

# **The Needham Organic Farm**

## **A vision for a sustainable future**

*“In Our Every Deliberation, We Must Consider the Impact of Our Decisions on the Next Seven Generations.”*

From the Great Law of the Iroquois Nation

Imagine a farm that grows top quality produce all year round without causing any harm to the environment. There would be a passive solar greenhouse that runs without conventional heat throughout the winter, and a waste management system that does not pollute the ground water. Imagine going back to the roots of farming but using today’s sustainable technology to increase efficiency. This is the vision for the Needham Organic Farm. A place that will encourage this community’s commitment to a sustainable future and educate our children in these ways, so that they may pass this knowledge on for generations to come.

The Needham Organic Farm Committee was formed to realize this vision. We believe in the environmental imperative to preserve and utilize local farmland to ensure quality, sustainable food programs. We are committed to the creation of a non-profit organization that would operate a sustainable organic farm and provide educational and recreational opportunities for the entire community.

### **Environmental Impact**

It is vitally important that we support models for agriculture that will meet the needs of a growing population while minimizing the impact on the environment. Our current dependence on industrialized agriculture is leading us down the path of environmental degradation. We are literally destroying the soil needed for future generations to feed themselves.

According to Oxfam America, in the United States 939 million pounds of pesticides are applied to crops each year. Pesticides kill microbes that are necessary for healthy soil. Unhealthy soil is susceptible to disease and insect infestation, which often leads to more pesticide use. In addition, industrial farmers often grow single crops over vast areas, sapping the soil of vital nutrients. In the United States we have lost nearly 50 percent of our topsoil heritage.

We can significantly change the prospects for future generations if we have the will to invest in a healthier sustainable form of agriculture.

### **Health Impact**

In addition to killing pests, pesticides can cause a multitude of human health problems including: cancer, genetic mutations, birth defects, learning disorders, immune problems, male infertility, and a whole list of other health problems. Children are especially vulnerable,

because of their smaller bodies. Studies have shown that children eating conventional foods have significantly higher levels of pesticides in their blood than those who eat organic foods.

As a result of these health concerns, demand for organic produce has increased significantly over the past few years. There is little doubt that this demand will continue to grow as the public becomes more educated about the health risks associated with conventionally farmed produce.

We want to help meet the growing demand for organic produce in our community. We believe that every child deserves to be given food free of toxins. We plan to provide organic produce through farm stand sales and to donate a portion of our surplus to the Needham Community Council.

### **Educational Impact**

Our children are the future stewards of the land and yet very few of them know where a potato comes from. It is the mission of the Needham Organic Farm Committee to provide the children -- and the adults -- of this community with the ability to both utilize and coexist with their natural surroundings. With a hands-on education, we hope to give the community the tools needed to live sustainably.

Today's youth will have the burden of contending with the climate issues we have passed on to them. There is no way to know if technological advances will come fast enough to allow us to easily adapt to the effects of climate change. Our best hope is to learn to live sustainably now, so we are prepared for whatever tomorrow will bring.

The farm will be a source of support and guidance for the community in making the leap towards a more sustainable lifestyle. We will provide a wide range of educational programs, from growing produce to making natural soaps that don't harm the environment. We will promote ideas that nurture a respect for nature. We will give the community knowledge that can significantly impact the way they live and their well being in the future.

### **Historical/Community Impact**

Since the 1920s, the McCracken family has welcomed generation after generation of Needham residents to Hearthstone Farm. Through the years, the McCrackens have opened their home to returning soldiers, their barn to neighbors' horses and their land to anyone who wished to walk the trails. The Needham Organic Farm Committee would like to preserve this historic property and continue the legacy of community building begun by the McCracken family.

Hearthstone farm is located at 220 Nehoiden Street and is comprised of 3.9 acres of land with a historic farmhouse (1756) and barn (1820s). The property abuts fifteen acres of town owned wooded trails with access to a Girl Scout camp and Rosemary Lake. Hearthstone Farm is centrally located between Central Avenue and Great Plain Avenue, making it easily accessible to Needham residents as well as people from surrounding communities.

The purchase of Hearthstone Farm will provide Needham with a true center for the community. There will be opportunities for education, volunteerism and community building. It will be a place for people of all ages to gather and enjoy time with neighbors and friends. The farm will provide an important connection to our past, but as a model for sustainable land use and energy practices, will be a bridge to our future. This commitment to sustainable living practices strengthens both the environment and the community that stands together to realize that commitment.

### **An Ambitious Plan**

The Needham Community Farm Committee is committed to the creation of a non-profit organization that would operate a sustainable organic farm, along with educational and recreational opportunities for the Needham community. With two organic farmers on the committee, the input of other established local farmers and committee members with a wide range of life skills, we are confident that we have developed a viable plan for the purchase and creation of the farm. A group of Olin College students are currently developing various systems that will promote sustainable practices on the farm. These include a passive solar greenhouse, water recovery, gray water and irrigation systems and composting toilets.

It is our belief that with a collaboration of resources, the farm will be up and running by year two of this project. It will take at least two growing seasons to prepare the outside soil for agricultural use, as it has never been used for this purpose (the property was previously a horse farm). As soon as the solar greenhouse is built we will be able to begin growing some produce. It is our hope to engage the community in every aspect of this project through volunteer and educational opportunities.

### **Realizing a Vision**

The realization of our vision is critically dependent on private support. Throughout history, philanthropists have seeded the innovations that moved our society forward. Without their vision and beneficence, the world would be a very different place.