

# Community Farms Outreach Newsletter

240 Beaver Street, Waltham, MA 02452 • 781-899-2403 • www.communityfarms.org



Winter 2005

## What Are We a Part of?

by Amanda Cather, CFO Farm Manager, in conversation with Chris Yoder, a CFO Board Director and Farmer of Vanguarden Farm, and Dee Kricker, Former CFO Board President

*"What are you a part of?"* Red Tomato founder Michael Rozyne asked us all during his talk at our Annual Meeting in November. *"Are you simply a CSA, or are you part of something larger?"*

Our Community Supported Agriculture program at Waltham Fields Community Farm, of course, is part of something larger, simply by virtue of being a project of our larger organization, Community Farms Outreach. Our direct food donations, which totaled over \$37,000 in 2004, connect us with the hunger relief community; the education work that we do puts us in the company of many committed people and organizations working on ecological literacy and place-based education.

Our use of food as our medium allows us the opportunity for kinship with others. The idea that food is universal is a simple one, but its power cannot be overestimated; through it, for example, we are part of the slow-food movement, whose worldwide membership is dedicated to countering our obsession with

convenience foods by promoting the gastronomic and aesthetic pleasures of savoring local and traditional foodstuffs. We are also part of the Community Supported Agriculture movement, whose members undertake the inconvenience of making a commitment to a farm for the season, regardless of the outcome, providing the farmer with the ability to make a living and preserve the land on which he or she farms.

These aspects of our work are the most appealing to my husband Mark, who sees the deliberate choice of our CSA shareholders to eat whole foods—despite the extra work they take to prepare—and take the time to purchase them directly from a local farm as a connection to a broader movement towards sustainability in our society.

Dee Kricker echoed these sentiments, remarking that "sustainable agriculture becomes an identity and a community . . . a complete experience. It's substan-

*continued on page 4*

## Building our Greenhouse, November 2004



Photos by Liz Fuller



## Community Farms Outreach

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

board@communityfarms.org

Gretta Anderson (Arlington)

*President*

Martha Creedon (Waltham)

*Vice President*

Judy Fallows (Watertown)

*Secretary*

Deron Estes (Somerville)

*Treasurer*

Jonathan Baker (Cambridge)

Josh Berkowitz (Somerville)

Tina Browne (Wellesley)

Kathy Diamond (Watertown)

Liz Fuller (Waltham)

Deb Guttormsen (Waltham)

Justine Kahn (Arlington)

Matthew McGuire (Dedham)

Bob Taraschi (Dedham)

Chris Yoder (Dover)

### STAFF

Amanda Cather

*Farm Manager*

Marla Rhodes

*Administrative Development Manager*

### *Newsletter Editor*

Kathy Diamond

kathydia@comcast.net

### **Community Farms Outreach, Inc.**

Our mission is to promote, support, and manage community farms and farms in the community. Community farms are farms that are charitable and educational: growing produce for soup kitchens, shelters, and food pantries, educating children and adults about how and where their food is grown, and generally to preserve the open space and beauty of farms.

Community Farms Outreach, Inc. is a 501(c)3 nonprofit charitable corporation.

## From the 2004 CFO Annual Report

*(Read the entire report on-line at [www.communityfarms.org](http://www.communityfarms.org).)*

### **FARMLAND PRESERVATION**

#### **Waltham Fields Community Farm**

The 2004 farming season was a year of transition and growth for our farm. Our land under cultivation grew to nine acres with the rental of three acres of farmland at the Lyman Estate, a property owned by Historic New England one mile from our Field Station site. This expanded both our capacity to preserve farmland and our ability to produce high-quality organic food for our CSA shareholders and hunger relief partners. Capital improvements, including a new tillage tractor, heated 30'x 72' hoophouse, Celli spader, Perfecta cultivator, and plastic mulch layer, provided the foundation for the development of new farming systems on our land. Soil test results show that our land management practices are making progress towards long-term ecological sustainability, the growth of our community supported agriculture program (CSA) is helping our farm make progress towards economic sustainability, and our hunger relief and education programs are continuing our work towards a more socially just and sustainable food system.

In 2004, we grew flower, herb, and vegetable crops on six acres of land, while primarily building up the Lyman Estate acres with cover crops. Our total harvest (excluding flowers and perennial herbs) was valued at \$140,191, or \$23,367 per acre. Our 185 regular CSA shareholders, seven work shares, and five farm staff and interns received twenty-one weekly shares. The value of these shares was \$102,834, making the average retail value of a CSA share from Waltham Fields Community Farm \$556.00. The total value of produce designated for hunger relief was \$37,891, or 27% of the total value of our harvested produce.

