

Growing New Farmers & Direct Marketing at Greenbank Farmers Market & Historic Farm

The **Northwest Agriculture Business Center** of Mount Vernon, Washington received \$68,000 to grow new farmers utilizing a CSA farm model at historic Greenbank Farm. Farmer-trainees learned direct market strategies, and put on workshops and demonstrations for the general public with a dual goal of learning while increasing the farm's customer base and volume of sales.

[Final Report FY09](#)

FINAL PERFORMANCE REPORT

Date: November 15, 2010

Recipient Name: Northwest Agriculture Business Center

Title of Project: Growing New Farmers & Direct Marketing at Historic Greenbank Farm

Grant Number: 12-25-G-0984

Location: Mount Vernon, WA 98273

Project Summary:

The goal of this FMPP grant is to grow (7) new farmers, new food, and new food consumers, so more agricultural land in Island County in Western Washington State is preserved from development by putting it into agricultural food production.

By providing hands-on training, new farmer trainees will produce:

1. CSA shares will support local Food Bank clients.
2. Food bank partners will increase the amount of local food distributed to their clients.
3. CSA farmer trainees will sell food at the Greenbank Farmers Market on Sundays.
4. Greenbank Farm will qualify for the WIC & Washington Farmer's Market Association.
5. The farmer trainees will provide a new source of locally grown foods from June 2010 through October 2010 and, hopefully, beyond.
6. The farmer trainee will increase the number of acres planted for food production.
7. New farmer trainees will have long-term relationships with local mentor farmers.
8. The Greenbank Farm CSA Project will achieve long-term financial security.
9. Connectivity between producers and consumers will increase.
10. The Loganberry patch at Greenbank Farm will be restored by CSA farmer trainees.
11. The Whidbey Island Food system becomes more secure as more farmers produce more.
12. Plan 5 educational workshops dealing with CSA and small farm issues, open to the public.
13. A Farmers Market Educational Consumer Demonstration Series will be developed to educate consumers about fresh food at the Farmers Market.

Project Approach:

The grant, as originally written, included the following strategies:

- In 2010 each of the selected farmer-trainees will farm on Greenbank Farm property. Organically certified land at Greenbank Farm will be partitioned among the selected new farmer trainees each year in the fall.

- Washington State University, South Whidbey Tilth, Gifts From The Heart Food Bank, churches, and the NABC will provide the training to make each new farmer successful.
- Business planning, product development and marketing will be included in the CSA core training by NABC staff.
- Selected farmer trainees will agree to sell their crops via the CSA and at the Greenbank Sunday Market and contribute to group projects.
- Construction of support structures (e.g. washing stations, hoop houses, irrigation) will take place in 2010 with the farmer trainees contributing the labor.
- CSA subscriptions will help support the project and farmer trainees. In year one, 60 CSA subscriptions will be sold to consumers.
- Some farmer trainees will require housing. This was a problem in 2008-2009, and several desirable candidates declined enrollment. Housing will be more critical going forward in the present economy and has been put into the 2010 budget.
- An inventory of available lands off-site is being initiated and we intend to match landowners who have an agricultural tax exemption with new farmers.
- Educational workshops will be organized annually;
- Providing additional funding for books and hand tools is also important to get new farmers started in basic understandings of farming and in the CSA model(s).

With the hiring and start of a Farm Program Director at the end of November 2009, an assessment of the project goals and strategies was undertaken. Based on the evaluations from graduating students and input from partners and project managers, it was decided that slightly modifying the structure of the program would improve the effectiveness of the program's educational capabilities and better serve the prospective farmer-trainees. By offering an ongoing curriculum (instead of a pre-season curriculum), having the farmer-trainees collaboratively producing and marketing produce (instead of individually growing and marketing produce) and expanding their direct marketing experience (to include direct-to-retail, direct-to-institution and contract seed growing), we could provide an improved and more comprehensive educational experience that would better prepare the participants to successfully start and manage their own operations in the future. Each farmer trainee, did however, have their own cultivation project that they managed from beginning to end harvest. It was also realized that key to accomplishing this educational goal would be the ability for participants to practice production techniques commonly found on small-scale commercial organic vegetable farms, which would require significantly upgrading the farm infrastructure at the Greenbank Farm's historic site. Although modest changes were made to the structure of the program, no additional costs were incurred and we were able to maintain all of our approved budget lines in the FMPP grant.

