
Newton Community Farm learning to grow online during coronavirus era

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Seedling season is just starting at the Newton Community Farm, and while growing operations are still moving ahead, the nonprofit has had to make adjustments to its education programs during the coronavirus crisis, according to executive director Sue Bottino.

So far the farm has had to cancel all in-person spring educational programs through May 4.

“We have some financial impact from that,” she said, adding, “So far, it’s manageable.”

To address the dearth of programs, the farm has started to create online offerings, including two pre-paid cooking classes for adults and families.

While they are exploring filming more paid classes in the future, right now they have uploaded several free videos to their YouTube Live channel.

“We miss having all of us gather in person at the farm but I think this is a good alternative for now,” said Bottino.

Growing season and beyond

Since “agriculture is deemed an essential service by the government,” said Bottino, farm manager Greg Maslowe and the assistant farm manager, whose full name is Bee, are the only two working at the Nahantan Street location.

The farm is currently closed to the public.

Due to social distancing, they could not hire an intern to help. If coronavirus protocols remain in effect after May, staff will have to rethink how they'll reap crops, since many volunteers help with that task.

"We are not sure yet what we're going to do in the summertime," said Bottino. They will also need to figure out the best way to run the farm stand.

Currently, Maslowe and Bee are starting to prepare seedlings in the four growing structures for sale in May, including trays of tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, cucumbers, flowers, herbs and more.

For the first time all orders and payments will be done online.

"A lot of farms are switching to (taking online orders) this year to minimize contact," said Bottino.

The farm will consider continuing to take orders online in the future as well.

"It will definitely give us a lot of good data, so that will be very helpful," she said, in terms of tracking inventory and what's popular. "We're learning how to be flexible."

Beyond selling at the Nahanton Street location, the farm also has a stand at the city's Saturday farmers market in West Newton starting in June.

However, "as of (April 1), no decision has been made about the upcoming season opening of the farmers markets," said Judy Dore, market manager.


In the meantime, the farm is asking residents to send in their recipes, photos of their own gardens, stories and more to the website's community page. Submissions then will be shared online.

Bottino said she's heard from community members that many people are going to grow a garden this year, since they have the time.

"It's a wonderful activity" for all ages, she said.

The Newton Community Farm is located at 303 Nahanton St. For more information on the farm itself and to add submissions on the community page, visit <https://newtoncommunityfarm.org/>.

To see videos on the farm's YouTube channel, visit <https://tinyurl.com/wzakb7s>



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