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## News

### Old Bethpage's Restoration Farm Offers Residents Locally Grown Organic Produce

By Denise Nash

Nassau County recently signed a contract for the creation of "Restoration Farm," a privately run, economically viable organic vegetable farm at county owned Old Bethpage Village Restoration.

The county signed a six-year use and occupancy permit contract with Restoration Farmers, LLC, a new company formed by Daniel Holmes and Caroline Fanning, two young but



Daniel Holmes and Caroline Fanning

experienced Long Island farmers. Under the agreement, Restoration Farm will sell its produce to the public through a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program. For use of the land, Restoration Farm will pay a percentage of its revenue to Nassau County.

CSA is a new agricultural model built upon the relationship between farmer and consumer. CSA farms are partially or entirely supported by members who pay in advance for weekly distributions of fresh produce.

By accepting the possibility that certain crops may do poorly or even fail, members share in the inherent risks of farming. This model demonstrates a commitment to the farmer, and it allows small farms to thrive in otherwise

unfavorable conditions. Given the alarming disappearance of farmland on Long Island and across the nation, more and more people are abandoning the supermarket and joining CSAs.

CSA is the cornerstone of all operations at Restoration Farm. Crops are selected to maintain a steady and varied supply of produce throughout the growing season.

Creation of the farm was initiated by Nassau County Executive Thomas Suozzi as part of "Healthy Nassau," his campaign to make Nassau the "healthiest county in the nation." The campaign builds upon existing initiatives and adds new ones to sustain a healthy environment and encourage healthy living.

"This is a wonderful opportunity to re-introduce farming at Old Bethpage Village Restoration, which gives visitors a glimpse into our past, so it's a perfect site for the county's organic farm," said Suozzi. "After all, before synthetic and toxic chemicals were introduced into agriculture, all farms were organic."

Daniel Holmes, born and raised in Bay Shore, has been farming since 1999. He got his start at the Poughkeepsie Farm Project, a 7-acre organic CSA on the grounds of Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, NY. In 2003, he returned to Long Island to become the head grower of Sophia Garden, a 1.5-acre organic CSA in Amityville. "At Sophia Garden, the CSA always had a waiting list," he said. "I'm sure we'll find a market for our produce here at Restoration Farm. The challenge will be to make a living at it, but that's the opportunity we've been waiting for."

Caroline Fanning grew up in Amityville and was introduced to organic farming in the Hudson Valley. While attending Vassar College, she interned at the Poughkeepsie Farm Project in Poughkeepsie, the Common Ground Farm in Wappingers Falls, and the Creed Ankony Farm in Rhinebeck. After graduating in 2004, she worked for World Hunger Year, a New York City nonprofit addressing food and hunger issues. She joined Holmes at Sophia Garden in Amityville in 2006.

"Organic is going mainstream, and as that happens, many people are becoming skeptical of its standards. There's just no way of knowing the truth about an organic apple shipped from thousands of miles away," said Holmes. "Buying locally grown food allows you to talk to the farmer and even visit the farm. You can see what's actually going on. That's why farmers markets and CSAs have become so popular."

Restoration Farm will abide by the organic principles outlined in the Farmer's Pledge of the Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York (NOFA-NY), which is an organization of consumers, gardeners and farmers creating a sustainable regional food system, which is ecologically sound and economically viable. Through demonstration and education, they promote land stewardship, organic food production and local marketing. NOFA-NY is one of seven northeastern state organizations that work together. They are governed by a volunteer board of farmers, consumers and gardeners whose officers are elected by the general membership and they are a non-profit educational organization supported by membership dues and contributions.

For Holmes and Fanning, running a successful farm means resourcefulness, hard work and being in the right place at the right time. "Back in March, we were ready to either give up or move to Nebraska - that's how dismal our chances at running a sustainable farm on Long Island seemed," said Holmes. "But then this opportunity came along, and we jumped at it."

While Nassau County has several farmers markets and CSA pickup sites, development pressures have pushed farms within the county to virtual extinction. Most of the food now sold at those markets and CSA pickup sites is brought in from eastern Long Island or upstate. Restoration Farm is one of the few places where Nassau residents can buy locally grown produce.

Though many CSAs operate as nonprofits and rely on grant funding to supplement their budgets, Holmes and Fanning chose to incorporate as a limited liability company. "We knew that if we wanted to make a career of farming, we'd have to make it sustainable financially as well as environmentally," said Fanning. "Does that mean we'd turn down a grant if it was offered to us? Of course not. We just wouldn't want the farm's success to depend on it."

The farm encompasses seven non-contiguous acres at the southern tip of Nassau County's Old Bethpage Village Restoration, which is modeled on a 19th-century village. Restoration Farm will be a separate operation using modern organic methods and technology. The larger fields will be planted with annual vegetables, while the smaller, irregular pieces will be reserved for perennial gardens, greenhouses, tool sheds, and compost. "I think the presence of a modern farm will enhance the Old Bethpage experience," said Fanning. "It will help people remember that farming is not just a thing of the past."

Upon learning in mid-May that they had won the county's bid competition for the farm, Holmes and Fanning began extensive planning and preparation efforts for the new venture, as they ironed out permit details with the county.

Now, with the signed permit and official go-ahead secured, Holmes and Fanning will spend the remainder of 2007 preparing their fields for 2008, when farm operations begin full force. They are also planting a small garden for a limited 2007 harvest to help build momentum for the farm.

Restoration Farm is now accepting members for its 2008 CSA. From June through November, members will receive weekly shares of produce at the farm. Full shares, which are picked up every week, are recommended for families of 4-6. Half shares, which are picked up every other week, are recommended for families of 2-3.

Restoration farm is located at 1303 Round Swamp Road in Old Bethpage. Please e-mail [info@restorationfarm.com](mailto:info@restorationfarm.com) or visit [www.restorationfarm.com](http://www.restorationfarm.com) for more information.



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