

MICRO-FARMING

DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

1. Executive Summary

Our aim is to develop a small demonstration network of micro-farmers on the East End of Long Island for the 2009 season, to document how the work progresses, and to produce a book, a video, and a website to show others how to develop micro-farming networks. Both the book and the video will cover organization and management tips as well as micro-farming techniques.

We define micro-farming as a cooperative venture among advanced gardeners. Previously these people have planted vegetable gardens for their own consumption. In a micro-farming network they produce for the community as well as their own families: Jack grows the zucchini, Jill grows the tomatoes, Tom has great currants, Dick grows the peppers, Harry specializes in greens—all supply their excess produce to farmers markets, CSAs, and eventually restaurants and groceries.

This approach has numerous benefits:

- As traditional agricultural land on Long Island continues to shrink under the pressure of development we liberate thousands of heretofore non-productive acres of lawns to provide food.
- The more we produce for local consumption, the less we spend on transportation of food from far-away agribusinesses.
- Micro-farming provides a needed source of additional income for those who are cash-poor but land-rich. Dale Haubrich and Bette Lacina, our principle advisors, run a successful full-time farming operation on less than two acres of land. They produce more than 20 tons of food per acre and have been doing so for decades.
- Not to be underestimated is the effect on children who now think food comes from the supermarket the same way they think money is spit out by cash machines. The more productive micro-farming gardens we have, the more children understand the real source of the food we eat.

2. Problem Statement and Proposed Solution

We are losing prime agricultural land to suburban development. We can gain some of it back—perhaps a significant percentage—by establishing a micro-farming culture.

The vast majority of our food dollars go to international agribusinesses. The more food we produce locally, the more money stays in our community. The numbers are larger than you may think: The Victory Garden movement of World War II was an enormous success. According to expert Michael Pollan, “By the end of the war, more than 20 million home gardens were supplying 40 percent of all the produce consumed in America.”

That level of production ramped up in less than three years, by the way.

Because they are local (and basically organic) micro-farms produce much higher-quality produce, increasing the health of our community.

The activity of micro-farming (like vegetable gardening) reintroduces young and old alike to the culture of the land and its cultivation—an important cultural resource that is quickly disappearing.

In his landmark essay “Farmer in Chief” (*New York Times Magazine*, October 10, 2008) Pollan succinctly summarizes the enormous advantages of such a system:

“The president should throw his support behind a new Victory Garden movement, this one seeking “victory” over three critical challenges we face today: high food prices, poor diets and a sedentary population. Eating from this, the shortest food chain of all, offers anyone with a patch of land a way to reduce their fossil-fuel consumption and help fight climate change. (We should offer grants to cities to build allotment gardens for people without access to land.) Just as important, Victory Gardens offer a way to enlist Americans, in body as well as mind, in the work of feeding themselves and changing the food system — something more ennobling, surely, than merely asking them to shop a little differently.”

(The complete essay is available online. Go to <http://Peconic.org/microfarm> for this and other useful links.)

3. Proposed Scope of Work and Schedule

1. Set up a network of 15 to 20 participants and determine the best produce for each to provide. (February—April.)

Dale Haubrich and Bette Lacina will provide advice to participants.

2. Haubrick and Lacina will serve, through their existing farmstand and farmer's market operation, as the primary distributors. But we will also establish relationships with other existing farmer's-market sellers and CSAs to distribute the produce. (February—May.) Restaurants may be included in the distribution base.

3. Document the project in print and on video. We will do this in real-time through magazines, newspapers, and local television, as well as, more formally, with the book and video we produce. (March—November.)

James Monaco and Harbor Electronic Publishing will oversee print and video production.

4. Develop the website as a meeting place for our farmer-gardeners and our customers. (Ongoing.)

James Monaco and Peconic.org will develop the website.

5. Produce book and video and distribute. Generate publicity. (November—March, 2010.)

4. Project Benefits

The micro-farming concept is already active, but until now has received little public attention. Our project, based on the East End of Long Island—otherwise known as “The Hamptons”—will generate serious public attention.

We are at a tipping point in food production: we have begun to realize the enormous problems of monoculture agribusiness, but we have not yet found real solutions to this problem. Micro-farming is one solution.

The project opens up a whole new area of development for New York State agriculture, helping to maintain our position as a major food supplier.

As Michael Pollan has noted, the new “Victory Garden” movement seeks victory over three critical challenges we face today: high food prices, poor diets, and a sedentary population.

As the movement spreads it will also have a radical positive effect both on a sustainable energy policy and the battle against Global Warming.

This is a win, win, win, win, win project.

We will quantify the acreage farmed, the amount of food produced compared with traditional farming, the savings in transportation costs, the savings in greenhouse gases, the profit and savings to the microfarmers. We will attempt to quantify the increased health benefits and increased quality of life.

Our current estimate, assuming 5 acres total under cultivation for the demonstration project, and a yield of 15 tons per acre (less than Haubrich and Lacina usually average), and an average cost of shipping of \$600 per ton per thousand miles, suggests a savings of \$45,000 in shipping costs alone.

Note that this project has significant *qualitative* benefits as well as *quantitative* benefits. Its greatest yield is in the publicity it offers the concept of micro-farming, which will leverage any local benefits by several magnitudes.

5. Proposer Qualifications

James Monaco is the author of more than a dozen books and an established publisher and audio/video producer. (He also has forty years experience as a vegetable gardener.)

Harbor Electronic Publishing, his company, is the major publisher of guide books and local history on Eastern Long Island. One of these books—The *HEP Guide to Long Island Farmstands*—is included here as an appendix.

The company also has experience producing CDs, DVDs, and videos. It has an established distribution network for books, CDs, DVDs, and other media, and hosts more than 25 websites. More information is available at <http://hepdigital.com>.

Peconic.org is a major source of information about the natural world of Eastern Long Island. It is produced by Harbor Electronic Publishing. See <http://peconic.org>.

Monaco and HEP have good relations with most of the farmers on the South Fork, the magazine *Edible East End*, the Long Island chapter of Slow Food, and the Center for Food and Wine at Stony Brook/Southampton University, all of whom will be approached to support the Micro-farming Project.

Dale Haubrich and Bette Lacina are seasoned small-scale farmers on the East End with a vast store of knowledge about how to maximize sustainable, organic production on small plots.

Dale already has completed a first draft of a book about small-scale farming. Bette and Dale have also started production of a film about their operation and techniques. The introduction is included here as an appendix. There are more than 20 hours of additional footage already shot that will provide useful material for the film about the Micro-farming Project that we will produce.

6. Technology Transfer

The general public is the target audience. The book and video should provide a powerful introduction to the concept of micro-farming. The website should provide a highly active platform for interaction among prospective New York State micro-farmers.