

It Takes a Village to Save a Farm

On a beautiful August morning, little Gracie enjoys a juicy oversized peach. You can rest assured it's healthy, Mommy, it's organic! Gracie's mom bought the fruit at Crossroads Farm at Grossmann's, Nassau County's newly reopened organic community farm in Malverne.

The Grossmann family had farmed the land since 1895, but a decade ago it became clear that the operation was no longer viable. There was some fear that the 5-acre plot would be sold to developers, with McMansions sprouting where beets had once grown. Thankfully, the **Nassau Land Trust** stepped in. With the family's support, the Land Trust successfully nominated Grossmann's for purchase by Nassau County. In 2010, the same year the land was bought, the Long Island Community Foundation made a grant of **\$20,000** to the Land Trust to help develop the farm's community programs.

"This is the last remaining farm in southwestern Nassau County," says David Okorn, executive of the Community Foundation. "It's an investment that has produced a successful model of preserving land for sustainable agriculture programs on Long Island."

While the name of the farm has changed, older neighbors will continue to think of it as Grossmann's, with fond memories of buying fresh corn, strawberries, and Halloween pumpkins. "I'm just so happy it's back and running. My kids love coming here," says Angela Giuttari of Lynbrook, a frequent visitor. "Not just for the fresh vegetables, but for the friendly, inviting atmosphere."

On the Farm

The work began on August 1, 2010 to convert the land into a USDA organic certified farm, with staff and



Gracie Smith eats some local produce on her first trip to Crossroads Farm at Grossmann's. Photo by Marie Smith

volunteers restoring the soil and planting, using organic compost. The health of the plants depends on the health of the soil, water, and animals on the farm, and their diversity attracts both wild and resident pollinators. (The farm has two honeybee hives under a shade tree.)

The demand for fresh, local, seasonal goods is greater than what the property can produce. To meet it, farmers from Old Westbury to Orient Point have been invited to sell their vegetables and artisanal goods at the farm.

Nature's Schoolhouse

"Farms are an arena for learning," says Bill Walsh, a seasoned farmer working at Crossroads. "There's something new to learn every day." The Land Trust is starting farming programs for children and adults: one



Sweet corn is in season on Long Island from July through September. Photo by Marie Smith



Farmer Bill Walsh manages the day-to-day operations of the farm and retail store while Lisa Mitten, consultant with the Nassau Land Trust, writes grants and helps manage the office, volunteers, and staff. Photo by Marie Smith

elementary-school class has already planted corn, and the newly restored greenhouse will be a teaching space especially useful in winter months.

Volunteers Aplenty

“Without our volunteers, we would not be where we are now,” said Lisa Mitten, a Land Trust staff member working at Crossroads. “We get many locals coming in and asking how they can help. It really does take a village!”

Ms. Mitten has been working on creating a more formal volunteer management system to deal with the flood of residents who want to get their hands dirty. “We have close to 125 volunteer applications filled out and about 30 regularly devoted volunteers,” Lisa continues.

Volunteers are matched with jobs that suit their skills; others donate farming supplies and money, while those working on larger projects may exchange their labor for fresh produce.

“Crossroads Farm at Grossmann’s is an invaluable part of the fabric of Long Island’s cultural history,” said Lloyd Zuckerberg, founder and chairman of Nassau Land Trust. “And with locally grown food on the top of people’s minds, we have an opportunity to give Long Islanders access to this local oasis right in Nassau County.”

“Just about every day, a customer will tell us how thrilled they are that the farm has been saved and is open for business again,” says Bill Walsh. “In their opinion, it was the best purchase the county ever made.”