

# The Seed Farm

## Lehigh County, PA

*Growing New Farmers for the Future*



Sara Runkel

Beginning Farmer Learning Network Meeting.  
March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2013

# The Seed Farm



**Mission:** To start and grow new sustainable farm businesses and farmers in the Lehigh Valley and to support the growth of our local food system.

The Seed Farm is a 501-c-3 non-profit organization. We work in partnership with the County of Lehigh and Penn State Cooperative Extension.



# Lehigh County Farmland Preservation Program



# The next generation of farmers.

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- 88% of new farmers did not grow up on farms.
- Increase in the number of women farmers.
- All ages.



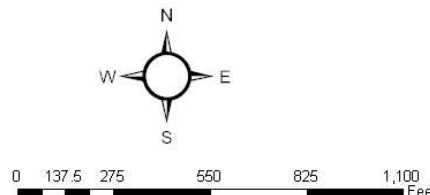
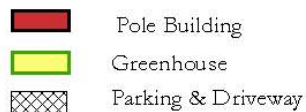


# The Seed Farm Programs

- New Farmer Training Program.
- Farm Business Incubator Program (aka. Stewardship Program).
- Specialized equipment for vegetable production demonstration.



the seed farm



43 acres including two ponds.

20 acres of tillable land.

2010 site improvements:

Well

Electric

New entrance and parking lot

20' x 20' Clearspan building

Graded pads for greenhouses  
and pole building.

2011 site improvements:

24' x 96' heated greenhouse

8' x 12' walk-in cooler

Perennial herb garden

2012 site improvements:

40' x 60' pole building

15' x 40' covered washing  
and packing area.

# New Farmer Training Program

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## Goals

- Provide intensive training in the management of a diversified vegetable farm.
- Prepare graduates to run their own farm business.
- Extensive training in equipment operation and maintenance.

**Up to 6 apprentices are selected each season. Each apprentice receives over 600 hours of hands-on training at the Seed Farm and 100 hours of classroom training.**





# **On-farm March – Nov. 600+ Hours total**

- Soil fertility management
- Disease and pest management
- Weed management
- Crop Planning
- Business planning
- Marketing
- Harvest and post-harvest handling
- Decision making skills
- Equipment use and maintenance
- Tractor safety
- Compost production
- Greenhouse management

# **Off-farm March – Nov. 100 Hours total**

- Exploring the Small Farm Dream
- Introduction to Organic Vegetable Production
- Planning the Small Farm
- Farm visits
- PASA Workshops
- Other Extension Classes





# On farm training components

## On Farm learning activities:

*March 3<sup>rd</sup> – April 28<sup>th</sup> no harvest, everyone works in market garden half day and half day learning activity or as noted.*

March 3<sup>rd</sup> : Welcome, introduction to farm. Introduction to crop planning spreadsheet and resources (all day).

March 10<sup>th</sup> : Crop planning, Tractor safety (all day)

March 17<sup>th</sup> : High tunnel construction (all day)

March 24<sup>th</sup> : Greenhouse management, record keeping, transplant production (soil blocks etc.), GAP

### Training

March 31<sup>st</sup> : BCS operation, tillage & soil moisture,

Transplanters & transplanting efficiency

April 7<sup>th</sup> : Seeders, seed storage, germ. testing

April 14<sup>th</sup> : OVP class: Greenhouse Management (Liberty Gardens)

April 21<sup>st</sup> : Breaking the Barriers (Del. Val.)

April 28<sup>th</sup> : Cultivation tools, hand tool maintenance, installing a cool-bot. Plastic layer

May 5<sup>th</sup> : Harvest & post-harvest handling spring crops

May 12<sup>th</sup> : OVP class: Seeding and transplanting, crop rotation planning (not at Seed Farm)

May 19<sup>th</sup> : Irrigation system design and set-up. More in-depth crop rotation planning

May 26<sup>th</sup> : pest management, using and calibrating a backpack sprayer

June 2<sup>nd</sup> : Tomato pruning & trellising

June 9<sup>th</sup> : OVP class: Weed management (Seed Farm)

June 16<sup>th</sup> : More in-depth tractor cultivation

June 23<sup>rd</sup> : Rodale Institute Field Trip (This date is not confirmed yet)

June 30<sup>th</sup> : Compost production and use

July 7<sup>th</sup> : farm plumbing, put shade cloth on grn hs.

July 14<sup>th</sup> : OVP class: Disease management (Seed Farm)

July 21<sup>st</sup> : More intensive scouting demo. Apprentices present disease management plan for crop project.

July 28<sup>th</sup> : Eagle Point Farm Field trip (This date is not confirmed yet)

August 4<sup>th</sup> : Evaluating a farmer's market with Brian Moyer

August 11<sup>th</sup> : OVP class: Pest management (at another farm)

August 18<sup>th</sup> : Soil testing, additional scouting. Apprentices present pest management plan for crop project.

August 25<sup>th</sup> : Harvest & post-harvest handling of storage crops (onions, garlic, winter squash, roots)

September 1<sup>st</sup> : basic construction skills

September 8<sup>th</sup> : OVP Class: Soils and cover crops

September 15<sup>th</sup> : Cover crops, soil health testing

September 22<sup>nd</sup> : Season extension

September 29<sup>th</sup> : Red Earth Farm field trip (sometime this week)

October 6<sup>th</sup> : More cover crops

October 13<sup>th</sup> : Crop rotation planning

October 20<sup>th</sup> : open

October 27<sup>th</sup> : Season evaluation. Celebrate!

## Crop Project

**Objective:** 1.) Develop a comprehensive crop plan for crop family or group to be grown at the Seed Farm. 2.) Gain hands-on knowledge and management experience with the selected crops.

