

COMMUNITY FARMS OUTREACH, INC.



3-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN Fiscal Years 2007-2009

Approved December 2006
By the Community Farms Outreach, Inc. Board of Directors

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ORGANIZATIONAL DESCRIPTION

For more than a decade, Community Farms Outreach (CFO) has created and delivered farm-based programming to address community needs in the areas of hunger relief, education, and farm preservation. At the core of CFO's operations is its Waltham Fields Community Farm, now the only farming operation in the City of Waltham, Massachusetts (pop. 60,000). The farm grows more than forty different kinds of vegetables on nine acres of land, six at the University of Massachusetts Field Station and another three acres at nearby historic property the Lyman Estate.

CFO's farming operations support a 250-share Community Supported Agriculture program, hands-on education for children and adults, and a produce donation program that provides almost \$30,000 worth of produce a year to local hunger relief efforts. CFO employs two year-round staff (Executive Director and Farm Manager), as well as seasonal positions consisting of a crew of approximately six farm staff, an educational programming employee, and a number of workshares. More than 1,500 volunteers contribute their time to work in the fields, in the greenhouse, on the road delivering produce to hunger relief partners, and in the office. Community Farms Outreach is governed by a ten-member Board of Directors. CFO staff and board members offer informal, but significant, counsel to other groups in the Boston area striving to preserve farmland and establish community farms.

HISTORY

Community Farms Outreach started as a group of volunteers who came together to contribute to hunger relief in their communities by gleaning leftover produce from area farms. In 1995, led by founder and pro-bono director Oakes Plimpton, CFO volunteers started their own charitable farm at the University of Massachusetts Field Station in Waltham. Individuals were welcome to drop in to help a committed core of volunteers grow food organically for donation to area emergency food pantries and soup kitchens. The project of launching this community farm quickly became the primary focus of Community Farms Outreach.

As the need for funding grew, CFO decided in 1997 to launch a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program (selling a portion of the farm's produce in the form of weekly shares, paid in advance) at Waltham Fields Community Farm. This allowed the farm to hire an experienced farmer, resulting in more efficient and informed production methods. Vegetable output and donations to food pantries more than doubled in that year, and a primary role of the Farm Manager ever since has been employing sustainable farming techniques to achieve high production output of the vegetable crops. The Farm Manager has also been responsible for the education, volunteer, and hunger relief programs based on the farm.

The first decade of Community Farms Outreach's work produced an effective collage of activity, largely through the hard work and generosity of many volunteers and a tiny but dedicated staff. All of these endeavors were accomplished by one year-round full-time employee (the Farm Manager), one part-time administrative employee, a seasonal farm crew, and a dedicated Board of Directors.

PLANNING PROCESS

In November 2004 the Board of Directors of Community Farms Outreach recognized that in order to increase the impact of the programs based at Waltham Fields Community Farm, and to meet more of the food- and farm-related needs of the community, it was time to take stock and think strategically about the next chapter of the organization.

CFO began its first formal strategic planning process by forming a Strategic Planning Leadership Committee (SPLC) composed of the board president, vice-president, three other board directors and the former board president. The task assigned to this committee was to facilitate the formalization of the organization's shared vision into a working document to provide written programming and planning guidance for the next three to five years. In early 2005, following an extensive Request for Proposal process, the consulting services of Ora Grodsky, Just Works Consulting, were engaged to facilitate the first phase of a two-year strategic planning process.

As stated in our 2005 Annual Report, "The goal of phase one was to discover the vision that guides us, the values that serve as the foundation for our work, and the mission that shapes our day-to-day efforts." This phase included a situational analysis to identify our organizational strengths and challenges (which included interviews and surveys of board, staff membership and key allies), opportunities to explore and exchange ideas on organizational focus and programming, which included two planning retreats attended by board, staff and key stakeholders, and extensive work by the SPLC in collaboration with the consultant.