The first task, before advertising of the program, was to refine and detail the 2010 program structure so as to present to potential participants an accurate description of the upcoming season's educational activities. As stated, it was determined that the educational programming should be ongoing throughout the season rather than concentrated at the beginning of the season and a weekly schedule, including ten hours of educational activities and twenty hours of field work, was created. A detailed description of the program was written and posted on the NABC

website and program descriptions were posted on various websites listing apprenticeships such as ATTRA, Grow Food, and Washington Tilth Producers. Throughout December and January, potential participants became aware of the GFTC through these websites and sent in completed application forms and resumes which were reviewed by the Farm Program Director. Phone interviews were conducted with each applicant and participants were selected based on their interest in organic agriculture, their ability to complete the program, an assessment of their previous work and school performance and calls to references. Nine participants were accepted for the 2010 season.

To help foster the long term viability of the program, the Farm Program Director worked on creating a temporary set of guiding documents outlining program goals and strategies. These were considered temporary as there were upcoming plans to create an advisory board of stakeholders who would then work to create a long-term vision and mission for the program. As the farm development plan solidified, a budget outlining future capital and operational expenditures was also created and will be included in future fund raising.

Based on student evaluations from the preceding season, another review of existing curriculums used nationwide was initiated. After a thorough search, the two curriculums, "Organic Farming and Gardening" and "Direct Marketing and Small Farm Viability" (developed at the Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems (CASFS) at the University of California-Santa Cruz (UCSC)), were chosen for their comprehensive overview and excellent structure. The Farm Program Director also developed custom curriculum materials to address topics that the CASFS curriculum did not cover. NABC's "Transitioning-to-Value-Added" curriculum and MISA's "Building a Sustainable Business" were also used for the business planning portion of the curriculum. In addition to gathering curriculum resources, a timeline was created to ensure that all materials would be covered in the course of the season and farms and agricultural professionals were contacted to set up field trips and guest speakers.

As stated, to present participants with an applicable farm education, a viable small-farm model to provide the hands-on experience with was deemed necessary and plans for a simple commercial vegetable farm were created. This consisted primarily of acquiring the necessary tools, supplies and equipment commonly found on small scale commercial vegetables farms with a CSA focus. Because of a limited budget, used equipment was the only option and a regional search for suitable equipment was undertaken. A marketing plan was also developed that would expose the participants to a variety of marketing options including CSA, Farmer's Market, Direct-to-Retail, Direct-to-Institution and Contract Seed growing. Meetings were held with potential retail and institutional buyers and agreements on crops and quantities were made. Once a marketing plan was in place, a detailed crop production plan was created outlining the types, amounts, varieties, locations and dates of crop plantings needed to fulfill the marketing plan. Seed and supply purchases were then made as needed per our FMPP grant budget.

As the beginning of the program approached, a search for housing for the participants began. Initially, participants were to secure their own housing, with assistance from the program, but at

the request of several participants, the Farm Program Director began to search for shared housing. Eventually, after a thorough search of area rentals, three houses were rented and rooms were sublet (and subsidized by the FMPP grant) to individual participants. FMPP grant funds for this purpose allowed students to participate in this program and was greatly appreciated by the students.

Once the program started in March, the weekly schedule was as follows; on Monday mornings, the group (the Farm Program Director and the participants) did a “farm walk” to observe and discuss changes in the garden over the past week as well as consider what tasks needed to be accomplished that week. After this walk, the group collectively wrote a “to-do” list for the week. Monday afternoons were spent working in the field. Tuesdays were also focused primarily on field work and, during the majority of the season, it was the main harvest and delivery day. Wednesday mornings was also spent working in the field while the afternoons were spent in the classroom primarily studying the CASFS “Organic Farming and Gardening” curriculum. Thursday mornings were spent working in the fields and the afternoons were spent in the classroom primarily studying the CASFS “Direct Marketing and Small Farm Viability” curriculum. Friday mornings were spent in the field, primarily on a second and smaller harvest and delivery. Friday afternoons were spent in the classroom focused on student presentations, a weekly review and a group check-in. In the spring, two participants came each Saturday, by rotation, briefly to manage the greenhouses, otherwise the participants had Saturday off. Sundays were farmer’s market day and two people, by rotation, would come to harvest in the morning and two people, by rotation, would set up and vend at the Greenbank Sunday Farmer’s Market. The Farmers Market tent used by the students was provided by the Greenbank Farm and the Port of Coupeville.

In addition to the regular weekly schedule, special activities such as field trips and guest speakers were scheduled. Over the course of the season, a total of 17 farms in the region were visited and 5 guest speakers came to the training farm. Participants were also required to complete several independent projects including monthly book reports, two research projects and a business plan. Several special projects also provided enhanced educational opportunity. Working in collaboration with the Organic Seed Alliance (OSA), the GFTC engaged in several crop variety trials. The project provided participants with an opportunity to experience the usefulness of variety trialing in informing growers about the range of traits and genetics within a single crop and choosing appropriate varieties.

