbey Island, recently featured in Whidbey Life Magazine, include livestock as an essential regenerative component. Practices include using sheep and goats to control invasive species and break up compacted soil, grazing chickens to fertilize as they feed on bugs in the orchard, mixing crop and animal rotations (sheep, pigs, and chickens) to work the soil, and planned grazing to produce both meat and vegetable crops. Not only do these farms help regenerate our Whidbey soils, they are home to well-cared-for animals.

We have altered our ecosystems and we may not be able to recreate the large herbivore grazing of the past, but by working with nature, we can move towards restoring the balance of water and fertility and create pockets of biodiversity. In turn, by supporting regenerative agriculture, we strengthen our community and local food system.
CALENDAR

Check the online calendar at southwhidbeytilth.org/calendar for the latest updates.

NOVEMBER
2 Whidbey Island Growers Association program “Agroforestry in Depth,” whidbeycd.org/agricultural-community.html
9-10 Tilth Alliance Conference, tilthalliance.org/special_events/Conference
19 Tilth Council business meeting, 6 to 8 p.m. Zoom meeting, president@southwhidbeytilth.org
29 Tilth Holiday Market, 12 to 4 p.m. (weather permitting, check southwhidbeytilth.org)

DECEMBER
1 Farmer’s Shadow garden discussion group, 6 to 7:30 p.m., education@southwhidbeytilth.org
6 Tilth Holiday Market, 12 to 4 p.m. (weather permitting, check southwhidbeytilth.org)
7-11 National Biochar Week, easternbiochar.org
13 Tilth Holiday Market, 12 to 4 p.m. (weather permitting, check southwhidbeytilth.org)
17 Tilth Council business meeting, 6 to 8 p.m. president@southwhidbeytilth.org
20 Tilth Holiday Market 12 to 4 p.m. (depending on attendance and weather permitting, check southwhidbeytilth.org)