

Government Officials and Agencies Join Our Team

Our drive to achieve STF's mission has been greatly boosted by support from a growing number of public officials and agencies.

We are most appreciative of the helpful assistance and advice that has been provided over the past several years by Northeast Philadelphia City Councilman Brian O'Neill and his fine office staff.

Our desperate need for a delivery vehicle was met by the School District of Philadelphia. They donated an old van to support the project's work and STF's developing relationship with Saul Agricultural High School.

From early in the project's development Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture Secretary Dennis Wolff and Deputy Secretary Cheryl Cook contributed valuable guidance and support. This year the Department awarded STF a Product Promotion grant that greatly helped increase sales.

In 2003, through the efforts of State Senator Vincent Fumo and in consultation with his associate Denise Rawls, IILF and PWD were introduced to State Senator Michael Stack, in whose district the demonstration farm is located. Senator

Stack and his excellent staff have become strong advocates, providing both financial support and expert guidance to help secure the funding necessary to achieve the goals of this project.

Through the determined resolve of Sam High, Supervisory District Conservationist of the US Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Services, STF will soon participate in the Agriculture Management Assistance Program. This program provides matching funds for the development and implementation of best management practices for small-scale farming. This is a very meaningful step, not just for the demonstration farm, but for the future farms we expect to see created in Philadelphia.

The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection's Secretary Kathy McGinty has graciously contributed the valuable advice and assistance of her professional staff. "Somerton Tanks Farm is proving that small-scale sustainable farming can be commercially viable in the city," Secretary McGinty said. "This project offers a long-term vision of job creation and more environmentally sound uses of land - urban green fields that can be cultivated, just as we are transforming brownfields."

Somerton Tanks Farm

c/o 2220 Kater Street
Phila, PA 19146

Somerton Tanks Farm

NEWSLETTER

Somerton Tanks Farm Exceeds Sales Revenue Goals - **Again**

We have just finished Somerton Tanks Farm's second demonstration year and what a year it was! We set out to grow and sell \$32,000 of vegetables on our half-acre field and have exceeded that goal by selling \$38,500 worth. When we set last year's goal at \$25,000 we were told that this was not possible to achieve. Yet in our second year we have surpassed that figure by a remarkable 54%.

Increasingly it is being pointed out to us that many conventional farms do not produce comparable levels of revenue. The magnitude of this achievement has elicited strong responses from our expert agricultural advisors. Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture's Deputy Secretary Cheryl Cook commented, "Somerton Tanks Farm is now a model for every urban setting in Pennsylvania; improving diets while creating jobs". Wally Satzewich, the Canadian farmer, writer and researcher, who developed many of the techniques used by STF, could scarcely believe the news and sees this as a "very unique accomplishment".

The Team

STF is the product of a joint venture between the Philadelphia Water Department (PWD) and the Institute for Innovations in Local Farming (IILF). In 2001 PWD and IILF merged their strategic planning and agriculture expertise to work toward their shared vision of a greener City, to minimize storm water runoff and to attract new, sustainable businesses such as vegetable farms.

PWD is an award winning, nationally respected public utility. The Department takes a comprehensive approach to develop and implement solutions to urban water pollution problems. IILF, a non-profit corporation, is a volunteer run organization whose main focus is to foster a Philadelphia based sustainable, agriculture industry on vacant, abandoned or underutilized land. The demonstration farm, housed on PWD land, employs best management practices and is a model for environmentally sound small-scale farming. STF is the first step in building the case that entrepreneurial neighborhood farms can generate reliable jobs, tax revenues, healthy food and enhance our communities.

Plans for 2005

First, we will continue our efforts to maximize the revenue from the field. Our 2005 goal is to increase produce sales to \$42,500, a full 70% higher than our original goal.

