

News

The Green Giant

by: Shannan Stoll, Contributing Writer

Seattle's two-day Green Festival pulls in the crowds

The Emerald City celebrated green with a capital 'G' this past weekend at the second annual Seattle Green Festival, held at the Washington State Trade & Convention Center. Nationwide, the eight-year-old festival has grown alongside a growing green economy. This year, Green Festivals visit five major cities, including the Seattle event, which boasted 300 exhibitors and over 125 speakers.

What does it mean to celebrate Green? According to the festival website, Green means "safe, healthy communities and a strong local economy." Katie Hunsberger, Senior Account Executive of Festival Marketing and Public Relations, says the mission of Seattle Green Festival is "to provide an opportunity for the entire green community — businesses, social justice and environmental organizations, government, utilities, the public — to come together to celebrate our successes and collaborate on the work ahead."

Come together they did. Vendors selling everything from green office supplies to the latest eco-fashion and green building materials wove a matrix of booths in Exhibition Hall, the largest room of the festival. Socks made from recycled yarn, paper beads crafted by people living with AIDS in Uganda, business cards made from elephant dung, Clif Bar, Organic Valley — they were all there, passing out raw pet food samples, demonstrating innovative garden tools and giving acupuncture consultations.

Noel Valdes says he travels to all five Green Festivals to sell his Wisconsin-made CobraHead products, gardening tools including weeders and cultivators. "I started doing the festival in San Francisco four years ago. Our mission is to help people grow their own food, and we have tools to help people do that."

People like Charlene Lee, a young Seattle resident was in attendance. "It's fun. I'm here to see all the new products that can help me be more sustainable," said Lee, holding a CobraHead she just purchased from Valdes. "I just got a Cobra. It's fantastic. I saw it last year at the festival and came back this year to buy one."

Lee was joined by tens of thousands of other festival-goers over two days. While official festival attendance numbers won't be released until later this week, Hunsberger estimates that this year's festival topped last year's 30,000+ attendance mark. And at lunch, it seemed like every one of that number crowded the two rows of booths in the Organic Foods section, carrying reusable polypropylene bags stuffed with green product brochures and sampling garden burgers on toothpicks, 10 different-flavored squares of Theo's Chocolate and organic popcorn mounded on paper plates.

Thirty thousand people eat a lot of popcorn and use a lot of paper plates. Festivals like these are notoriously wasteful events, and in some ways, Green Festival is another example. It is also a little different, though, a little greener. All festival materials were printed on recycled materials, all those paper plates were 100% biodegradable and festival attendees were offered incentives to use green transportation. During the festival, volunteers stood at "Resource Recovery Stations" directing waste traffic: biodegradable plates in the compost bin and gum in the landfill bin.

There was also more to do at the festival than buy, sell, or sample green products. Some of the country's most visionary leaders of the environmental and social justice movements spoke. Lines of people waiting to see mycologist Paul Stamets, food author Alice Waters, and radio and TV host Amy Goodman wound through the hallways of the center conference rooms. Local and national community action group booths bordered the exhibition hall's bustling commercial center.

Leah Baugh, who works at EOS Alliance (EOS stands for Environmental Outreach and Stewardship), came to the festival to talk about the work of her environmental nonprofit. "Greenfest is a really good opportunity to see the whole gamut of things going on in the field and for people to connect," Baugh said. "At the same time, being here can feel overwhelming because even though they're trying to reduce waste, there's just a lot of stuff. Last year we didn't have a gimmick, something for people to buy or take. This year we do: we have reusable bags and low-flow showerheads. And I think we're getting more people to our table. Part of me would like to see less stuff at the festival, but it's also kind of what draws people in."

If the Seattle Green Festival is any indication, the nationwide and global greenmarkets are big business. How big? According to an annual report issued by [GreenBiz.com](#), it's difficult to estimate the exact size of the green economy because the number changes depending on whether the question is restricted to small, mission-driven green businesses or includes big corporations, like Starbucks, who are "greening" their practices. But the market is big. In 2007, the global organic food market alone was estimated at \$43.5 billion, according to market analyst Datamonitor.

What's the role of the green economy in our increasingly strained economic and environmental climate? When introducing Goodman, who hosts the radio and TV show "Democracy Now!," executive co-producer of the festival Kevin Danaher said, "WWII got us out of the last depression. That's not going to happen this time. It's gonna be the green economy this time." In October 2008, the United Nations Environment Program launched a \$4 million Green Economic Initiative to push the global economy toward environmentally friendly investments that create jobs and address climate change. As the economy struggles, the green economy may continue to grow.

But will more stuff — even green stuff — really solve our current environmental and social crisis? Near the close of a talk that focused on the importance of independent thought — particularly in the media — in solving social and environmental problems, Goodman quoted Albert Einstein: "No problem can be solved from the same consciousness that created it." A shift toward green products may be a part of this shift in consciousness, but Goodman's comment suggests these questions: Is it enough? How many reusable bags and Kleen Kanteen water bottles do we need? What other change needs to happen?

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Jake Harris covered in 500 plastic bags as "The Bag Monster." Harris' Bag Monster campaign uses humor and satire to raise consciousness about plastic bag waste. He was a big hit at Seattle Green Festival last weekend.

Photo by: Shannan Stoll, Contributing Writer

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Wednesday, April 22 at 3:52pm

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Tuesday, April 21 at 12:16pm

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Monday, April 20 at 1:03pm

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Friday, April 17 at 4:14pm

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Jail planning timeline

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