#### **Friends of Waltham Field Station**

We continued to face concerns in 2004 regarding our tenancy at the Waltham Field Station because of fiscal restraints and management changes at the University of Massachusetts. CFO made a concerted effort to address uncertainty about the future of the Field Station by taking a leadership role in site preservation efforts. These efforts included strengthening the network of site tenants and supporters, enhancing communication among users, and consolidating this support into an informal association, Friends of Waltham Field Station.

Working with the Friends of WFS, we developed and submitted to the University a proposal for a joint UMass-CFO planning task force. When it became apparent that UMass would not formally respond to the proposal, the Steering Committee decided to proceed with the work of developing a business plan with detailed objectives and goals to keep the Field Station open and flourishing. Information provided by users indicates that more than thirty groups with a total membership of almost 5000 people use the facilities on a regular basis for a wide range of agricultural purposes. Whether UMass continues to maintain ownership and/or if they begin to develop alternative plans for the site, CFO and the Friends of WFS will be better prepared to advocate on behalf of our collective interests.

## HUNGER RELIEF

We provided produce on a regular basis to emergency food programs at the Waltham Salvation Army, the Red Cross in Waltham, and Food for Free in Cambridge. In addition, we delivered produce twice a week to Sandra's Lodge, a local shelter for homeless women and children. The value of produce delivered to emergency food programs and shelters totaled \$21,285. It is our plan to steadily increase the value of the produce that we donate to our hunger relief partners in 2005 while continuing to develop the integrity and specificity of our donations program.

In addition to continuing our work with emergency food programs in 2004, CFO embarked on a new type of program to provide produce to low-income families on a regular basis. Our organization partnered with the urban agriculture program at Revision House, a shelter for pregnant and parenting women in Dorchester, to provide 50 shares to low-income residents of the Lena Park Housing Development in Boston. In 2005, we hope to make connections with agencies and populations in our own community to pilot a similar program locally.

## EDUCATION

The 2004 season was extremely useful in helping us better understand how our organization can sustainably link education with meaningful work. Because we are a working farm, each group that visits Waltham Fields must engage in productive work in order to justify the staff time that we spend on education. We believe that even the youngest visitors can make a contribution to the work of our farm, and conversely, that even the most hard-working volunteer experience should include an educational component. In 2004 our staff developed and piloted an introduction to our land and our mission that connected each volunteer and educational group with the context for their work.

### Farmer Training Program

Our Assistant Grower positions—newly conceived for the 2004 season as advanced opportunities in farmer training for individuals with one or more seasons of farming experience—attracted many highly qualified applicants. The two staff members that we hired did an exceptional job in these positions. Regular feedback sessions, ongoing in-the-row education, and intense practice with farm decision-making and personnel management contributed to making these positions very successful farmer training tools in 2004.

### Service Learning Program

School groups from Waltham, Newton, Framingham, Lexington, and Cambridge visited the farm during the 2004 season. Beaver Country Day School

in Newton and the Gann Academy/New Jewish High School in Waltham made repeated visits to the farm to help with all aspects of our spring and fall agriculture work. Framingham Charter School brought our largest school group: 70 sixth graders helped cover our garlic crop with straw mulch and learned about cover cropping, composting, economic and environmental sustainability, and many other aspects of our work.

In addition to school groups, more than 40 corporate, religious, and university groups visited the farm in 2004. In all, over 50 education and volunteer groups made visits, contributing a total of more than 4000 hours of labor. Individual volunteers, including CSA shareholders, high school students, visiting farmers, and others, contributed more than 3500 hours.

### Children's Learning Garden

Camp counselors described our sixth season of working with Cambridge Adventure Day Camp, a summer program serving at-risk youth in Cambridge, as "the best ever." Activities from Seattle Tilth's Teaching Peace Through Gardening curriculum were very popular with the campers and will form the basis for next season's summer program.



Join us at Waltham Fields  
Community Farm for a  
Spring Equinox celebration.  
Sunday, March 20th, 6:00 P.M.

## CFO Spring Fling and Silent Auction on Saturday, April 2nd

**MARK YOUR CALENDARS!** CFO's 6th annual Spring Fling and Silent Auction will be held on Saturday, April 2nd at the UMass Field Station in Waltham. Festivities begin at 5:00 with a family-friendly farm tour (weather permitting), children's educational games and the opening of the Silent Auction. Auction bidding will close at 8:00. A sampling of Silent Auction items will be available for preview on our web site: [www.communityfarms.org](http://www.communityfarms.org).

