

**SARE / FARMER AND RANCHER
PROJECT PROFILE
(Final Report)**

1. GENERAL INFORMATION

Project # FNE99-230
Project Title Farm-based Sustainable Agriculture Education Programs

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(Note: All future correspondence regarding the project should be directed to Christine Fowler. However, the original project contact was David Batchelder.)

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Mill Valley Farm
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SARE \$	\$ 2,850.00	(Total SARE funds granted.)
Matching Non-Federal \$	\$10,313.79	(\$3,622.50 budgeted)
Matching Federal \$	\$ 300.00	(\$ 120.00 budgeted)
Total Cost	\$13,463.79	(\$6,871.00 budgeted)

Project Duration 2* (Number of years SARE funds were requested for this project)
* Project was extended through March 2001, but funding didn't change.)

Section 1: Project Title:

Farm-based Sustainable Agriculture Education Programs (FNE99-230)

Section 2: Project Goals:

This project had a two-fold objective: to contribute to a culture of sustainability in our larger community and to enhance the health and economic viability of Mill Valley Farm in particular. We planned to introduce sustainable agriculture practices to children during two-week summer programs at the farm. Besides helping to reconnect people to the sources of their food, the on-farm education programs were intended to be a means to increase farm income both directly, through registration fees, and indirectly, by expanding public awareness of the farm and thereby increasing traffic at the farm stand, generating members for the existing Community-Supported Agriculture project (CSA) and maintaining a more visible presence at the farmers markets. Community support is vital for a farm like Mill Valley, which markets its produce locally, in accordance with its conviction that producing healthy food locally is essential for sustainability.

We planned to develop a series of workshops to cover some areas of sustainable agriculture, to test those activities with children on the farm, and to compile those in a curriculum document. We hoped that this document might serve as a model for other growers in our region who were interested in developing on-farm education programs.

Section 3: Farm Information:

Mill Valley Farm is a small, diversified, organic vegetable farm in Stratham, NH, a former agricultural community that is experiencing the effects of suburban sprawl. David Batchelder began growing crops there in 1980 and the farm has been certified organic since 1993. In 2003, the farm is being leased to another grower.

Besides vegetables, the farm also offers small fruits and eggs. Farm produce is sold at Seacoast Growers Association weekly markets, at the farm stand, and through the Community-Supported Agriculture project (CSA). The Mill Valley Farm CSA is now in its ninth season, and has involved up to 80 families per season from the greater NH Seacoast Region.

Since 1998, when this proposal was originally submitted, 38 acres of the 100 acre farm were sold. The total acreage of the farm is now approximately 62 acres, 58 of which protected from future development by a Land Conservation Investment Program (LCIP) conservation easement. The cultivated acreage is approximately 8 acres of vegetables, 4 acres of cover crops, 1 acre of small fruits, ½ acre of tree fruits, and 21 acres of hay.

Section 4: Cooperators:

Chrissy Fowler planned, prepared, marketed, and implemented all agriculture education programs. She also kept financial records, hired and paid program staff, and administered all program-related details. *(The summer programs were operated as a separate entity from Mill Valley Farm, and were wholly administered by North Twin Education Programs. Under our arrangement, NTEP paid Mill Valley Farm a fee for*

Section 6: Findings, Accomplishments, Unexpected Results

The project was a success overall. The feedback from the community was overwhelmingly positive. When we cancelled our plans for programs in 2003, parents and children expressed great disappointment. The programs made for a busier farm, with increased traffic and a heightened activity level. At times, the hubbub was aversive to the farmer. On the other hand, the increased farm traffic resulted in higher farm stand sales when camp was in session. It is highly likely that the programs at Mill Valley would have continued to thrive if all parties wanted to offer them.

These are some of our insights:

- **Program staff can be well-compensated.** (Hired staff earned \$18/hr for daily preparation and implementation. The director earned about \$5000 each year for planning, preparing and implementing all aspects of the program.)
- **Shorter days work well.** (It is too hot to farm with kids after lunch!)
- **Small is good.** (It is tempting to have large sessions of 30 or more children, given the economy of scale. Our most satisfying programs had 15-20 children.)
- **Multi-age works well.** (We liked our broad range of ages, entering grades 1-5. Junior counselors were an asset.)
- **Children crave authentic work and creative artistic expression.** (They responded more to actual farm tasks than to those activities which would be equally well-suited to a classroom environment.)
- **Cooking with whole foods was important.** (Making snack with the children out of farm produce was a meaningful way to connect them directly with the sources of their food. They ate heartily each morning.)
- **Marketing takes more time and money than you think!** (Initially we were unprepared for the investment, and naïve about the early timing of family summer planning. Word of mouth is the most effective, but other marketing is important to maintain a presence in the community's collective consciousness.)
- **Parents and children want on-farm education experiences.** (The feedback on questionnaires and separate letters indicated extensive support for our programs. Children were happy, parents were happy, we were happy.)

These and other insights are outlined in more detail in the accompanying curriculum document, Adventures in Agriculture: Guidelines and Activities for On-farm Education Programs. See sections 1-4 in particular.

Section 7: Site Conditions Affecting the Outcome:

N/A

Section 8: Economic Findings:

We wondered how a farm might increase its overall income by offering educational workshops to the public. The specific economic gain of having on-farm education programs is difficult to ascertain, in part due to the multiple factors involved. We did

notice positive results in general. The programs heightened the farm's visibility in the region, increased farm stand traffic during program sessions, and directly resulted in several CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) memberships. The farm didn't gain significant income from the programs themselves, given our arrangement to administer the programs separately. However, the program lease fees accounted for about 1-3% of the farm's gross receipts, and the programs represented a minimal investment of farm labor and resources. Some data follows:

In 2000, 4 of the 17 (24%) families of program participants became new CSA shareholders. This represented about 5% of total CSA memberships that year. However, none of the four new families renewed their CSA membership for 2001, although one did register their children for a second year of programs.