With our core organizational identity clearly articulated, we were in a position to hire our first Executive Director to guide our next phase and participate in the development of organizational goals and objectives. Meg Coward came on in April and we were then ready to resume strategic planning. Again working in collaboration with the same consultant, and with the dedication of a new SPLC, we engaged board, staff and key stakeholders in critical dialogue and development of our strategic goals and objectives. The SPLC solicited the input of board and staff, and developed key activities to meet each of the objectives.

The Board-approved Mission, Vision, and Strategic Plan will be presented to the CFO Membership at the Annual Meeting in January 2007.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF STRATEGIC PLAN

Mission

Community Farms Outreach promotes local agriculture through growing and distribution practices that are socially, ecologically, and economically sustainable. We forge relationships between people, their food supply, and the land from which it grows.

Vision

We envision communities in which sustainable agriculture plays a central role in creating universal access to the food and beauty of local farms.

Approach

The 2007-2009 Strategic Plan calls for Community Farms Outreach to focus resources on the refinement and growth of the programs based at Waltham Fields Community Farm. We believe this is a realistic yet ambitious plan rooted in the strengths of the organization. As the first step toward furthering our Mission and Vision in Waltham and its contiguous communities, we intend to build our existing programs through increased capacity and ensuring a sustainable infrastructure.

Impact

We will work to realize our mission and vision in several important ways during the next three years. Guided by the goals, objectives and activities laid out in this Strategic Plan, at the end of 2009, Waltham Fields Community Farm will be offering three-season educational programs on the farm to many more local young people; working with strategically-recruited volunteers whose first experience on the farm will be a gateway into further engagement with WFCF; distributing free and low-cost produce to a more economically and ethnically diverse population of Waltham residents, whose receipt of that food will expose them to other opportunities for engaging with WFCF; and providing a variety of ways for the larger community to learn about farms and local food through regular public events on the farm. These activities will serve to build Waltham Fields Community Farm into a community asset whose survival our friends and neighbors will want to ensure.

All of these activities will be made possible through the operation of a sustainable, high-production vegetable operation. The Community Supported Agriculture program at WFCF will be enhanced over the next three years through increased shareholder retention focused on Waltham and contiguous communities; more sophisticated communication systems; increased opportunities for community building and education for shareholders.

Waltham Fields Community Farm will also maintain and expand its commitment to local farms and farmers through the recruitment and training of new farmers each year; new distribution partnerships with other local farms; and on-going support of farm preservation in the region.

Through this three-year investment in the programs of Waltham Fields Community Farm, Community Farms Outreach will position itself solidly to consider the larger impact possible beyond the farm in years to come.

MISSION AND VISION

Mission

Community Farms Outreach promotes local agriculture through growing and distribution practices that are socially, ecologically, and economically sustainable. We forge relationships between people, their food supply, and the land from which it grows.

Vision

We envision communities in which sustainable agriculture plays a central role in creating universal access to the food and beauty of local farms.

GOALS

Goal 1

Achieve capacity to assure financial health and long-term viability of the Organization.

Goal 2

Deepen and expand visibility and strategic relationships in Waltham and contiguous communities.

Goal 3

Manage WFCF as an economically viable, socially just, and environmentally sound model of farming.

Goal 4

Distribute produce to address a broad range of food security needs in Waltham and contiguous communities.

Goal 5

Connect people with the land and their food through educational opportunities.

Goal 6

Support local farms and farmers.

OBJECTIVES

Goal 1: Achieve capacity to assure financial health and long-term viability.

Objective 1.1: Develop and maintain sustainable administrative infrastructure.

Objective 1.2: Develop and maintain sophisticated financial management practices.

Objective 1.3: Develop and maintain a strong board of directors.

Objective 1.4: Achieve secure land tenancy.

Objective 1.5: Define and implement value-based fundraising strategy.

Objective 1.6: Develop and maintain different categories of membership that broaden the reach of membership at all levels.

Goal 2: Deepen and expand visibility and strategic relationships in Waltham and contiguous communities.

