

Newton Community Farm, Inc. 2017 Business Plan

Submitted by: Newton Community Farm, Inc.
303 Nahanton Street
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Submitted to: Newton Farm Commission
City Hall
1000 Commonwealth Avenue
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About

In 2005 the City of Newton's Community Preservation Committee and Board of Aldermen voted to acquire the historic Angino farmstead, the last working farm in Newton, for use as a community farm. Newton Community Farm, Inc. (NCF) currently operates the farm under a 20 year license from the City and with the guidance of the City's Farm Commission.

As a non-profit organization, NCF strives to benefit the community by:

- Providing locally grown produce to residents through a variety of distribution channels including:
 - weekly attendance at a City of Newton's Farmers' Market;
 - On-site farm stand;
 - An 80-share community-supported agriculture (CSA) program;
 - donations to local food access organizations;
 - sales to local restaurants;
- Educating the public about the sustainable use of land and other natural resources through hands-on classes, workshops, and public farm volunteer hours;
- Preserving Newton's only working farm as a historic site and valuable open space, and maintain the character and culture of the Angino farm;
- Connecting gardening enthusiasts through events and networking opportunities;
- Establishing connection with the community by offering a variety of events to appeal to different populations, encouraging them to learn about and support the Farm's mission.

Board Members and Portfolios

Stephanie Cogen* (President, Events, Fundraising) Craig Greiner (Communications)
Barbara Seal* (Treasurer) Robin Maltz (Assistant Clerk)
Dede Vittori* (Clerk) Jon Orren (Kitchen)
Brenda Cotter (Legal) Silka Rothschild (Education)
Eugene Finkelstein (Ledgebrook Representative) Lisa Schumann (Volunteers)

* Executive Committee Member

Farm Staff

Farm Manager Greg Maslowe
Farm Educator/Coordinator Alison Scorer
Administrator/Events Coordinator Emily Sorenson



Executive Summary

Newton Community Farm's tenth year was both a successful and challenging year. Some notable successes were:

- *Tenth Harvest*, a celebration of the Farm's tenth anniversary, which honored all the individuals and organizations who were instrumental to our success, and contributed to a successful fundraising year;
- Major growth in our education program, 60% increase in revenue and 23% growth in the number of children served by our programs;
- Initiation of a relationship with our neighbor, Mount Ida College, which hosted our Tenth Harvest event, and whose business and graphics arts students are benefiting from hands-on learning by working on projects to help the Farm;
- Expansion of our summer intern program to include a dedicated staff supervisor for Field Work interns, and for the first time, an Education intern;
- Another year of three successful public events – our Seedling Sale and Dinner on the Farm brought in revenue over budget, and our Fall Festival brought over 700 people to the Farm.

Challenges in 2016 included:

- Extreme weather which included a cold, late spring, and drought conditions during the summer, leading to the first year in the Farm's history of not meeting the Farm Operations budget, which will fall short by approximately \$3000.
- A vacancy on our board in the Fundraising position, which has limited our ability to work on new fundraising initiatives and our capital campaign, but has not prevented us from generally exceeding our annual fundraising budget.

As we head into our next decade, we will review our operations to make sure that we are managing our growth in a way that will serve the community for the years to come. In the early years of the Farm, we relied on exceptionally committed volunteers, and had steady growth in both our produce and education programming. Now that the Farm is ten years old, we will be reviewing our operations and our organizational structure to ensure that we are sustainable, and identify those areas where we face challenges to long-term viability. Our plans include:

- reviewing our farming practices to make sure that we are not depleting the land. This may require cutting back on production, or taking some beds out of rotation in order to preserve the health of our soil.
- continuing to take risks with our education program, expanding where we can, and offering new programs to appeal to different types of students, and expanding our scholarship program.
- evaluating our organizational structure and consider hiring more staff to reduce the reliance on volunteers to deliver our core services.