Second, we will escalate our efforts to establish the Neighborhood Farm Site Program. We aim to conduct a feasibility study that will measure and document the economic, environmental and community impacts that a new agricultural industry will have in Philadelphia. IILF is currently seeking funding for this study

Our Funders Make STF's Progress Possible

The costs of running a demonstration farm and a non-profit organization are considerable. We could not have made this much progress so quickly without the generous contributions from all of our funders. Their confidence in this unconventional project is inspiring to us. **This year's funders are: 1957 Charity Foundation; Allen Hilles Fund; Douty Foundation; the Honorable Michael J. Stack; the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture and the US Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Services.**

In-Kind Contributors Provide Vital Leverage

In light of the fact that IILF has no paid administrative staff, it is impressive that this complex project has achieved so much in such a short time. Extensive in-kind service contributions have met many of our needs and the value of these contributions was key to leveraging important funding.

Videographer Ruthanne Rust of RSquaredVideo captured every step of the farm's two-year development. Ruthanne distilled hours of footage into an excellent short video that is available to the public. Janice Levin contributed her legal expertise to guide IILF through many stages of organizational growth. Janice, who is a board member, also provided the "home base" for the Mt. Airy CSA pick-up. Amy Semenuk generously contributed her web design

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STF's 2004 Experience

STF's 2004 Season Planning Committee was composed of Roxanne Christensen (President of IILF), Nancy Weissman (Director of Economic Development for PWD) and the 2003 Farmer Training Graduates Nicole Shelly and Lori Albright. Through a series of winter meetings this committee evaluated the 2003 growing and marketing experience. We assessed our successes and strategized how to build on them. We identified the problems and through research and creativity came up with new techniques to eliminate or minimize them. With the arrival of April, 2004 we were ready to plow our growing understanding of small-scale sustainable farming back into the fields.

The Farmers

Nicole Shelly signed on as STF's lead farmer for 2004 along with her co-farmer and husband Steve. While farming is never an easy job, farming on a non-profit, highly visible, demonstration and research project brings even greater challenges. It was their intelligent, systematic and dedicated farming approach that carried STF to this extraordinary level of productivity. The successful outcome leaves no question about their excellence as farmers.

Growing Vegetables

In 2004 we expanded the types of vegetables to create more diversity for our markets. We grew about 100 different varieties of vegetables including garlic, head lettuce, snap peas, chard, fingerling potatoes, chervil, sweet onions and heirloom tomatoes. The vegetables were planted physically closer together than in 2003 and we rarely left a plot barren for more than a few days.

The battle with harmful insects posed a worrisome dilemma. Last year, the farm was new and bugs were slow in finding it. This year they made up for lost time. The flea beetle and the leaf minor took some serious bites out of STF's crops. Guided

by our commitment to farm organically Nicole and Steve fought back with creative uses of agricultural cloth, soap solutions and hand picking methods. Despite these efforts we lost almost all our spring spinach, arugula and broccoli raab. Fortunately, because the crops were more diversified this year, other vegetables filled the revenue void.

With this planting density comes new challenges. Perhaps the biggest challenge is maintaining healthy soil. Crop rotation on this small field is complicated and requires a very disciplined approach. And growing more crops requires more work and longer hours of labor.

Marketing

To balance out the increased vegetable yield we upgraded our marketing efforts using a generous grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture. In addition, Drew Keegan and Maria Dandanova of Pennsylvania Preferred provided STF with expert help in analyzing data and refining marketing plans.

Our 2003 experience illuminated the importance of a strong Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program in which CSA members pay a lump sum in the winter in return for high quality, fresh vegetables throughout the growing season. STF marketed its 2004 CSA program through community organizations and enrolled 37 enthusiastic and supportive CSA members from Mt. Airy, the Northeast and Center City. This early revenue stream was vital to cover the farm's start-up costs.

Our other main markets were fine restaurants, caterers, retail markets and farmers markets. These included Coleman's in Blue Bell, Conroy Catering in Fox Chase, Organic Planet in Mt. Airy, Pumpkin in Center City, the Fair Foods Stand at the Reading Terminal, the Farmers Market Alliance's 2nd and South Street Farmers Market and Farm To City's Rittenhouse Square Farmers Market. We also began to develop a loyal clientele at the STF farmstand. STF continues to accept WIC coupons.

season. These "in the field" volunteers are Liz Gasiewski, Mira Kilpatrick, Miriam Jones, Andrew Pirie, and Leigh Maida. One special volunteer, Lili Dalke, gave STF the tremendous gift of her full-time labors during her college summer break.