Objective 2.1: Achieve brand recognition of WFCF in local communities.

Objective 2.2: Prioritize CSA shareholder recruitment toward Waltham and contiguous communities.

Objective 2.3: Develop and maintain collaborations with local partner organizations.

Objective 2.4: Develop and maintain relationships with public officials and institutions.

Goal 3: Manage WFCF as an economically viable, socially just, and environmentally sound model of farming.

Objective 3.1: Define WFCF's particular model of an economically viable, socially just, and environmentally sound farm.

Objective 3.2: Operate WFCF as an economically viable farm.

Objective 3.3: Operate WFCF as an environmentally sound farm.

Objective 3.4: Operate WFCF as a socially just farm.

Goal 4: Distribute produce to address a broad range of food security needs in Waltham and contiguous communities.

Objective 4.1: Provide food to a broad range of at-risk populations.

Objective 4.2: Create new distribution streams for produce to serve other economically disadvantaged populations.

Objective 4.3: Provide culturally appropriate foods to food distribution partners.

Objective 4.4: Share educational opportunities and materials with food distribution partners.

Objective 4.5: Conduct outreach to potential recipients to create broader awareness of available food.

Goal 5: Connect people with the land and their food through educational opportunities.

Objective 5.1: Develop on-site, three-season programming for local students.

Objective 5.2: Offer food and farm related educational opportunities for the public on the farm.

Objective 5.3: Accommodate volunteers who help meet our educational purpose in financially sound ways that support production.

Objective 5.4: Conduct farmer training.

Goal 6: Support local farms and farmers.

Objective 6.1: Provide resources and distribution outlets for other local farmers.

Objective 6.2: Deepen and formalize CFO's leadership in the training of new farmers in Eastern Massachusetts.

Objective 6.3: Serve as a resource for others interested in starting community farms.

ACTIVITIES

These are the key activities we plan to engage in to meet our objectives.

Goal 1: Achieve capacity to assure financial health and long-term viability.

Objective 1.1: Develop and maintain sustainable administrative infrastructure.

Year 1 Activities:

- 1.1.1 Create a reliable, efficient computer system.
- 1.1.2 Secure office space adequate to host staff, volunteer and board work.
- 1.1.3 Provide access to at least one professional development opportunity per year for all year-round staff.

Year 2-3 Activities:

- 1.1.4 Track annual CFO membership, and maintain contact with current members through quarterly newsletters.
- 1.1.5 Create a CFO e-mail listserv and send regular (no more than monthly) e-mail updates.

Objective 1.2: Develop and maintain sophisticated financial management practices.

Year 1 Activities:

- 1.2.1 Continue to provide the Board of Directors with monthly financial reports.
- 1.2.2 Recruit at least one member with non-profit financial expertise onto the Board of Directors to ensure sound oversight.
- 1.2.3 Create an investment strategy and spending earmarks for cash reserves.
- 1.2.4 Conduct annual financial reviews with the aid of outside consultant.

Year 2-3 Activities:

- 1.2.5 Create long-term budgeting forecasts, including a multi-year capital expenditure plan.

Objective 1.3: Develop and maintain a strong board of directors.

Year 1 Activities:

- 1.3.1 Recruit new board members to meet needed skills and expertise based on strategic plan.
- 1.3.2 Outline clear roles, responsibilities and expectations at the beginning of each board year through a comprehensive orientation.
- 1.3.3 Provide annual trainings for board members designed to increase their governance capacity.
- 1.3.4 Form an Advisory Board.

Objective 1.4: Achieve secure land tenancy.

Year 1 Activities:

- 1.4.1 Devote a few hours a month of the Executive Director's time to leadership of Friends of the Waltham Field Station.
- 1.4.2 Maintain regular contact with the heads of the UMass Extension Agency.

Year 2-3 Activities:

- 1.4.3 Educate all CFO members and volunteers about the need to keep this site in agricultural production as a community asset.

Objective 1.5: Define and implement value-based fundraising strategy.