We hosted two public workshops this season. The first was on ‘soil amendment and the use of manure’ in collaboration with Washington State University Extension and attended by over 60 people. In collaboration with OSA, a workshop was provided on seed-saving. This five-hour workshop was attended by 12 people and it covered the basic principles of seed saving and plant breeding.

During the time focused on the farm, the students were involved in all aspects of running the farm including planning, infrastructure development, planting, tillage, composting, weeding, irrigation,

harvesting, packing, marketing, delivering, etc. They put up the greenhouses, installed the irrigation system and set up the washing/packing station as well as maintained the equipment through oil changes and greasing. Students spent a significant amount of time engaged in direct marketing activities, primarily CSA recruitment, production and distribution, administration and Farmer's Market vending. The CSA signed up 42 members and they were provided a weekly box of food from June 1st through October 15th along with a weekly newsletter created by the participants.

Participants were also responsible for maintaining communications with the CSA members via phone and email. Each participant managed the market stand several times throughout the season, including harvest, setup, vending and breakdown. One of the students became the Co-Manager of the Sunday Farmers Market from July thru the end of the market season in October. Recordkeeping was also an important activity throughout all of these activities. Several speakers were invited to the market and several Greenbank Farm events were staged on Sundays to improve market attendance per the FMPP grant.

Goals and Outcomes Achieved:

The program was successful in providing a thorough educational experience on small-scale organic farm production, business planning and direct-marketing to the eight full-time participants. The GFTC also made significant progress in developing its program structure, curriculum, infrastructure and strategic plan. This was an important development year for the GFTC and we are well prepared to move forward and expand our ability to serve an increasing number of beneficiaries. Our goal of expanding our educational programming beyond the program participants was minimally undertaken this year because of the significant work load in developing the existing full-time program and farm infrastructure. Now that much of that work is done, we are able to incorporate a wider audience and have plans for several workshops in 2011 as well as facilitating the networking and collaboration of existing farms on Whidbey Island. We were able to establish an increased presence and awareness of local food on the Island through our consistent presence at the Greenbank Farmer's Market and our partnership with two local grocers and the Whidbey General Hospital cafeteria, who all purchased produce from the GFTC. We also regularly delivered CSA shares and extra produce to the two Island Food banks. We produced additional food for a local food system and cultivated new organic acres. Additionally, the Greenbank Farm Sunday Farmers Market is now a member of the Washington Farmers Market Association. We produced 2 of the five workshops for a public audience and were limited by our budget. We developed a list of speakers and event possibilities for the Sunday Farmers Market with the Greenbank Market manager and several events were strategically planned for Sunday Farmers Market days. The only goal we have not achieved is financial stability, although charging future participants tuition is a possibility.

Accomplishments (in outline format) include;

- Education

- Provided 8 participants with a broad and thorough education on starting and maintaining a small scale organic commercial farm through academic and experiential educational activities.
- Covered all the material in the two CASFS curriculums (“Organic Farming and Gardening” and “Direct Marketing and Small Farm Viability”(curriculum outlines in appendix))
- Cooperatively managed the student farm, where participants learned and practiced;
 - Plant propagation and greenhouse management
 - Soil fertility management and bed preparation
 - Weed management
 - Harvest and post-harvest handling
 - Irrigation design and application
 - Marketing
 1. Farmers market set-up and vending
 2. CSA advertising and member service
 3. Newsletter production, writing and editing
 4. Direct to retail; calling for orders, writing invoices and delivering
 - Greenhouse construction
 - Tractor safety and operation
 - Pest and disease management
 - Cover cropping
 - Composting
- Each participant read and presented 6 book reports
- Each participant completed and presented two research projects
- Each participant completed and presented an agricultural business plan
- The participants went on 11 field trips visiting 16 farm operations
- Farm Production
 - Farm Development:

- Installed two greenhouses
 - Installed 1500' deer fencing
 - Installed electricity and potable water to greenhouses
 - Installed an irrigation system capable of managing the 5 acres
 - Planted a 400' native hedgerow
 - Initiated a field layout that encourages proper management (25 'subfields')
 - Acquired hand tools, a tractor and basic implements
 - Leased a delivery truck
 - Installed a harvest/processing area
- Crop production
 - Planted 50 types of cash crops in 14 of 25 'subfields'
 - Planted remainder of 'subfields' in cover crops
 - Yielded:
 1. 4673 bunches of leaf crops
 2. 2245 bunches of root crops
 3. 4347 pounds of fruiting crops
 4. 2717 heads of lettuce
- Marketing
 - Attended every Sunday Greenbank Farm Farmer's Market in 2010 and managed the market from July – October
 - Delivered weekly boxes to 42 CSA members
 - Sold to Whidbey General Hospital, pioneering farm-to-institution sales on Whidbey Island
 - Sold to the Goose Grocer and the Star Grocer on a bi-weekly basis
 - Donated regularly to local food banks - 28 food boxes & 500 lbs of miscellaneous produce
 - Published a weekly newsletter from June 1 through October 15