This is a four-part project that will take place over the course of the 2012 season. Each apprentice will be responsible for developing a crop plan and managing a crop family or group for the season. The information you develop will be shared with the other apprentices and can be used when developing your own farm plan in the fall. The four parts are: 1) crop selection and production plan, 2) fertility management plan, 3) disease and pest management plan, 4) growing, managing and marketing the selected crop.

### Crop choices:

Please pick one group to manage ie- brassicas, roots, etc.

Roots: carrots, parsnips, beets, radishes, turnips

Brassicas: cabbage, cauliflower, brussel sprouts, broccoli, broccoli raab

Legumes: dry beans, mixed green beans, edamame, peas

Solanacea: tomatoes, potatoes, eggplant

Curcubits: melons, winter squash, summer squash, cucumbers

Greens: spinach, lettuce, braising mix (chard, kale, collards)

Herbs: perennials, cilantro, dill, basil, parsley

## Management areas.

Each apprentice will also be responsible for one of the following management areas on a monthly rotation. This portion of the program will start in April.

High Tunnel

Greenhouse

Farmer's Market: harvest, post-harvest, marketing

Compost

Cover crops

Wholesale: harvest, post-harvest, marketing





2012 apprentice Valerie Garcia at the Emmaus Farmers' Market. Proceeds from the sale of produce from the training garden support the operating costs of the farm.

# Trainee evaluation

## FARMING SKILLS EVALUATION – 2012

Please evaluate your level of competency in each of the areas listed below.

Please evaluate all of the areas listed, even if you have no experience and/or the topic seems non-applicable to you.

	Beginning of Season					End of Season				
1. Soil Fertility	No exposure	Some exposure	Some exposure & some competency	Advanced level competency	Full competency	No exposure	Some exposure	Some exposure & some competency	Advanced level competency	Full competency
Understanding the basics of soil health	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Testing for soil compaction	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Roll and impacts of tillage on soil health										
Soil testing	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Read & interpret soil test	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Organic matter management	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Fundamentals of composting	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Hand built compost	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Compost windrows	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Developing Nutrient Budgets.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5



# Stewardship Program

## Goals

- To support the development of new profitable farm businesses in the Lehigh Valley.
- Eliminate three of the top 4 barriers to farm business start up: access to land, equipment, and training. 4<sup>th</sup> barrier is access to capital.

Graduates of the apprenticeship program can apply to become Stewards by submitting a farm business plan. Stewards lease land from the Seed Farm and have the option of renting space in our greenhouse and walk-in cooler. They also have access to our irrigation system, equipment, and continued mentoring.



# After The Seed Farm

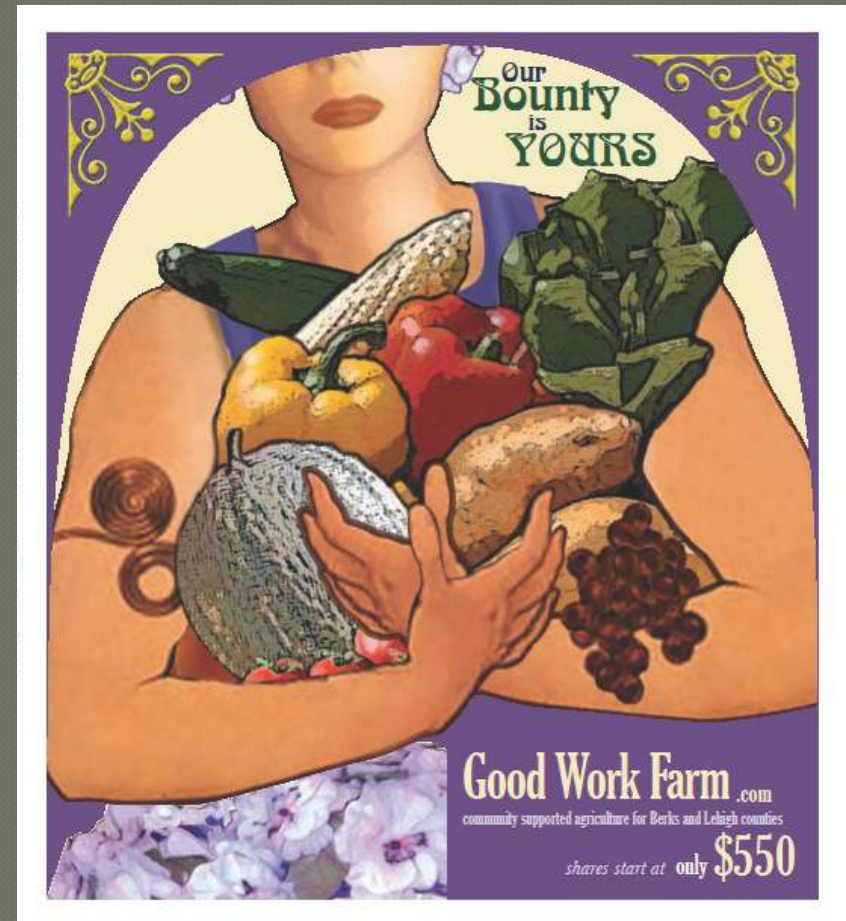
70% of Seed Farm participants have pursued careers in agriculture following the training program.

All of the 2012 apprentices plan on remaining in the agricultural field.

Two graduates of the 2010 training program started a farm business at the Seed Farm in 2011.

## *Good Work Farm*

3 acres – 75 member community supported agriculture (CSA) farm and vendor at The Kutztown Farmers' Market.







Sarah Edmonds of Good Work Farm, starting plants in our greenhouse.



# Equipment Demonstration Educational Field Days







Questions?