Year 1 Activities:

- 1.5.1 Develop an initial fundraising plan based on the values of CFO.

Year 2-3 Activities:

- 1.5.2 Develop a comprehensive fundraising plan based on the values of CFO.

Objective 1.6: Develop and maintain different categories of membership that broaden the reach of membership at all levels.

Year 2-3 Activities:

- 1.6.1 Review the benefits of CFO membership, beyond basic support of the mission and vision.
- 1.6.2 Cast the net of CFO membership far and wide to include those who can only afford to join for a few dollars to those who can donate large amounts.

Goal 2: Deepen and expand visibility and strategic relationships in Waltham and contiguous communities.

Objective 2.1: Achieve brand recognition of WFCF in local communities.

Year 1 Activities:

2.1.1 Create a logo for WFCF.

Year 2-3 Activities:

2.1.2 Produce quarterly press releases.

2.1.3 Contact local media about each CFO/WFCF event.

2.1.4 Redesign CFO/WFCF website.

Objective 2.2: Prioritize CSA shareholder recruitment toward Waltham and contiguous communities.

Year 1 Activities:

2.2.1 Identify important sites for public display through survey of key stakeholders.

2.2.2 Ask current CSA shareholders from Waltham to serve as recruiters for new shareholders from their community.

Objective 2.3: Develop and maintain collaborations with local partner organizations.

Year 1 Activities:

2.3.1 Develop a list of key current and future local partner organizations in the following categories: hunger relief, education/volunteers, farm preservation, and fundraising.

2.3.2 Maintain relationships with partner organizations by attending annual meetings and meeting with key staff.

Objective 2.4: Develop and maintain relationships with public officials and institutions.

Year 2-3 Activities

2.4.1 Create a list of public officials who are current and potential allies of CFO/WFCF, put them on the mailing list and meet with them at least once a year.

Goal 3: Manage WFCF as an economically viable, socially just, and environmentally sound model of farming.

Objective 3.1: Define WFCF's particular model of an economically viable, socially just, and environmentally sound farm.

Year 1 Activities:

- 3.1.1 Define WFCF's current economic model more clearly by creating a programmatic budget.
- 3.1.2 Research best practices of other community farms.

Year 2-3 Activities:

- 3.1.3 Based on WFCF's current practice and research, clearly define WFCF's specific approach to being economically viable, socially just, and environmentally sound.
- 3.1.4 Document the WFCF model for internal distribution and possible publication.

Objective 3.2: Operate WFCF as an economically viable farm.

Year 1 Activities:

- 3.2.1 Continue to cover the costs of farm operations through agricultural production.
- 3.2.2 Refine the operations of the CSA each year to ensure that we continue to grow the quality, variety and quantity of produce desired by CSA members.
- 3.2.3 Continue to invest in appropriate infrastructure for the farming operation that streamline and support production.
- 3.2.4 Retain excellent farm manager and staff.
- 3.2.5 Practice sound farm financial management, including long-term capital equipment planning with depreciation factored in.

Year 2-3 Activities:

- 3.2.6 Enhance communication and information sharing with and among CSA members through production of CSA manual, appropriate farm signage, informative newsletters and well-managed listserves.
- 3.2.7 Offer increased opportunities for shareholders to get involved with the farm and organization, including family-friendly events and workdays.

Objective 3.3: Operate WFCF as an environmentally sound farm.

Year 1 Activities:

- 3.3.1 Follow the spirit of the NOFA-New York 'Farmers' Pledge' with respect to growing practices and philosophy. (See addendum.)
- 3.3.2 Create crop plans that balance ambitious production goals with measures that support the long-term health of our land.

Objective 3.4: Operate WFCF as a socially just farm.

