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Interview with Katy Kolker, Portland Fruit Tree Project, 2010 (audio)

Katy Kolker

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Stillinger, Dan, "Interview with Katy Kolker, 2010 (audio)" (2010). Sustainability History Project. <http://archives.pdx.edu/ds/psu/10773>

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Portland State University Oral History Project

Interview Index

Interviewee: Katy Kolker, Portland Fruit Tree Project

Interviewer: Dan Stillinger

Date: 2/27/10

Location of Interview:

Research Assistant: Ian McCreary

Interview Series: Sustaining Northwest Landscapes and Communities

Recording Equipment; Digital Recorder (Windows Media Audio File) with an external omni directional microphone

Time:

Notes:

0:09	Intro, Yes
0:30	How long have you lived in Portland?
“8	years”
0:32	Where are you from originally?
“Baltim	ore, after college”
1:02	What did you study after graduating college?
“Biology”	
1:16	How did you get involved in you field of work?
	“Being a member of Growing Gardens and Americorp, then started the Portland Fruit Tree Project.”
2:00	How do you define sustainability?
	“Being able to sustain or continue as is. The ability of humans to relate to the environment with minimal negative impact.”
2:47	How do you gauge progress towards sustainability?
	“The steps to assess sustainability and human connections to the environment involve understanding how our daily lives impact the environment on a local and regional level.”
3:50	Please describe a typical day with the PFTP
	“The summer and fall harvest seasons are very different, but involve visiting tree owners and harvest participations with volunteers. My role of director has become more administrative.”
5:04	Please describe an atypical day with the PFTP
	“Nothing is really normal – I just try to take thing as they come.”
5:57	What are some of your proudest achievements?
	“Three years ago, we had the idea (of PFTP), and then taking it from an idea into a program which saved 15,000 pounds of fruit last year, with 300 volunteers, 250 harvest aids, and creating leadership opportunities.”
7:10	What are some of your persistent challenges?
	“Limitations in resources, staff, and finances. Our core is volunteer driven and based in community. Time is always the biggest challenge.”
8:14	According to your website, the Portland Fruit Tree Project was recently (2008) accepted as an official 501C non-profit organization.

How did this directly impact your organizational dynamics and agenda?

“It launched us into an organized structure, created funding for a fulltime staff person (2009). It had a huge impact overall.”

9:22

My research mentioned that you are a member of the food policy council, and currently co-chair of the FPC’s Urban Agriculture and Land Use Committee. In what ways do you see the work of these groups as complementary or conflictual?

“In terms of the big picture, we are looking at organizing to create a city with more local food production, and creating a single tangible, yet problematic solution.”

10:40

How does the PFTP secure its funding and how is it distributed?

“Donations primarily, but a few grants within Portland such as from the Meyer foundation. We received \$6,000 in services from one company as well. But mostly it comes from donations of commodities, labor, and time.”

12:00

What do PFTP’s hands-on workshops involve?

“They are taught by volunteers and take place at tree harvest sites.”

12:44

How do you acquire “registered” tree owners?

“Tree owners register through PFTP – required to be organic.”

13:16

What are some of the seasonal difficulties?

“July to November is always challenging. During August and November we have had to pick 2-3 trees per week.”

14:15

How do you distribute the produce?

“About half of the food stays with the volunteers, and the other half is given to local food banks and low-income households.”

15:06

How do you locate participants?

“People usually come to us. We do outreach through community events, a good amount of media press, and general word of mouth.”

15:15

What methods does PFTP do to publicly promote itself?

“Mailing lists, the website. This year we had a larger outreach to people through emergency food service programs on the East side of Portland.”

17:10

To what extent do you strive to involve youth education in PFTP?

“We encourage people to bring kids. We are involved in the Mt. Scott alternative high school. We want to involve more high school groups in the future. Group harvests are not necessarily youth driven, but are a great way to involve youth. We do have a policy of not letting small children climb on the ladders for safety reasons.”

18:38

What do you see as the most important long-term benefit of youth education?

“Health – above all else.”

19:02

Your group offers pest and disease assessment as one of the workshops coming up this year. What is PFTP’s position on the use of pesticides/fungicides, etc?

- “We promote organic tree care because it is better for the environment those consuming the produce. We choose not to harvest trees with a history of pesticide use.”
- 19:36 **Can you describe PFTP’s impact on low-income neighborhoods in the Portland Metro area?**
“By providing fresh healthy foods to those who need them most – last year we distributed 15,000 pounds of fruit to 1,500 low income families. Fresh produce is always scarce at food banks.”
- 22:13 **How does the localizing of food resources go beyond the concept of “emergency food”?**
“Community building results from increasing connections through local food production. It creates a shift towards local foods and away from globalized produce. It provides an opportunity for people to acquire high quality organic food they normally couldn’t afford with the limitations of their paychecks.”
- 23:04 **What do you understand to be the ecological and economic benefits of community based food production?**
“Ecologically – decreased carbon footprint and improving our urban environment. Economically – more options for food outside of monetary ability, flexibility to spend.”
- 24:25 **How do you think the current economic recession has changed people’s needs for programs like the PFTP?**
“More than ever, people need some type of economic break, especially when it comes to food.”
- 24:47 **What goals does PFTP hope to accomplish within the next decade through community empowerment?**
“It’s hard to say. We would like to see a time when all fruit trees in the city are being harvested and cared for. We want to develop a community orchards program. Everyone in Portland should know where local fruits are located in their neighborhood.”
- 26:20 **Does PFTP have plans for regional expansion? Could you ever see such a program existing in Gresham for example?**
“Yes. We are expanding our program in Portland and want to expand into Vancouver, Gresham, and Aloha. We have received calls from all around the country from people wanting to follow the PFTP model. We want to be able to aide them in the future.”
- 28:37 **One last question. What’s your favorite fruit?**
“I’d have to say Asian Pears.”