



**FLORIDA WEST COAST
RESOURCE CONSERVATION & DEVELOPMENT (RC&D)
COUNCIL, INC**

Keeping Agriculture in the Community in Manatee, Hillsborough, Pinellas, and Sarasota Counties.

Geraldson Community Farm Project



Dr. Geraldson on the farm many years ago.

On March 1, 2005, the Manatee County Board of County Commissioners (BCC) voted to purchase the approximately 20-acre Geraldson’s Farm in Bradenton from the Geraldson family for the creation of a community farm at the site.

With the Geraldson’s Farm purchase, the County has the opportunity to integrate two priorities: the preservation of natural areas such as environmentally sensitive lands with the preservation of green space in productive agriculture. Additionally, the farm’s location adjacent to Robinson Preserve and the Botanical Park provides

an excellent opportunity for complementary outdoor recreation and education/demonstration at these facilities.

Manatee County is providing leadership to other communities around the country who want to preserve urban farmland as productive agricultural land. The County’s management objectives for the Geraldson Community Farm Conceptual Management Plan create the framework for a consensus-based community resource. Key management objectives are: operates as working farm, is community-operated, offers education outreach, holds community events, demonstrates sustainable farming practices, honors the County’s agricultural heritage, celebrates its history, and grows into financial independence.



Geraldson Community Farm “Before”.

The Role of the Florida West Coast RC&D



The RC&D presented research and gathered community input during 2006.

To develop the Conceptual Management Plan, the Florida West Coast Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Council, a local 501(c)(3) working in sustainable agriculture, created a partnership working group, researched community farm models, presented research and gathered community input, and presented the consensus plan to the Board of County Commissioners for consideration. On September 26, 2006 the BCC approved the conceptual management plan and charged the Florida West Coast RC&D to lead the community in building Manatee County’s first Community Farm.

Success of Community Farming

Small-scale, community-oriented farms near urban/suburban areas are becoming increasingly popular for their locally-grown produce and other crops, community events, educational opportunities and environmentally-sensitive and sustainable production methods such as organic. Direct marketing from farm to consumer through

CSAs (see below), farmer's markets, farmstands and other avenues has helped create viable business opportunities for small farms in Florida and around the country.

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) – A growing model for small farm success



Farm staff pack the CSA “shares” in boxes that are either picked up or delivered to members.

The foundation of most economically and socially successful community farms is the Community Supported Agriculture, or CSA, model of community-based farming. The first two CSA's were started in the U.S. in 1986 at the Indian Line Farm in Massachusetts and the Temple-Wilton Community Farm in New Hampshire. In 1990, there were 60 farms with CSA's in the U.S., growing to over 1200 today. The CSA model provides weekly shares of the harvest to CSA members who have paid up-front for their shares for the season. This provides some working capital for the farm operation as well as sharing the inherent risks of agriculture, e.g. weather events, between the farmer and the consumer. Many CSAs offer some need-based scholarships for seasonal shares as well. CSA's are also an excellent way to encourage an economic development goal of recycling local dollars directly back into the local community.

Highlights of the Conceptual Management Plan -- Look for crops in 2007!

For the first year of production at Geraldson Community Farm, 2 acres of farm fields with a small CSA, farmer's market presence, a website and newsletter, and one or two community events will be a manageable start. An Extension Demonstration and Education Area has also been designated. A farm manager, part-time field help, and marketing support are being mobilized through the RC&D to implement the farming operations. Continued community and volunteer support has already been amazing and is critical for the ongoing success of the farm.



Conceptual plan developed by the working group. A high-quality version is available at www.fwcrccd.org

Non-Profit Management Entity

The RC&D will develop and manage the working revenue-producing farm with some initial assistance from Manatee County. The RC&D has a purpose that is designated as public benefit through its non-profit status and also has a non-competitive relationship with private sector businesses. The plan is that the RC&D will provide a solid foundation for the project, while transitioning to the formation of a separate nonprofit to manage and finance the farm long-term. The RC&D will also be developing a long-range phased plan for the strategic financial independence of the farm, which will be reflected in the annual support projections with a target date for ending County support.

Target Date for First Harvest



The desired goal for a small first harvest on the farm is fall of 2007, which is an ambitious timeline. To follow the progress on the Geraldson Community Farm or get involved, please visit the website established by the RC&D for this project. There is a survey for people who would like to make recommendations or get on the list for potential memberships in the CSA operation, as well as a farm e-Newsletter.

For more information, please feel free to visit the RC&D website at www.fwcrccd.org or call the office at (941) 723-3252.