- investing in our buildings to preserve them, so we can rely on them to support our operations, and we will continue to save for capital expenditures that we will need in the next 5 to 10 years. Includes a new well, refurbished chicken coop, possibly solar panels, and a capital reserve for future capital expenses.
- considering the viability of creating an endowment to protect the Farm's financial future, and/or explore planned giving as an opportunity for the NCF community.

Farm Operations

Our tenth year was, in many respects, one of our most challenging. The year began with a cold, late spring which gave way to one of the most significant droughts eastern MA has seen in a very long time. Fall brought early frosts and flash flood warnings. All in all, not the best year for farming. The impacts for the farm were mixed:

- Late start to season and drought brought reduced yields for many crops, with some crops complete losses;
- Reduced yields resulted in smaller CSA shares (though we were still able to meet share value);
- We had a severe outbreak of club root, a disease effecting the entire brassica family. Severity of disease may have been enhanced by drought conditions;
- Our well functioned all season without fail (though we still weren't able to keep pace with the drought); and while farm stand and CSA sales were slightly below budget projections, sales at the West Newton farmers' market exceeded budget indicating a growing clientele at this relatively new market.

We completed construction on a second moveable high tunnel this spring and immediately put it into production growing high profit cherry tomatoes. The high tunnel was partially funded by a grant from the National Resources Conservation Service, who also partially funded our first high tunnel. We are still developing long term plans for utilizing two high tunnels. Final decisions will be informed by what we learn at a professional conference on high tunnel growing this winter.

Our High School Intern program was once again very successful for both the farm and the interns. We had 27 students participated in the program, and for the first time, we hired a dedicated instructor/farmer to run the program. The instructor was able to concentrate on the educational aspects of the program, giving the Farm Manager and his assistant more time to focus on production issues. We observed that it also facilitated better group bonding during each two-week session.



After 10 years most of our systems are well established, with yearly adjustments to increase efficiency, productivity and sustainability. In 2017 this will continue with only small changes to various farm operations programs.

The largest change will be to our field work volunteer program. After reviewing volunteer programs at other non-profit farms in the area, we learned that we were offering more volunteer opportunities than most farms of this size. For next year we will improve the volunteer program by reducing the number of volunteer hours. This will create a more meaningful experience for the volunteers and a more manageable program for farm staff. Specific changes include:

- Requiring advance sign up, and limiting the number of slots available for each work session;
- Eliminating weekday public volunteers hours in July and August, when we have our High School Intern program, and already have upwards of 10 workers ;
- For all weekday volunteer hours, offering only one time slot, instead of two.
- Slight reduction in the number of work hours required of CSA sharers, to account for the slight reduction in opportunity to do those hours.



Research and Development of NCF Orchard

Consistent with reduced apple yields across the state, the NCF apple harvest for 2016 was the smallest since the orchard was planted in 2007. The low fruit harvest was caused by several factors including low production of blossoms in the spring due to winter kill of fruit buds, more severe than that reported for MA orchards. For some varieties, overproduction of fruit in 2015 forcing some varieties (typical of Honeycrisp) may have contributed to low blossom production. Finally, the statewide drought likely contributed indicating that the frequency of our drip irrigation was not sufficient for our shallow 18” soil depth.

For 2017, trees will be pruned to reduce crowding. We anticipate a heavy bloom, and will thin blossoms accordingly. After fruit-set, apples will be thinned to a maximum of 30 to 50 per tree depending on tree size and root stock. Soil moisture readings will be made regularly using a soil moisture meter. Three mature trees, selected due to their lack of productivity in 2015, will be removed to allow more sun penetration through the canopy.

To prevent shading of the orchard, the City will be again asked to prune the single Norway Maple on Nahanton Street which shades the orchard.

Sustainability



In 2016, the Sustainability Committee has begun a review of potentially installing solar panels at the Farm. We have received reports from private solar companies, done research into funding options for nonprofits, and will prepare a comparative analysis for the Board to consider in the spring. The City of Newton has declined to install the panels as part of a City-wide program, but has expressed support for the project at NCF. We hope that we can find a solution that is financially responsible, and enables us to model sustainable energy use and model sustainable decisions to the community.