- Tabled at four community events promoting the GFTC
- Organization Building
 - Solicited and assembled an Advisory board
 - Developed vision, mission and values statements
 - Developed short a long term goals and strategies
 - Developed a PowerPoint presentation to share the GFTC's mission and accomplishments with local organizations
 - Refined the GFTC budget
 - Solicited and received an Americorps volunteer
 - Refined record keeping procedures
 - Improved communication between project partners
 - Organized a community pig roast at the end of the season

Beneficiaries:

The Whidbey Island food system community benefited from this project as produce grown by students was received via the cafeteria at the local hospital; two local grocery stores; two food banks; 42 community supported members, and customers at the Sunday Greenbank Farmers Market. The Sunday Farmers Market had a consistent group of farmers - anchored by the students in our program. This improved attendance of consumers at the market over the course of the season. The Greenbank Management Group saw increased traffic at their historic site as a result of this project. Many felt this project brought new life back to the market and Greenbank's historic farm site.

Lessons Learned:

Many lessons were learned over the course of this development year including those concerning participant group dynamics, teaching strategies, the potential and challenges of the farm, the soil, and the local markets and the importance of creating a resilient and effective organization.

Participant group dynamics was one of our greatest challenges this year. The shared housing situations led to personal conflicts that grew to consume the group focus at certain points of time. Despite group discussions on respect, boundaries, and healthy communication, the group dynamic was increasingly tense as the season progressed. The main challenge centered around one individual whose poor communication skills and extreme ecological convictions led to constant negative comments on his housemates "un-ecological" behavior. Another individual also caused difficulty because of their sense of superiority and lack of respect for other participants. This

caused others to have feelings of resentment. To address this problem in coming years, we have two strategies. First, during the interview process we will look closer at an applicant's history of working in teams and secondly, an advisory board member is a trained psychotherapist and has offered to facilitate ongoing team building meetings and assist in resolving whatever conflicts arise. Her expertise in this area along with a preemptive approach should minimize the development of distracting personal conflicts.

The Farm Program Director also learned a great deal about how to be an effective educator and field manager. Overall, 2010 was a success in these respects but small refinements will be made, especially concerning the feedback process and clearly defining and following through with project expectations and deadlines. Field trips and guest speakers are very popular and effective and more of these will be planned for 2011, budget permitting.

The Greenbank Farm has proved to be a challenging farming site with low soil fertility, low available water capacity, a cold and windy microclimate and high weed pressure. Despite these setbacks, progress was made in improving the situation and strategies have been developed to continue the improvement process. The marketing potentials of Whidbey Island were explored this year and based on our experience, we will be refining the crop list and amounts grown to better suit the existing demand.

During the transition of leadership in the fall of 2009, the exiting parties left minimal records, documents, policies or written goals and strategies to build upon. This forced a situation requiring a build-up from scratch of creating a program and organization that could be both successful in the short and long-term. Therefore we have tried to create clear documents concerning the program structure, policies, curriculum, goals and strategies so as to facilitate the long term continuity if the program regardless of unforeseen personnel changes.

We met our initial goal to: grow new farmers (8), new food, and new food consumers, so more agricultural land in Island County in Western Washington State is preserved from development by putting it into agricultural food production.

We felt we had a successful year and project on a bare-bones budget of \$68,000 and are satisfied that we met all of our commitments to this project over the season with the budget that was approved.

Additional Information:

This year, the Port of Coupeville, The Greenbank Management Group, Washington State University Extension, the food banks, and the new advisory board all deepened their working relationships and their support for the project. This was evident at the concluding event, the community pig roast, when these groups participated in a celebration of the year's hard work. New collaborators, such as the Whidbey Island General Hospital and the grocery stores opened new doors to the program, the students and the local food system that didn't exist before. The Program Manager's excellence in implementing this project demonstrated the potential power of a program like this

for change that will positively impact local food production and appreciation. We had many consumers express their thanks for the efforts of this program and the farmers who got their start this year with us. (Included: newsletters & photos)

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The view of the field from above- in June



Harvesting Grain



Assessing Corn for Organic Seed Alliance



Allen as Co-Manager of the Farmers Market



The 2010 crew with CSA boxes