

Crop Mob is primarily a group of young, landless, and wannabe farmers who come together to work and build an interconnected agrarian community. Crop Mob is also a group of experienced farmers and gardeners sharing knowledge with their peers and the next generation of agrarians. The Crop Mob is open to all regardless of experience, background or age as it is intended to be a community effort.

History

In October 2008 a group of 11 young agrarians from Orange and Chatham counties in the Triangle region of North Carolina got together to talk about issues facing young farmers. We talked about healthcare, wages, access to land etc. This wasn't a new conversation for anyone around the table in fact we had all attended many similar meetings and nothing ever seemed to happen. Adah, a particularly restless young farmer was visibly uncomfortable and squirming in her seat, finally she spoke up. "I'm tired of sitting in meetings just talking about things. It feels like a waste of my time. Why can't we go out and work while we meet rather than just sitting around a table?"

Adah felt like she built stronger relationships with people by working side by side rather than just sitting around a table talking. She had a lot of work to do and if she was going to take time away from the farm she didn't want to feel like she was wasting it. The idea emerged out of the group that we could come together to work on each others farms. We would build community, help each other out, and share a meal. By the end of October we had organized our first mob with 19 people digging, sorting and boxing 1600 pounds of sweet potatoes in about 2.5 hours. Things accelerated from there. We got into the rhythm of mobbing once a month, getting word out through email over our listserv.

In brief, here are the basic operating principles of Crop Mob:

- No money is ever exchanged.
- Work is done on small-scale, sustainable farms and gardens.
- A meal is shared, often provided by the host.
- This is not a charity. We crop mob for crop mobbers.
- Future crop mob events are suggested at a crop mob event
- Media interviews are conducted at a crop mob event

1. What do you need to start?

A. Number one is a handful of people who are interested in helping each other out for a few hours a month. An initial meeting will be necessary to go over the basics of the group and hopefully select the first project. It should be noted that the Crop Mob is not meant to be a rural based organization. The model can work in community gardens, urban neighborhoods, wherever there is a need to get agricultural work done on any scale.

At the onset, there should be at least a few folks who are familiar with sustainable agriculture or gardening in theory and practice and should have some practical and technical experience. Experience should be in leading people with task oriented goals and also in basics such as bed building, mulching, simple harvesting and planting.

A great starting group is 7 to 10 people. Among this core there need to be several people who have farms or gardens that can be mobbed. A stable, reliable and experienced initial crew is important to guide the mob through the startup projects and events. As more and more mobs occur, you'll find that new people will step forward into organizational and developmental roles.

While there is no "boss" of crop mob, there needs to be one or two people at each mob that can delegate responsibilities, direct and redirect labor pools. This does not need to be the same person or persons each time, but should consist of someone connected with the farm where the mob is taking place.

B. The second thing you need is something to keep everyone in contact. We use Google groups, and it has worked out great. New members to the group are automatically set to "moderated" so that they can't post right away. This helps with spam since messages from moderated members can be stopped before they go out to the group. We have very little if any problems with spam since setting up this system. The listserv allows you to setup RSVPs for the meetings or for the next mob. I suggest that you use this listserv for Crop Mob related materials ONLY. There are plenty of other lists out there for sustainable agriculture, gardening, politics, etc.

The young people getting into sustainable agriculture, many of whom didn't grow up on farms, are not eager to go off on their own and toil away in isolation. This is a generation that grew up with cell phones and internet; they want to be connected; they want to be part of a community. Crop Mob uses internet based social networking to bring this community together in real life.

C. Guidelines

- Sustainable farms and gardens only within a set radius or defined geographical area. You don't want to be running around 100 miles away. Another mob can cover that.
- After the initial mob, all future mobs must be suggested at a crop mob event by someone from that future farm (can be an intern, apprentice, owner, etc.). This guarantees that someone from the next suggested farm has worked at least one crop mob before the mob comes to their place. (this can be hard to do at first but is worthwhile instituting because it simplifies things as the mob grows)
- All media interviews should be done at a crop mob event so that the interviewer can get the context of how the crop mob operates.
- At the end of the mob event a meal is shared that is provided by the host farm. Celebration is really important for communities and sharing a meal is powerful thing.
- No money is ever exchanged for the work or for the food provided to attendees.
- The crop mob is a community not a charity and is not for hire. "We crop mob for crop mobbers."

2. Possible pitfalls in the Crop Mob model

A. Too large of an area- Trying to cover a large geographic area just leads to a lot of travel time for participants. An hour's drive (50 or so miles) should be the most extreme for your group to consider.

B. Mob too often - We have found that once a month is plenty for our mob. Other mobs may function well every other month or quarterly. Mobbing too often for the tastes of the group can lead to diminishing numbers of mobbers showing up each time.

C. Having too many people without enough tasks or direction - We have not found the magic number of participants that is too much. Our last mob was probably our biggest, but there was still plenty of work left to do at the end of the day. The goal is to finish certain priority tasks and move on to other ones that do not necessarily need to be completed but do need a jumpstart. Running out of tasks could signal either that there are too many people or that the event was not planned as well as it could be. It can be really helpful to have a task that folks can jump into right as they arrive so they don't have to mill around too much waiting for a critical mass to get started. Once the critical mass has been achieved you can gather the group to introduce a larger or more complicated task.

D. An offshoot of the mob is helping participants feel comfortable leading other people in skilled work. A percentage of the mobbers will be inexperienced and need direction. If people who know what they are doing are not empowered to share their knowledge and get out in front, then other experienced participants should facilitate.

E. Seeking funding and grants - While it may be necessary to use some funds (for a web presence for example), the money needed is minor and can be found within the group. Seeking larger amounts of money is simply not necessary for the function of the group. Tools are brought each time by the mobbers and are specific to the project. There is no office, no printer to refill with ink and toner, no coffee maker, no executive director. These things are not what get the work done every month. We are not a "legal entity" on purpose. We don't require outside funding in order to function well.