

The Little Green Wagon – A Way of Organizing

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The Little Green Wagon invites children and young people who visit the **Forsyth Farmers' Market** to plant a seed, watch it grow from one Saturday to the next, and take their plant home when it is ready to transplant. Plants that don't find a home with the children who planted them are given away.



This project, designed and implemented by members of **Mixed Greens** a group of Forsyth Farmer's Market supporters, serves the market's mission by promoting young people's understanding and participation in the local food system.

The Little Green Wagon embodies a way of organizing that mirrors the market's commitment to *give priority to organic production over conventional, whole foods over prepared foods, craft or artisan production of staples over more processed food.*



- It has grown organically from the creative efforts of people who care about the market and want to craft new routes to active participation.
- The idea moved quickly to a low cost prototype –an available wagon, some seeds and pots to hold them, some sticks to name the plants and their growers, some boards to contain the soil that holds the pots and a hand made sign to announce the venture. It established the level of interest among young visitors to the market by directly inviting participation rather than by surveying interest or otherwise talking about the idea. A successful first day led to improvements: a more permanent sign, a logo, an identity for the project on *facebook*.



- It minimizes the costs of coordination. The rhythm of plant growth paces the project –new plantings every Saturday. The needs of the plants in relationship to the young growers define necessary tasks. The match between these tasks and the interests of those who choose to be involved define responsibilities –someone assures that the wagon and related supplies are in place on time; someone provides encouragement and whatever instruction a young person may need; someone stores the wagon away safely; someone tends the plants from Saturday to Saturday; someone posts a reminder that the





plants are ready to go home; someone finds a place for plants that need a home when the cycle is ready to start again.

- The idea is easy to understand and simple for others to copy.
- Success can be estimated easily, at a glance: how many pots does the wagon hold at the end of a day of planting? how many growers stop by to check on their plants? how many pots find a home with their planters? A deeper sense can be gained by listening for the stories that flow around the Little Green Wagon.
- The idea can find its limits naturally. Will the bigger area allowed by an offered truck bed encourage more participation or will it become unwieldy? Trying will tell and retreat to a smaller scale is easy.
- Like any sort of human scale farming, The Little Green Wagon is completely vulnerable to the care of those who tend the project. It can continue only as long as young people want to plant and see their plants grow. It is sustained and improved only if people choose to tend it. When care fades, the project will die. But, even if the project fades if people choose, the knowledge gained and relationships strengthened will fertilize a new effort.

Organizing for an inclusive and sustainable community can puzzle people who think at an industrial scale. Somewhat like farmers concerned to build living soil, the strategy exemplified by The Little Green Wagon aims to build increasingly diverse relationships through shared experience of acting on care for a place and all of its people. Much more depends on what emerges from the ways engaged people care to invest their energy than on achieving measured milestones in a grand strategy. This can be frustrating to people who want a sense of control or the satisfaction of quick returns on well defined projects, but ignoring the reality that community depends on recognizing and enabling one another's gifts deprives people of the conditions necessary to create the organic, the whole, and the artisanal.