THE EVERGREEN COMMUNITY FARM

(3)

A PROPOSAL SUBMITTED BY

THE ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN PROGRAM 11-24-71

Members of the Evergreen community, particularly students and faculty in the Environmental Design program, have shown a strong desire to create an organic farm. There have been several meetings held at which ideas have been generated and developed. At this point, we, "the farm group", are submitting a request for the use of the property and building facilities at the corner of Lewis and Simmons roads. This land was a small farm prior to the development of The Evergreen State College. A boundary survey, included in this proposal, has been completed.

The Evergreen community farm is to be an organic farm modeled after the Santa Cruz and the J.I. Rodale experimental farms. These are both classical examples of working experimental farms. Organic means that no chemical fertilizers or pesticides are used and that the machinery is muscle-powered (animal and/or human) and/or a non-polluting form of energy.

SCOPE

Because the production of food is the very basis of human existence and because any agricultural endeavor involves altering the natural environment, this farm is a vital experiment for our program that is concerned with designing in harmony with the environment. The prime consideration of organic farming is sound ecological planning, i.e. altering the natural environment constructively. For example, it is necessary to conserve proper soil fauna

through composting to maintain the health and productivity of the soil. Environmental study and design will be one of the main responsibilities and learning experiences of the farm group.

PURPOSE

The farm is intended to serve as a learning resource area where new ideas and skills can be developed. Improved methods for farming organically, such as alternatives to chemical fertilizers and pesticides, can be explored. Initially, the farm project will be limited to basic research and building projects - soil and vegetation surveys, repairs to or removal of existing structures, land-use studies. As additional information is gathered and as skills develop, the farm and people and projects will expand beyond the basics of farming into areas such as new insect resistant strains of crops. The farm has long range potentials for studies in future years when more land can be put into production, animals can be obtained, new structures can be erected and flowers can be grown.

GOVERNANCE

Governance of the farm project will be by general consensus, or collective opinion, of the farm community. This form is adopted since the farm will be run as a community. The people, i.e. community, making the decisions will be those putting time and energy into the project and who have a working knowledge of the farm. This form of governance, rather than by committee, will facilitate the involvement of all members of the farm community in the decision making processes - a valuable learning experience - and consequently increase the knowledge base for these decisions. It will eliminate communication

problems through group fragmentation; the knowledge isolation that results will be removed. All activities will be posted in order to insure that any interested member of the college community may participate. The Olympia community will serve as an important resource area. Since the farm is a part of the college, the farm group will be held directly accountable to The Evergreen State College administration, faculty and students.

PELIMINARY SCHEDULE

I) ECOLOGICAL PLANNING

Develop a land-use plan consisting of (a) soil survey, (b) land survey of boundaries and contours (one foot intervals), (c) location and condition of buildings and other structures, (d) water drainage, (e) catalog of plant life and wildlife habitat types. This information will be cataloged by overlay maps patterned after Ian McHarg's techniques described in Design with Nature. These studies will be used as our reference for land-use decisions, dovetailing into a planting plan for spring. This plan will include a map of how the farm will look after planting (size and location of fields, crop location, type of planting style used, where other farm functions will occur). Presently, there is a contour and boundary map of the farm (included in this proposal). Soil and drainage surveys are in progress as well as an evaluation of existing structures.

II) COMPOSTING

In order to build up an adequate supply of compost by spring, a winter composting method will be started the first week of December. This includes remodeling one of the outbuildings as a compost shelter since composting must be done inside during the winter to maintain necessary heat. A garbage shredder musy be constructed in order to break down large pieces of garbage to facilitate faster decomposition. Because it is already late in the year, it is imperative that we begin immediately to allow sufficient time for decomposition processes. Plans to gather organic refuse from the school are under way with Bill Kenworthy.

1971-72

The Evergreen Community Organic Farm

The Evergreen Community Organic Farm project was initiated in October by a group of students from Environmental Design and other programs. The students spent Fall Quarter organizing themselves, locating a suitable site on campus, and preparing a plan that presented their goals and proposed means of achieving these. During those early months, participation reached as high as 35 to 40 students; however, as students settled into different courses of study, this number stabilized at 8 to 12 regular workers.

An eleven-acre abandoned farmstead on Lewis Road was chosen for the organic farm site. The area included an old farmhouse and a realtively new, small barn. Several of the cleared acres were well-suited for cultivation.

During Winter Quarter the students spent their time gearing up for the action of Spring Quarter. They made contact with the Agricultural Extension Service and visited their offices. A series of lectures was also given by the area agronomist and representatives from the Puyallup Experimental Station. A number of books and articles were read, and discussions held about them. Time was also given to developing a scheme for rehabilitating the farmhouse.

As spring approached, the "doing" phase began. Seeds were ordered, and the field was plowed and rototilled. Irrigation lines were laid, the well pump was repaired, and work on the farmhouse was begun.

The students had agreed to practice companion planting. One test area was also to be set aside as a "disaster plot" in which improper combinations of plants would be used. Unfortunately, because of the large area under cultivation and the small number of workers, the disaster plot never became a reality.

The soil was enriched with chicken and horse manure. Bone meal and lime were also added based on soil test results. Planting was done during April and May. Straw mulching was used to minimize the weeding chores. Two hives of bees were also set up near the garden.

Study emphasis during the Spring was on biological and organic control of pests and disease. Other faculty visited the farm and shared their knowledge with us. The only insect pest that proved unmanageable was the root maggot that bothered the turnips and radishes. However, the infestation affected only a small percentage of the plants.

Financial support for the farm was provided in part by the Environmental Design program. However, most of the funding was through the Student Activities monies. Several strategies were discussed by the project members to make the farm effort self-sustaining financially. Santa Cruz was used as the model and in accordance with their work, many flower bulbs and seeds were purchased with the intent of deriving a cash return through the sale of cut flowers. Another scheme was to sell the farm produce to employees and students at TESC and to organic food stores. Nothing has transpired along these lines to date. In the meanwhile, a proposed budget for 1972-73 has been submitted to the Student Activities Review Board.

A continuing problem for the farm project has centered on communications and decision-making. Various flyers and notices were posted in the Library throughout the year announcing meetings, need for help, tools, etc. A large TECOF calendar was maintained on the wall in the main lobby of the Library. In addition a farm log has been kept which records and dates all of the activities at the farm, expecially those of Spring Quarter. This should serve as a guide for future participants by showing what worked and what resources and references were useful.

During Fall and Winter, meetings were held on an ad hoc basis, however this caused confusion and concern in terms of making binding decisions for the project. During Spring Quarter regular decision-making meetings were held once a week with the understanding that these would be the proper mechanisms for discussing issues

and resolving any problems. Anyone who chose not to attend, in fact, forfeited his/her right to participate in any decisions made during the meetings.

The future of the farm is a question mark at the present. All of the core participants from this past year have been graduated or are leaving the area. Two caretakers have been attending to the farm chores this summer, but they, too, will be leaving in the Fall. Hopefully, a new group of students will move in to continue the effort and, ideally, an academic home will also be found for the project, either in a coordinated studies program or contracts.

In conclusion the farm project was generally successful and provided an extremely rich learning experience for the participants. In the future it should continue to provide a valuable focus for a wide range of specific areas of interest, especially in the natural sciences.

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