

SPOTLIGHT FARM

Westport Town Farm Trustees of Reservations



Current Crops:
Red Onions
White Onions
Summer Squash
Zucchini
Pole Beans
Sunflowers
Tomatoes
Peas
Cucumber
Swiss Chard
Carrots
Bush Beans
Broccoli
Beets
Turnips
Peppers
Eggplants
Pumpkin
Butternut Squash
Corn
Acorn Squash
Lemon Balm
Oregano
Basil

The Farm

On a winding road not far from Route 88 in Westport, MA is where you find the Westport Town Farm. Surrounded by trees with a view of the Westport River, a 1720 farm house and old barn on a granite slab are the face of the facility. Out to greet visitors is Steve Connors, farm manager of 3 years and the designated farm dog Mackey. The farm is set on 40 acres and is owned by the town of Westport, and managed by The Trustees of Reservations who also manage a total of 105 properties in the state of Massachusetts. The farm is open to the public daily and offers walking trails that lead 1 mile around the property from the shore of the river back to the farmhouse.

The workers on this farm are different than you would typically expect. Not professionally seasoned old timers on tractors, but a team of 15 teens working under the expertise of Connors. Applicants to the program are through the South Coast Youth Corps and are from local area schools, more than half from Fall River and New Bedford.

The produce of the farm is more often donated than sold. The only farmer's market that the farm attends is the Downtown Fall River Market on Thursday morning just outside Government Center. Anything that is not sold is taken to the Westport Senior Center and distributed to low-income elderly or through meal programs. Connors says the goal is to supply people who would not normally have access to organic vegetables the chance to enjoy them.

The Products

Are the products at the Westport Town Farm organic? Yes and no. Most small local farms practice sustainable farming methods, but this farm takes care to assure that practice organic methods as well. Certifying a farm as "organic" is not cheap, so most small farms (like this one) would rather practice organic and skip the extensive certification paperwork. They continue to farm organically using the Youth Corps workers and Mackey as various forms of pest control.

The farm plot is fenced in from rabbits (using a buried fence) and high netting keeps the deer away from crops, leaving Mackie to chase away any stragglers. Connors explains that most of the pest control is manually done which he demonstrates by picking off Japanese Beetles from the pole beans. When growing crops organically, the avoidance of synthetic chemical pesticides is a must. Some crops however require organic forms of pesticide as there would be no crop left to yield if they were untreated. Only two forms of organic pesticides are used in the garden. The first is an organic bacteria that affects only insects to prevent them from eating and is completely harmless to humans, and another that is only toxic for 12 hours after which point is completely safe. Insects are never eliminated, just controlled.

Steve is extremely knowledgeable about plants, starting from the descent to the garden explaining his choice of flowers to draw in local insects or pollinators to pollinate the flowering vegetables. He starts many of the crops from seed in greenhouses starting in



The Westport Town Farm
830 Drift Road
Westport, MA
<http://www.thetrustees.org/>

Open Year Round
Sunrise to Sunset
Admission is Free

March. The seedlings are raised in a make-shift greenhouse in Connors' office and also by donated space at 2 local greenhouses at Paradise Hill Farm and The Montessori School's 8th grade greenhouses both in Westport. Once the plants are ready the students plant them on the farm.

Overview

Connors expressed concern for Massachusetts not being able to sustain itself agriculturally. Small farms like this can try and aid in this lack of vegetable production, but can only do so much. There is just simply not enough farm land or farmers in the state to take on this responsibility. A lot of produce found in stores is not locally grown. "Consumers want tomatoes in January" said Connors, but tomatoes only go into season here in early /mid summer. Local farms just cannot compete with this type of imported agriculture. But buying local and in season assures consumers they will get the freshest and tastiest product mostly free from toxic pesticides making local produce the healthier choice.

Connors notes that agriculture is not finished here in southeastern Massachusetts. Definitely not for this farm in particular, the Westport Town Farm has aspirations to only get better. Hoping to someday replant what was once its orchard with fruit trees and maybe getting their own greenhouses, this farm will be ever expanding. In fact, they just added some land in South Dartmouth at the Cornell Farm where Connors says they plan to grow some late harvest vegetables. The Westport Town Farm is a place that you want to definitely keeping watch on in the future and maybe even plan a visit.