



Photo by Ralph Stewart

The FARM Institute will provide four one-acre plots to enterprising growers.

The FARM Institute announced that the ground has been prepared, deer fence installed, and five people selected to try innovative crops or growing methods on one-acre parcels on the Institute's property in Katama.

"With funding from the Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program, a branch of the U.S.D.A., the five farmers will have access to water, a small stipend for seeds or equipment, and support from FARM Institute staff and each other," the institute said in a press release. "The purpose of the project is to provide a low-risk way to try new products for Vineyard markets, or ways to make growing more efficient and profitable."

"There was no shortage of good ideas when it came to digging into the local dirt," garden manager Rebecca Sanders said. "We have a great group of participants with really diverse interests."

The Institute provided the following project outlines:

Alex Rentumis and his partner, Katrina Nevin, will plant an oilseed crop, probably sunflowers, for use in bio-diesel fuels and for human consumption. The object is to learn whether the soil and climate at Katama will support a crop that can be harvested and pressed for a clean fresh oil.

Dan and Anna Merhalski will experiment with the financial sustainability of a small-scale market garden as a possible way to encourage more food production on limited acres. They plan to try quinoa, barley, and hops, along with heirloom tomatoes and other vegetables, and they will bring in some beehives as well.

Patrick Brown will explore ways to remineralize Island soils with pond fines (sediment), glacial gravel powders, and other materials, observing the nutritional output from these efforts.

Teri Praskach will grow flowers and herbs using cover crops between the rows. The cover crops will be tilled in at two to three week intervals and the effects on weed control and soil health will be measured.

Lily Walter will use her plot to compare no till, reduced till and conventional tillage methods in productivity for a vegetable garden.

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