We continue to strive to make our events more sustainable. For Dinner on the Farm, we rent dishes and flatware, and will explore other non-disposable products to use instead of paper and plastic products. At our large public events, such as the Fall Festival, we have found it challenging to have large numbers of people correctly sort their waste into trash, recycling, and compost. In early 2017, we will look into purchasing dedicated receptacles for recycling and compost, to make it easier to handle the waste from our larger events. And we continue to work with

our partner organization who attend and support our events to reduce the disposable materials that they use and hand out to the participants.

Education

This past year has seen exceptional growth within the year round education program, with revenue increasing by over 60%. Enrollment in onsite classes, the numbers of educational group visits and offsite programming have all increased.

Highlights for 2016 include:

- Launching a scholarship program, beginning with a grant from the Charles River Neighborhood Foundation, enabling us to welcome a diverse range of children;
- Having 140 children attend our summer programs, in a total of 340 spots, a 23% increase over 2015, due in part to our comparative analysis of all programming and making the requisite adjustments to the marketing plan;
- Collaborating with local schools, including Countryside Elementary School, Memorial Spaulding and the Newton South preschool program to teach hundreds of children of the work of the farm and the principles we follow and embrace;
- Leading over 15 outreach programs in local preschools, private schools and with other youth organizations focusing on nature-based learning and food system awareness;
- Invitations to lead two professional development workshops for elementary and preschool teachers, on incorporating school gardens into the curriculum;
- Welcoming more than 10 different groups, some for multiple visits, and equaling approximately 150 visitors through paid educational group programs outside our usual youth programming. These groups ranged in age, some serving individuals with emotional, behavioral and physical disabilities; and
- Beginning a summer education high school intern program to give students with an interest in education the opportunity to gain first- hand experience and to develop leadership skills. Many have continued to volunteer their time to education programs in the fall.

For 2017 we will continue to build on the growth seen in 2016, and include the following initiatives:

- Pursue licensing as a camp program through the City, which would open up marketing and scheduling options that are currently unavailable to us;
- Expand full day, week-long summer programs. Developing and implementing new week long summer programs for children entering Kindergarten;

- Continue development of year-round programming for children of all ages. This includes the ongoing development of a Tuesday afternoon program, as well as offering family-orientated events such as Halloween on the Farm, which provides exposure and marketing opportunities for other programming;
- Expand upon popular Farm Sprouts program including the introduction of a weekend program to welcome working parents; and
- Continue the expansion of the teacher professional development program, both on site and off site.



Events and Outreach

Our events in 2016 brought approximately 1800 people to the farm, and were successful in meeting our financial and community building goals. Our Seedling Sale brought in approximately \$2000 over budget, and was attended by approximately 1000 people who purchased seedlings and other supplies for their home gardens. The Dinner on the Farm once again sold out, at a higher ticket price, confirming that this is a well-loved event in the community. The Fall Festival was a gorgeous day, and was attended by over 700 people. Local restaurant chain b.good provided food, and donated all profits from the event to NCF.

In addition to our three annual events, we had two education events for adults. In April, we brought author and solar energy advocate Phillip Warburg to speak. In June, we had a fundraiser featuring Tom Ashbrook of WBUR, who spoke and answered questions from the audience. We received wonderful feedback on this event, and we are fortunate to have Tom Ashbrook, a Newton resident, as a supporter. Finally, we held a tenth anniversary celebration, with over 120 guests, to honor and recognize the important work and tremendous effort that has gone into making the Farm what it is today. The event, which was paid for with sponsorships from local businesses inspired at least \$3,500 in donations from event attendees.



In 2017, we will build on these success, and adapt to some other changing circumstances.

- For our Seedling Sale, we will maintain the current level of production of seedlings, as we have reached maximum capacity for our greenhouses and the labor from our Farm Manager and Assistant Farmer. This year we experimented with purchasing and reselling compost, which was well-received by our customers. We will do this again, and potentially look for other products to resell.
- Dinner on the Farm has been catered for many years by Board Member Jon Orren, which has been a very successful model for us. For next summer, Jon cannot commit to doing this again, so we have had to look for an alternative. Newton restaurant Farmstead Table, which has been a committed customer for our produce,

will step in and cater the event. We look forward to this partnership, and anticipate that the event will appeal to an even wider audience.