This will be an evening filled with contra-dancing, great hors d'oeuvres and good company. The band Independence will provide lively music for dancing. Door prizes will be given out at this year's Spring Fling, so bring your friends, bid high and often, and enjoy the dancing!

Tickets are \$20 each (children under 12 free). To reserve tickets, please send a check to Community Farms Outreach, attn: Spring Fling, 240 Beaver Street, Waltham, MA. 02452. All tickets will be held at the door.

## What Are We a Part of? (continued)

tial and tangible, because it's rooted in place, with a physicality, a sensualness, an aesthetic." She describes how relationships and friendships can grow from the experience of eating locally because the farm creates "connections on many levels, more real than calling people up and going out to dinner with them."

From a farmer's point of view, we are also part of a movement to preserve agriculture as a viable way of life, both through our support of local farms and our farmer training program. If, as E.F. Schumacher writes in *Buddhist Economics*, "work, properly conducted in conditions of human dignity and freedom, blesses those who do it and equally their products," then the products of our farm, along with the many other small farms that are worked with love and skill by committed farmers, are sacred foods that equally bless those who consume them. Dee puts it this way: "Food equals work—this is the way it's supposed to be if you live in a community that's a village. People invest themselves in the land, you get their investment, profound and complex—removed a couple of times before it comes back as a vegetable, but you get it." She points out that farm work is rewarded sensually and psychically: "The aesthetics sustain you, while so many places drain you."

Chris Yoder believes strongly that our work is, at its heart, economic and political in nature—one part of what he calls a "pro-democracy movement" in our society. The economics and ecology of food, he argues, are fundamentals underlying our basic needs, over which most people in our society exercise very little control. "To the extent that we have choice about these fundamental issues we have democracy." To engage in the real work of food production as a farmer or a consumer, he says, is "to take seriously the claim that we are to participate in running this democracy." One young man who applied for a position as an assistant grower with Community Farms Outreach, who has an impressive resume of activism and education, remarked that he came to the sustainable agriculture movement because he sees it as a way of doing activism "without confronting people and telling them they're wrong."

Both Dee and Chris are adamant about the importance of preserving public spaces in general, and our own farm in particular, to their visions of the work of which we are a part. "The market encroaches on every space," Chris says, both literally—as in the case of land use—and figuratively—as in the case of brain space. Both also reiterated the power of food choice in working towards this preservation as well as other types of change—what Dee calls all the "fabrics, connections and associations" that build up when we become intimately involved with agriculture. By "choosing what peas to put in our mouths," Chris agrees, we begin to

work against this encroachment and towards "the vision of another way—it might be possible to have an economy where people aren't hungry."

One growing world-wide movement that ties together many of these concepts—hunger relief, social justice, local agriculture, land stewardship, place-based education—is community food security, represented in the United States by the Community Food Security Coalition, of which our organization is an active member. According to their website, community food security proponents believe that:

- access to healthy food is a basic human right and must not be compromised;
- communities are enriched by the cultivation and celebration of diverse food traditions and experience;
- the production, distribution, and preparation of food must be healthy and humane for all humans, animals and ecosystems;
- agricultural land and biological diversity must be protected for future generations;
- all food commerce must be just, democratic and economically fair.

These are powerful beliefs that succinctly describe the basis for much of the work that we—and by this "we" I mean all of us, our entire membership as well as our board, staff, volunteers and hunger relief partner agencies—do at Community Farms Outreach. They illustrate the range of what Frances Moore Lappe, in her book *Hope's Edge*, calls 'entry points' into the work that we do. People come to CFO from many backgrounds: as what Chris calls "corporate refugees," as radical stay-at-home mamas (and working ones, too), for political reasons, because they are passionate about our social mission and interested in agriculture, because they are passionate about agriculture and interested in our social mission, or simply because they like the food. And because of the breadth and depth of the work that we do, there is a role for each of them to play at CFO.

So, in short, what are we part of? To answer from my own point of view, I would turn to the Reverend Victoria Safford, quoted by Moore Lappe:

*Our mission is to plant ourselves at the gates of Hope—not the prudent gates of Optimism, which are somewhat narrower; not the stalwart, boring gates of Common Sense; not the strident gates of Self-Righteousness, which creak on shrill and angry hinges (people cannot hear us there; they cannot pass through); not the cheerful, flimsy garden gates of "Everything is gonna be all right." But a different, sometimes lonely place, the place of truth-telling, about our own soul first of all and its condition, the place of resistance and defiance, the piece of ground from which you see the world both as it is and as it could be, as it will be; the place from which you glimpse not only struggle, but joy in the struggle. And we stand there, beckoning and calling, telling people what we are seeing, asking people what they see.*