

Time to Get Dirty: A Community Farm in Horsham, Pennsylvania Spreads Awareness about Sustainable Farming and Local Food Systems

Grow, give, teach. These three simple words capture the essence of Pennypack Farm, a women-lead organic farming non-profit in Horsham, Pennsylvania. Pennypack was founded in the early 2000s after a group of committed citizens responded to a newspaper ad for the formation of a community farm. Since then, Pennypack has grown to a 13-acre, sustainability-focused, environmentally-conscious farm with a 400-member summer and a 180-member winter CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) program. Pennypack Farm understands farming is an integral part of the community, where people can gather in a supportive space to better their mental and physical health. Solutionaries at Pennypack Farm focus on growing local produce to provide to the community, as well as farming education so others can grow produce sustainably.

As a non-profit, the farm donates over 10,000 pounds of fresh produce every year to those with limited food access. In recent years, Pennypack Farm has been able to triple their food donation program with the help of community members. According to Kirstie Jones, Farm Manager at Pennypack, the organization works to ensure that all food, whether donated or purchased, is of good quality. They have also partnered with Rolling Harvest Food Rescue and three local food pantries to minimize food waste and distribute as much food to the community as possible. In doing this, Pennypack Farm is attempting to do their part to increase access to nutritious food to the local community. While decreasing food waste, this method of giving also minimizes their carbon footprint. The minimization of their carbon footprint also falls in line with one of Pennypack Farm's main priorities, sustainability.

To meet the “teach” aspect of their motto, Pennypack Farm has educational programs that focus on the importance of local farming, sustainability, and healthy food choices. One of their programs features an 18-month farmer training apprenticeship that aims to teach people the skills needed to manage their own farms and reach as many individuals as possible. Providing others with the necessary skills and education to grow their own produce is both healthy for the individuals and the environment.

The success of the community farm did not come without its challenges. “Farming is always a challenge... you’re always at the mercy of your weather, and especially with climate change, the weather is crazy” stated Kirstie. One of the biggest challenges the staff at Pennypack Farm faced this past year is being flexible with mother nature, all while working with limited staff members. Intense rain events and thunderstorms have made farming difficult since seeding can be disrupted and plants dislike being overwatered. To overcome these adversities, the farming staff at Pennypack had to become strategic and learn to work within small windows of time. According to Kirstie, “agriculture is one of the biggest contributors to climate change... the more you support local farmers that are farming sustainably, the more you reduce that kind of food footprint”. To combat climate change in the farming industry, Kirstie has begun recording how much carbon is being sequestered by the grasses and cover crops they are growing.

Approximately 8 miles down the road, a local university plans to collaborate with Pennypack Farm to try their own hand at sustainable farming. Arcadia University, a local Pennsylvania liberal arts college has begun plans to start their own, student-run, community garden. Arcadia students will work closely with Pennypack Farm’s expert female-lead staffers in order to effectively run, manage, and maintain the garden. From providing advice on pest control techniques to helping students create planting calendars, and even donating their extra seed

transplants, Pennypack Farm will be on hand to assist students and answer all questions. Pennypack Farm is committed to helping provide Arcadia students with the tools, tips, and necessary tricks to help their community garden thrive for current, and future, generations of students.



Figure 1. You-Pick cherry tomatoes, peppers, flowers, and herbs from early fall share at Pennypack Farm. Adapted from “What’s in a Share?”, by Pennypack Farm & Education Center, n.d., Retrieved March 20, 2020, from <https://www.pennypackfarm.org/CSA-Membership/Summer-CSA/What-s-In-A-Share/256/>. Adapted with permission.



Figure 2. You-Pick flowers at Pennypack Farm that members can pick on their own during the season. Adapted from “You-Pick Crops”, by Pennypack Farm & Education Center, n.d., Retrieved March 20, 2020, from <https://www.pennypackfarm.org/CSA-Membership/Summer-CSA/You-Pick-Crops/257/>. Copyright n.d. by Brynn Reese and Judith Krasinski. Adapted with permission.