Year 1 Activities:

- 3.4.1 Continue to operate as an equal opportunity employer. Provide orientation to each new employee including detailed discussion of employee policies and grievance procedures.
- 3.4.2 Strive to fairly compensate all seasonal farm staff through an appropriate combination of wages, food, housing, education and health care.
- 3.4.3 Provide access to professional development for seasonal staff through a line item in the annual budget to be spent at the discretion of each employee.
- 3.4.4 Proactively recruit staff and program participants from diverse backgrounds.

Goal 4: Distribute produce to address a broad range of food security needs in Waltham and contiguous communities.

Objective 4.1: Provide food to a broad range of at-risk populations.

Year 1 Activities:

4.1.1 Continue to provide organizational shares and bulk produce to local emergency food programs which provide food to the severely at-risk at no cost. Strategically decrease those partnerships as other distribution streams come on line.

Year 2-3 Activities:

4.1.2 Research the food needs of other at-risk populations in Waltham, including the elderly and children.

4.1.3 Develop two new produce distribution partnerships to help alleviate these needs, prioritizing partnerships that combine food donations with nutritional education.

Objective 4.2: Create new distribution streams for produce to serve other economically disadvantaged populations.

Year 2-3 Activities:

4.2.1 Partner with organizations in Waltham and contiguous communities who work with populations not traditionally included in the local food movement, and explore ways to distribute produce through those organizations.

4.2.2 Create multiple programs for individuals and organizations to acquire CSA shares at less than full cost.

4.2.3 Create a roving truck program to offer produce to residents of Waltham by coming through neighborhoods each week during the growing season.

Objective 4.3: Provide culturally appropriate foods to food distribution partners.

Year 1 Activities:

4.3.1 Meet annually with staff of partner agencies to determine the foods most desired by their clientele.

4.3.2 Incorporate responses into the next year's crop plan to the extent possible given other constraints on that plan.

Year 2-3 Activities:

4.3.3 Survey annually the recipients of partner agencies to determine their needs/desires for fresh food.

Objective 4.4: Share educational opportunities and materials with food distribution partners.

Year 1 Activities:

4.4.1 Work with staff of partner agencies to distribute the vegetable guide along with the donated produce.

Year 2-3 Activities:

4.4.2 Work with staff of partner agencies to create opportunities for their clients to come to the Farm.

4.4.3 Work with those partners to create farm-based education programming that is relevant, engaging and mutually beneficial.

4.4.4 Get WFCF's vegetable guide (tips/recipes/nutritional facts) translated into predominate languages (other than English) in Waltham and contiguous communities.

Objective 4.5: Conduct outreach to potential recipients to create broader awareness of available food.

Year 2-3 Activities:

4.5.1 Work with community leaders in Waltham and contiguous communities to determine how residents in need figure out where to secure food for themselves and their families.

4.5.2 Develop outreach materials that can be distributed through identified channels.

Goal 5: Connect people with the land and their food through educational opportunities.

Objective 5.1: Develop on-site, three-season programming for local students.

Year 1 Activities:

- 5.1.1 Identify two new desired strategic educational partners in Waltham/contiguous communities who could relatively seamlessly be incorporated into the Children's Learning Garden program.
- 5.1.2 Pilot educational programs with two new partners in the Children's Learning Garden, facilitated by current staff and/or consultants hired in for particular workshops.

Year 2-3 Activities:

- 5.1.3 Build educational programming into a three season curriculum/experience and pilot partnerships with at least two student groups.

Objective 5.2: Offer food and farm related educational opportunities for the public on the farm.

Year 2-3 Activities:

- 5.2.1 Host regular on-farm dinners with speakers and local chefs.
- 5.2.2 Host periodic discussion group/book groups on food and farming.
- 5.2.3 Offer cooking classes using farm produce for adults and kids at the Field Station.
- 5.2.4 Create a self-guided walking tour of the Field Station site.

Objective 5.3: Accommodate volunteers who help meet our educational purpose in financially sound ways that support production.