In 2001, 13 of the 43 (30%) families registering children for education programs requested CSA information. As in 2000, 4 of these became members. This also represented about 5% of total CSA memberships for that season.

The lease fees paid for use of the farm were as follows:

2000 - \$75/week
2001 - \$150/week
2002 - \$200/week

It is clear that there is a market for children's agriculture education programs. These programs have an excellent financial rate of return on the investment of time, labor and materials, especially when compared to the typical financial return of growing and marketing vegetables. The educational programs were self-supporting, and the staff was reasonably well-compensated. We were able to retain interested children from one year to the next, and began to find an equilibrium for program size. Some data follows:

2000	22 children		
	Session 1: 14	Session 2: 8	
	(10 returning in 2001 = 45% retention rate)		
2001	71 children	(14% returning, 86% new)	222% increase
	Session 1: 24	Session 2: 31	Session 3: 16
	(18 returning in 2002 = 25% retention rate)		
2002	67 children	(26% returning, 74% new)	6% decrease
	Session 1: 31	Session 2: 15	Session 3: 6
			Session 4: 15

It must also be noted that there was significant time spent developing and implementing these programs, not to mention to the time spent sharing the results with others. However, these hours were a labor of love. It was a pleasure to discuss the project with journalists, educators, farmers and the public. It was satisfying to refine the curriculum with another year's programs in mind. In sum, it was worth the investment.

Section 9: New Ideas and Next Steps:

In its second year, we collaborated with YMCA Camp Lincoln, a well-established summer camp in Kingston, NH. This cooperative effort was initiated by the Camp Lincoln staff in the fall of 2000, in hopes that they could satisfy a demand for farm camp programs. They paid Mill Valley a reduced tuition rate to send 12 of their campers, entering grades 4-7, to a longer-day session of Adventures in Agriculture.

We offered the session to non-YMCA students as well, charging \$330 for the two week, 9:30am - 3:30pm session. (Members paid \$305.) YMCA Camp Lincoln charged \$450 for their two week 8am - 5pm session, which included bus transportation from outlying towns to Kingston to the farm and back. They paid Mill Valley reduced tuition of \$175 per child, and sent two of their camp counselors to work with our program staff. Essentially, YMCA Camp Lincoln was offered a substantial discount for the program (only paying 53-57% of our normal rate), even considering that they paid separately for the two staff people they sent.

In 2002, we chose not to continue this collaboration for several reasons. The longer day did not work for us, in part because after lunch, the farm is just too hot to run outdoor programs for children. Also, because Camp Lincoln hired their own staffers (non-farmers, including college and high school students) and had to send two of them with their students, we had less latitude to hire our own well-qualified farmers and educators. We felt these staffing limitations adversely affected our programs. Finally, we could not afford to subsidize Camp Lincoln's campers by offering them such severely discounted rates, given that there was no other compensatory benefit for us.

In 2002, we experimented with shorter session durations of one week. This seemed to universally appeal to families. Each shorter session was geared to a narrower age range (Session 1 for children entering grades K-2, Session 3 for children entering grades 4-6.)

A refinement for the future might be to offer only one-week sessions. Despite any drawbacks, it seems worth considering, given that other agriculture education organizations run their summer programs in one-week sessions.

Potential Pros:

- + Children would have the option of attending more than one session (perhaps with a discount on tuition for additional sessions).
- + Accommodates families who can fit only one week into their summer schedule
- + Accommodates families who requested longer session duration (3-5 weeks).

Potential Cons:

- More work to expand and sequence curriculum to avoid excessive repetition.
- Difficult to create sense of "program community" with groups changing each week.
- Additional administrative burden generated by each new session.

Section 10: Practice Continuation:

We did not run education programs at Mill Valley in 2003 because David Batchelder was not farming. He leased the farm to another grower and both of them felt it would not work to have programs at Mill Valley. It is unclear if there will be education programs at Mill Valley Farm in years to come. However, North Twin Education Programs intends to work to provide on-farm agriculture education programs in the future.

Section 11: Outreach:

Results were shared with the public both formally and informally throughout the duration of our project. While we have not yet done all of the outreach we planned when drafting the grant proposal, we are satisfied with the work we have done thus far.

- Newspaper articles in the Boston Globe, Foster's Daily Democrat (2), Portsmouth Herald (2), Hampton Newsletter and Exeter Newsletter.
 - Features in the NOFA-NH Newsletter (2) and *Farming: The Journal of Northeast Ag.*
 - Information at farm during Rockingham County Open Farm Day, Aug. 2000
 - Presentations at MOFGA's* Common Ground Fair in Unity, ME, Sept. 2000 and Sept. 2003 (*Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association)
 - Networking and connection-building with agriculture education peers:
 - Julia Steed-Mawson (UNH Cooperative Extension, Hillsborough County)
 - Linda Hartkopf (Hart to Hart Farm in Albion, ME)
 - Carey Truebe (Morris Farm in Wiscasset, ME)
- Growers and Educators attending:
- Teacher Training for Project Food, Land and People in Maine Summer 2000
 - Think Tank II: From Seed to Sprout (Gardens in Schools and Communities) UNH Cooperative Extension, Goffstown, NH March 2001
 - Vermont Ag. In the Classroom Conference, Shelburne Farms, Shelburne, VT November 2001
 - Soul of Agriculture Conference, UNH, Durham, NH November 2001 & 2002

Section 12: Name and Date:

Christine H. Fowler

September 6, 2003