Day in and day out IILF President Roxanne Christensen capably dedicates herself to the multitude of planning and administrative tasks that keep IILF and STF running. This is in addition to her "real" job in the information-publishing field. As an urban farm advocate for many years, Roxanne works to fulfill IILF's vision of a healthful, more vibrant Philadelphia through development of a sustainable agricultural economy.

Volunteers Help STF Reach Our Goals

An extraordinary group of volunteers contributed time and energy to help with the day to day farm needs. Their hard work was integral to the high achievement of the farm this

STF's 2004 FABULOUS TEAM MEMBERS

Mission Statement

The Institute for Innovations in Local Farming (ILLF) mission is to establish a sustainable agricultural industry in Philadelphia by researching and developing new intensive growing and marketing techniques, training and supporting urban farmers, spearheading the creation of city-based farms, and providing agricultural education programs. For more information go to www.somertontanksfarm.org or call 215-732-3048.

FUNDERS

1957 Charity Foundation
Allen Hilles Fund
Douty Foundation
Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture
The Honorable Michael J. Stack,
Senator, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
US Department of Agriculture,
Natural Resources Conservation Services

PARTNERS

BCS America
Johnny's Seeds
John Berry, Agricultural Marketing Educator,
Penn State Cooperative Extension Service
Mary Seton Carboy and Beth Kean, Greensgrow
Chef Jim Coleman, Coleman Restaurant
Jack Conroy, Conroy Catering
David Douds, US Dept. of Agriculture –
Agricultural Research Service
Fertrel Corporation
The Honorable Vincent Fumo,
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Senate
Germantown Jewish Center
Lindsay Gilmore, Organic Planet
Joseph Griffin, Oley Institute
Ann Karlin, Fair Food Project
Drew Keegan and Maria Dandanova, Pennsylvania Preferred
Laurel Valley Farms, Inc.
John Metrick,
SE PA Resource Conservation & Development Council
Steve Moore, Agricultural Advisor
Mt. Airy Greening Network
Northwest Interfaith Movement Environmental Network
The Honorable Brian O'Neill, Councilman, City of Philadelphia
Pennypack Ecological Restoration Trust
Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection
Pep Boys
Duane Perry, Farmers Market Alliance
Philadelphia Commerce Department
Philadelphia Workforce Development Corporation
Philadelphia School District
Robert Pierson, Farm to City
Wally Satzewich and Gail Vandersteen,
Market Gardening Concepts, Agricultural Advisors
Somerton Civic Association
David Specca, Rutgers University Eco Complex, Agricultural Advisor
The Honorable Michael J. Stack,
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Senate
Betsy Teutsch
Judith & David Weiner
Betty & Dave Weissman

SPECIAL EVENTS

CSA and Special Friends Open House Day, June 19, 2004
Book and the Cook Tour with Chef/Author Aliza Green,
July 25, 2004
Neighborhood Open House, October 2, 2004

VOLUNTEERS

Lori Albright (2003 Training Graduate)
Lili Dalke
Liz Gasiewski
Karlyn Haas
Megan Haupt
Miriam Jones
Mira Kilpatrick
Tanishia Lawson
David Lopes
Leigh Maida
Joyce Millman
Andrew Pirie
Tom & Barb Shelly

MEDIA COVERAGE

Newspapers:

Grow Magazine, Spring 2004
Philadelphia Business Journal, July 2004
Philly Press, July 2004
Philadelphia City Paper, July 2004
News Gleaner, August 2004
Philadelphia Inquirer, Letter to the Editor, August 2004

Magazines Articles and Book Citations:

Proud Neighbor Magazine, Summer 2004
Worldwatch Institute's Eat Here: Reclaiming Homegrown Pleasures in a Global Supermarket, 2004

Television:

National PBS series "Flavors of America", January 2004
National PBS Documentary - Edens Lost and Found, to air in 2005