- For the Fall Festival, we will repeat some of the new activities we added this year (a NCF scavenger hunt) and anticipate that we will again partner with b.good to provide food. We will also consider new ways to market our education programs to event attendees, possibly offering a sample class at the event.

Across all events, we will look for ways to reduce waste, improve sustainability, and create more opportunities for local business to support the Farm with event sponsorships.

Barn Programming

In 2016 we continued to rent out the Barn to both private individuals and non-profits for a variety of events, generating a net income of about \$3100. In addition to a number of private parties, the Barn was used for a gathering of arts students from Newton South, and the following events open to the public: a Slow Money Boston seminar on financing for small farms, a meeting of the Community Preservation Committee, and a cooking class by Newton Community Education. We were pleased to host a combination of revenue-generating uses, and public events offered by other non-profits.

For 2017, we will continue to publicize the rental program so that more can be aware of this valuable resource. Two challenges we face are: how to balance use of the Barn with the Farm Manager's quality of life living at the Farm, and how to find available staff to manage the events at the Barn. We will consider changing our Barn rental policy to have a greater number of minimum hours for rentals, so that each rental has a higher profit margin, allowing us to have fewer private events but bring in the

same or greater income. And we will continue to work with Mount Ida and other local schools to find staff to work at the events.

As we have planned for increased educational programming for Summer 2017, the availability of the Barn space has become more crucial to our operations, providing indoor space to shelter kids from bad weather or sun. Without this space, the increased educational programming would not be possible. In addition, we will consider temporary tents on the deck to create further space for this purpose during the summer.

In 2017, the Barn will continue to generate revenue for the Farm, support our own programming and outreach, and provide space for other local nonprofits to host public events.



Preservation

After completing many improvement projects on our buildings in the past few years, in 2016 we finished a few outstanding projects including the pullet storage shed and the internet controlled thermostat in the Barn. In addition we did only routine upkeep, including some work on the old plumbing system the Farmhouse.

In 2017, our plan is to refurbish the chicken coop. Options for this project are to keep the structure as just a chicken coop, or to expand the underground space to provide more storage, which was lost when we renovated the Barn. The Board must undertake this decision-making process, and identify someone to lead the project. Funds for this project will come from a potential anonymous donor, and the remainder from our Capital Campaign account.

Administration

Communications

Communications policy for Newton Community Farm is designed to speak directly to our core community via the following methods:

- Newsletters - 8 per year to over 1,000 recipients
- Social Media - Facebook, Twitter, Instagram
- Targeted emails - Fundraising, CSA Outreach, Education
- Lawn signs - for festivals and events
- Website

Our strategy is to increase engagement across all of these platforms as we generate and distribute new and unique content. Bringing on more volunteers to assist with this strategy is a goal and a challenge for 2017.

Communications via traditional media is a secondary outreach tool but a valuable one. This landscape is constantly changing, as evidenced by the evolution of the Newton TAB. We received favorable coverage this year as the centerpiece of how CPA funds are used positively on a community level.

Leveraging our close proximity to Mt. Ida College has been a highlight of 2016. We will continue that partnership with students in the business and communications classes, which promises to yield useful materials over the next year. At present we are working with design students to modernize our logo, and to create promotional materials for events.

Expanding our awareness footprint is a key emphasis for 2017. We hope to bring on new volunteers, and will be looking for a Board-level communications lead. We hope to share the bounty of the farm with new community members in the new year.

Board Affairs

In 2016, there was significant turnover in our Board, due to the end of terms, and the challenges of being on a working Board. We have a number of new directors, who all bring enthusiasm, commitment and valuable skills to the Board. In particular, the transition for our new Treasurer, Barbara Seal, was very smooth. We also have a new Volunteers Chair Lisa Schumann, Legal Chair Brenda Cotter, Education Chair Silka Rothschild.

