

## LBO Early History

Long Beach Organic, Inc. (LBO) was formed on December 14, 1994 by Charles Moore. While the organization today is mostly associated with organic community gardens, its original conception was part of a much broader vision. By the early 90s, Moore, a long time environmentalist had become dismayed by the increasing pollution in waters surrounding the city. His childhood was spent swimming in the channels and bays of Alamitos Bay. As a very young child, he, like many other mid-century Long Beach youth, learned to swim in the Colorado Lagoon. Moore remembers the waters of Colorado Lagoon, located just down the street from the family home, were once safe enough for the Red Cross to hold swimming classes. As the years passed he watched the water in the lagoon become so filthy that it was rarely swim able. It saddened him that contemporary youth would never know the clean ocean he so loved. He decided to take action.

Moore applied to Secretary of State for nonprofit status for two organizations that December day, LBO and Algalita Marine Research Foundation. AMRF was to study the effects of run-off in the ocean and Long Beach Organic was to address ocean pollution by reducing run-off from land. He was aware of how the hard urban surfaces of a city landscape created this water pollution and how soft soils and planted land could act as a cleansing sponge for run-off water. He combined this knowledge with years of experience in organic gardening, which started in 1974 after he read *The Ruth Stout No-Work Garden Book: Secrets of the Famous Year-Round Mulch Method*, and a dedication to education and social justice. The result was a novel “urban agriculture helps save the ocean” model.

The initial project of LBO was to found a garden in the downtown area. First & Elm Garden on the property of private landowner Helen Woo continues to be a vibrant independent community garden to this day. The next project involved working with property owners on Signal Hill to bioremediate the oil-tarnished soils with mulching. As the soil healed, the organization partnered with the Cambodian Health Project to remediate a public health ill. This immigrant community suffered health problems from lack of exercise and poor nutrition. A second urban garden was formed and eventually over 50 Cambodian families farmed plots. The property was lost to eminent domain - a private cement plant now covers the property, moved there to free up space for another auto dealership. Next the tiny Pacific & 6<sup>th</sup> Garden was founded. Pacific & 6th is still a vital LBO garden today.

Many lessons were learned during this time, perhaps the most valuable was that the organization needed to ensure the work of building a garden was not lost when a landowner changed course. Specifically the organization invested time energy and funds to build a garden on a vacant lot on Anaheim east of Cherry Avenue. Just

before the garden was ready to open, the landowner had an offer on his property he couldn't refuse and sold the site just as it was ready to open as a garden. Since that time, LBO has made it a policy not to lease property for less than 2 years.

In the meantime, the organization approached and worked with other property owners as advisors on how to start gardens on vacant land. Some of these included a church garden at Palos Verdes and Willow and a garden at Hill and Atlantic. The latter property later became a Habitat for Humanity home. LBO also worked with youth education of Campfire girls and boys on gardening.

When the natural foods store, Wild Oats, came to town, LBO saw an opportunity to do a larger project. The store approached LBO with an offer of funding to start a large community garden on the old Pacific Railway line just above 10<sup>th</sup> on Grand St. With funds available, the work of community organizing and recruiting gardeners was begun. With gardeners recruited, a core group went to work building the garden from scratch by hand spreading mulch and building beds. Within a year the garden bustled with urban farmers - eventually over 70 families tilled the 90 plots of the garden known as Wild Oats Community Garden.

In addition to founding community gardens and educating on gardening, other early projects and accomplishments of LBO included: reviving the Long Beach food co-op by bringing in organic produce from outside farms as well as growing produce locally on private land and working on wetlands education. With its sister organization, AMRF, LBO held several celebrity-hosted *Coast and Ocean Connection* educational events at the Long Beach Museum of Art and the Cabrillo Aquarium drawing regional attention; and participated in local wetlands recovery projects by growing native plants for what was planned to be an urban farm and park at Willow Springs Gulch. Throughout those early years, LBO also grew and offered for wholesale, native plants as well as tropical and temperate fruit trees at the organization's small but abundant nursery on Gladys Ave.

During this period AMRF, the other non-profit Moore founded, grew into an internationally known organization for its work documenting the quantity and effects of plastic pollution in the ocean and Moore became a renowned researcher and sought-after speaker on this subject. While he no longer participates in the day to day operations of LBO, he continues to provide advice and support as founder. LBO now operates eight gardens and has more in the works. Moore is proud of LBO's success in growing of gardens - the seeds of which he planted that December back in 1994.