Year 1 Activities:

- 5.3.1 Conduct a review of our current field volunteer program, to be conducted on annual basis going forward. Determine which groups we want to continue to work with. Create a list of at least ten new groups we would like to target as strategic partners.
- 5.3.2 Manage organizational CFO member volunteers to work on fundraising and community-building events, publications, and outreach.
- 5.3.3 Bring management of field Volunteer Groups in-house, to be managed by staff rather than volunteers.

Objective 5.4: Conduct farmer training.

Year 1 Activities:

- 5.4.1 Continue to hire farmers-in-training (assistant growers and interns) with a range of experiential levels.
- 5.4.2 Focus on farm management component for assistant growers.

5.4.3 Begin to build a resource library for farmers-in-training.

Year 2-3 Activities:

5.4.4 Provide incentives for high-quality employees to return to the farm for additional training years.

5.4.5 Document farmer training program with the goal of compiling a WFCF Farmer Training Manual.

Goal 6: Support local farms and farmers.

Objective 6.1: Provide resources and distribution outlets for other local farmers.

Year 1 Activities:

- 6.1.1 Research the liability implications of the WFCF CSA serving as a distribution outlet for various local farm products.
- 6.1.2 Survey CSA membership to determine which products they would purchase in addition to their shares.

Year 2-3 Activities:

- 6.1.3 Based on research, conduct outreach to other farms to generate a list of possible distribution partners.
- 6.1.4 Partner with two new farms (in addition to fruit shares) to market and distribute their produce through the CSA.

Objective 6.2: Deepen and formalize CFO's leadership in the training of new farmers in Eastern Massachusetts.

Year 1 Activities:

- 6.2.1 Devote Farm Manager's time to leadership of EMASSCRAFT (Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training of Eastern Massachusetts).

Objective 6.3: Serve as a resource for others interested in starting community farms.

Year 1 Activities:

- 6.3.1 Devote up to a few hours (total) a month of the Executive Director, the Farm Manager, and Board Members' time to offering informal counsel to those interested in starting up their own community farms.

Year 2-3 Activities:

- 6.3.2 Begin to assemble a resource library of information relevant to those interested in community farms.

ADDENDUM: NOFA-New York 'Farmers' Pledge' (referenced in Objective 3.3)

WE PLEDGE THAT IN OUR FARMING, PROCESSING, AND MARKETING WE WILL:

- Serve the health of soil, people and nature by rejecting the use of synthetic insecticides, herbicides, fungicides, and fertilizers;
- reject the use of GMOs, chemically treated seeds, synthetic toxic materials, irradiation, and sewage sludge in our farming, and all synthetic substances in post harvest handling;
- treat livestock humanely by providing pasture for ruminants, access to outdoors and fresh air for all livestock, banning cruel alterations, and using no hormones, GMOs or antibiotics in feed;
- support agricultural markets and infrastructures that enable small farms to thrive;
- maintain and build healthy soils by farming practices that include rotating crops annually, using compost, cover crops, green manures, and reducing tillage;
- conserve natural resources by reducing erosion and pollution of air, soil and water through responsible farming practices;
- maximize the nutritional value of food and feed by practicing careful post harvest handling;
- practice minimal processing for all food products to preserve the natural nutritional value of food: NO use of irradiation, ultra-pasteurization, excessive heat, synthetic preservatives, or GMO processing agents or additives and include all ingredients on labels;
- reduce the ecological footprint of farms and homes by limiting energy use and converting to renewable sources of energy;
- reduce food miles by selling produce locally and regionally;
- create beneficial habitat for wildlife and encourage biodiversity;
- help preserve farmland and farming know-how;
- ensure food safety by using potable water for washing crops;
- handle raw manure and soil amendments with care;
- use ethical business practices;
- pay a living wage to all farm workers and acknowledge their freedom of association and their right to collective bargaining;
- treat family members and farm workers with respect, and ensure their safety on the farm;
- work in cooperation with other farmers and with the neighboring community to create a more sustainable way of life;
- encourage the distribution of unsold but edible food to people who need it;
- sustain the land in healthy condition for future generations.

<http://www.nofany.org/farmerspledge.htm>