In 2017, we will focus on seating a Fundraising Chair, a position that was vacant during 2016. We will also lose a long-time and very valuable Board member, Dede Vittori, who is currently our Clerk, and covers Farm Operations communications. We look forward to transitioning new Board Member Robin Maltz into that position in February, when Dede's term is up.

The Board Affairs Committee, comprised of Stephanie Cogen, Craig Greiner, and Lisa Schumann will

continue to revise the rolling three-year plan, recruit new Directors where needed, organize and plan the Board Retreat, oversee Board nominations and manage Board member participation. In the coming year, the Board Affairs Committee also plans to guide the Board through a process of evaluating our goals for the next five years, and our current organizational structure and staffing levels, to determine whether our current structure should be adapted to meet our long-term goals.

Fundraising

During 2016, our Fundraising board position remained vacant. Without someone dedicated to fundraising, we limited initiatives to our annual appeals, our Friends of the Farm program, and our one-time Tenth Harvest event to raise the majority of funds, to meet our budget goal of \$28,000. Meeting this budget goal closes the gap between our income and our operating expenses, and enables us to end the year in the black.

In 2016, we chose to shift focus away from our Capital Campaign due to the lack of a fundraising chair, and because we did not have any capital improvement projects scheduled for 2016. Some capital campaign donations were made, primarily by board members, and individuals who are knowledgeable about this campaign, totaling approximately \$3000, and another \$5000 contribution from our operating budget, which we make yearly.

For 2017, a fundraising priority will be to bring someone onto the board with development experience, who can add elements to our fundraising strategy, both for our Annual Campaign, and our Capital Campaign. We plan on returning our focus to approaching individual donors, and will consider adding in events such as community dinners, and house parties. We will also explore using a more developed and systematic program for corporate sponsors from the community.

Our Capital Plan anticipates renovating our chicken coop in 2017, which will likely be funded in part by an anonymous donor.



Budget Summary

The 2017 budgeting approach is conservative, aimed, in most areas, at maintaining the level of service and achievement attained in 2016. Over the last period of years, our produce output has generally increased each year, permitting us to increase the size of the Farm Ops budget. As we come to the natural end of that period of growth, we will look to our education program as the source of additional revenue.

Farm Ops income and expenses are expected to increase commensurate with the general upward trend in both food prices and production costs, primarily for seed and purchased produce. In 2017, we will focus on maintaining soil health and productivity, rather than increased yield. The full-season participation of the Assistant Grower is factored into the budget, but does not represent an increase over the preceding year. In 2016, difficult growing conditions including an historic drought, prohibited us from meeting our Farm Ops budget projects, and we have taken that into account in the 2017 projections.

NCF's 2016 youth education program was extremely successful, and greatly exceeded budgeted income. In 2017, we will build on this growth and success at a moderate and attainable level. The licensing of NCF as a camp will present opportunities to broaden the reach of the program. Education Program expenses will increase due to more staff hours needed for increased enrollments. In addition, early enrollment discounts will be used again to encourage earlier commitment to NCF's summer educational programming. Increases in education-related expenses are more than made up for by increases in budgeted revenue.

Rental use of the Barn by outside groups or individuals will be maintained at a moderate level, contributing some additional income, and maintaining NCF's profile among other than our core market.

We will continue to pursue Corporate Sponsorships in 2017 as the Board gains experience in this process and develops a network of potential donor companies. General fundraising will continue to be an important income source, and traditional annual NCF events such as the Seedling Sale, and Dinner on the Farm remain important parts of the income portfolio.

Salary and related expenses for the two salaried staff will increase, partly as a result of salary increases, and partly due to the extension of NCF's paid vacation policy to the Education Director.

In addition, Admin expenses are projected to be higher for 2017, primarily due to a continuing upward trend in insurance expenses, especially in the liability and workers' compensation areas.

Our 2017 budget once again features a slight surplus before accounting for a budgeted annual depreciation expense of \$16,000. In addition, \$5,000 will be transferred from available operating assets to the Capital Expenditures fund for the third consecutive year.