



*Creating an entrepreneurial local food
and agriculture economy*

www.fwcrd.org

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Frequently Asked Questions – Our Training Farms

The Florida West Coast Resource Conservation (RC&D) Council, Inc. is operating two local farms to train beginner farmers in all aspects of small farm management. These two farms, Geraldson Community Farm and Gamble Creek Farm are not-for-profit farms under the 501(c)(3) purpose of the RC&D as economic development projects. We hope that this FAQ sheet will provide answers to some of the questions you may have. As always, feel free to contact our office listed above for more information.

Where are the RC&D's training farms?

The Geraldson Community Farm is a 20-acre farm with 8 acres in certified organic diversified vegetable production located at 1401 99th Street NW in Bradenton, FL. Gamble Creek Farm is at the Center for Integrated Agriculture, a 26-acre property at 14950 Golf Course Road, Parrish, Florida. Gamble Creek Farm has hydroponic production and a variety of growing and irrigation methods. Currently, the farms have 4 apprentices, with additional positions available on a rotating basis.

How are RC&D training farms operating?

Geraldson Community Farm and Gamble Creek Farm are not-for-profit farms by staff hired by a Board of Directors, similar to any not-for-profit organization. Both farms have fictitious names (d.b.a – “doing business as” status) registered with the State of Florida under the Florida West Coast RC&D Council, Inc.



I have heard the RC&D using taxpayer money to compete with local farmers. Is that true?

No, Federal and local grants are not available to simply run a farm. Basic farm operations are funded by sales and memberships, which provide a foundation for trainings and apprenticeship programs. Grant funds are sought by the RC&D to provide economic development programs such as job trainings, educational programs, and activities such as buy-local campaigns, and other efforts.

Sales are common for charitable organizations (gift shops at museums, videos being produced and sold to benefit Sesame Street, hot dogs being sold by youth sports groups at County parks, and others). In accordance with not-for-profit guidelines and tax law, sales by the farms must be used for continued public programming. Three annual audits of the finances of RC&D have found the funds to be handled in a highly accountable and proper manner.

How did the Geraldson Community Farm get started?

Geraldson Community Farm was bought by Manatee County in 2005 from the Geraldson family, one of the original farming families in the area. Dr. Carroll Geraldson was a pioneer in Florida agriculture and worked with Blake Whisenant on the development of the EarthBox.

During 2005-2006, the Florida West Coast RC&D lead a partnership in the development of a plan to ensure its preservation and success and in September of 2006 Manatee County Board of County Commissioners approved the plan and later signed an agreement with the RC&D to implement the development of a community farm. The present-day community farm bears the family name at the request of the family trust to honor their father and grandfather - Dr. Geraldson.

Isn't the Geraldson Community Farm a County-run farm?

No, the land the farm is on is owned by Manatee County, but the Florida West Coast RC&D leases the land from the County similar to the Parrish Schoolhouse and YMCA arrangement. These are agreements with Manatee County with not-for-profit agencies operating for public benefit.

Why wasn't the Geraldson Community Farm lease given to a local farmer?

The lease agreement with Manatee County required a not-for-profit organization willing to raise funds for buildings and programs, provide adequate insurance for public access and volunteers, an annual audit of finances to demonstrate public accountability, and a requirement to follow the Conceptual Management Plan (mentioned above, available on-line) as the program outline on the property.

How did Gamble Creek Farm get started?

Gamble Creek Farm at the Center for Integrated Agriculture was developed in association with the Manatee Agricultural Reuse System (MARS). The purchase of a demonstration site allowed for the development a comprehensive solution for beneficial use of reclaimed water for agriculture. An agricultural program was needed to make the site viable for the long-term programming for the benefit of the region and Manatee County. The agricultural program focuses on training beginning farmers in all aspects of farm planning and management, with emphasis on conservation of natural resources.

What is the relationship of the RC&D to USDA and other government partners?

The RC&D office hosts an employee of the USDA, the RC&D Coordinator, who assists with the development of grant proposals and trainings of the Board and Council members to build the capacity of the organization. USDA does not control or operate the RC&D. The RC&D also has agreements and partners with various government agencies, just like other not-for-profit organizations.

What is the RC&D doing to help local farmers?

In addition to the training farms, the RC&D is also assisting the region's farmers in a variety of ways, which are just starting to come to fruition. The RC&D is submitting grants to fund a buy-local campaign supported by a variety of partners, providing training workshops on small farm business start-up, and providing one-on-one marketing assistance to local producers.

The Local Food Buying Club is also operated for the direct benefit of small-scale growers by connecting a group of buyers to farmgate sales through the RC&D. There is only a small fee charged to the customer to minimally cover costs with the goal of maximizing return to the farmers. This service is free to the farmers and often the RC&D staff picks up from the farm on behalf of the Buying Club.

For more information on the Florida West Coast RC&D Council, please contact our office at the information listed on the front, or our website focused on small farmers, www.FarmerTraining.org.