

**University of Massachusetts - Amherst**

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**From the SelectedWorks of Madeleine K. Charney**

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## Community Saves Farm From Jaws of Development — Feeds Self Instead

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## COMMUNITY/WORLD

# Community Saves Farm From Jaws Of Development, Feeds Self Instead

By Madeleine Charney

As the fertile Pioneer Valley looks on, valuable Massachusetts farm land is permanently snatched away and lost to development. Fortunately, there are forces afoot to counter that tragic trend.

The North Amherst Community Farm (NACF), a non profit land trust, launched a new CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) in North Amherst, MA this spring. The 38-acre property boasts views of Mt. Warner, walking trails, a wetland stream, and a wildlife corridor. The group's vision includes creating more equitable access to fresh, organic produce for the 10,000 people living within a 1-1/2 mile radius of the farm.

But more than that, NACF plans to strengthen the bonds within this diverse community through its educational and cultural programming, raising awareness of the connection between food production and distribution and the health of the environment. Their right-hand man: Vegetable

farmer, Jeremy Barker-Plotkin.

## HEALTH-CONSCIOUS FARMER SEARCH OF LIKE-MINDED FARMER

Last spring Jeremy was driving around with an eye for farming opportunities when he spied Dan Gallagher founding a "Looking for Farmer" sign in the ground. After a lengthy process of sorting through proposals from various farmers, Jeremy and his wife Audrey were selected as the right match for the project. Their operation, Simple Gifts Farm, was already established in Belchertown, and has now been transferred to the new CSA site.

Joining the Barker-Plotkins are Marcy Lowy, veterinarian, and her husband Dave Tepler, livestock farmer, who will raise grass-fed animals on the land for meat and eggs. Rotating the livestock pastures with the organic vegetables fields will maintain healthier soil and reduce pests.

## HARD WORK PAYS OFF

Gallagher, co-president of NACF and an Amherst resident, was one of the early participants who took action when the property was slated for the development chopping block. Economic conditions pushed the owners, the Dziekanowski family, to sell the family farm. The fetching price: \$1.2 million. However, NACF was able to turn the project into a different animal.

According to Steve Dunn, NACF's other co-president, donations from at least 250 contributors amounted to nearly \$140,000. In addition, the Town of Amherst contributed \$100,800 from Community Preservation Act funds. Bundled together with \$355,000 from the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources, development rights will be jointly held by the town and the state. The Dziekanowskis, who could have asked a higher price from developers, offered an additional \$600,000 in the form of a 30-year low-interest loan. They made this choice to assure that the land would be farmed in perpetuity.

Says Dunn, "The value of the land greatly exceeds what a farm operation can generate." For that reason, he encourages community members to continue their support with hands-on assistance as well as mon-



Dave Tepler (left) will raise livestock while Jeremy Barker-Plotkin (right) will raise produce for the new North Amherst Community Farm CSA. Photo by Jonathan von Ransan

etary assistance. Do you like to write or take photographs? Then you might like to contribute to the farm's newsletter. Do you relish physical activity? Consider helping with building and maintenance projects. Computer savvy? The website needs maintaining. Organizing fundraising is another area where more heads and hands are greatly needed.

## THIS LAND IS YOUR LAND, THIS LAND IS MY LAND

Hosts of people in the community have been stepping up to the plate, donating expertise, labor and time. Bruce Coldham of Coldham Architects, LLC will advise on the construction and renovation of buildings. Shaul Perry of Sunwood Builders volunteered to build a farm stand where produce will be sold to passersby. Ruth Hazard, of the Department of Plant, Soil and Insect Sciences at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst has been instrumental in the hiring process and defining the terms of the lease.

"It is this collective, grass roots effort that's making [the farm] work," Dunn emphasized. He also credited the non profit organization Equity Trust for their dedication to educating NACF about economic options and strategies. Like NACF, Equity Trusts views economics as a web of relationships, the relationship of individuals to one another, the communities that we live within, and the earth that sustains us.

To that end, plans are already underway for a children's garden and ongoing projects with two local elementary schools. Commu-

nity members will be exposed to ecological innovations such as the use of renewable energy as the farm installs photovoltaics for heating buildings, a compost-heated greenhouse, and Jeremy Barker-Plotkin's own "grease truck," which is fueled by used cooking oil.

## SHARE AND SHARE ALIKE

CSA Shares are offered on a sliding-scale basis, from \$375-\$425 with produce and meat available June through October. The goal is to recruit 100 members this season and increase to up to 200 in the future. Work shares will allow ten eligible members to work in exchange for a reduced rate. All members are encouraged to contribute one harvest shift, thereby reducing the workload for the farmers and increasing their sense of connection to the land.

North Amherst Community Farm is located at 1089 North Pleasant Street, Amherst, MA 01002. For information about the CSA, contact Jeremy Barker-Plotkin at jbp@thespa.com or 413-323-8468. For information about contributing time or funds, call 413-549-0722 or visit NACF's website at [www.nacfonline.org/](http://www.nacfonline.org/).

Madeleine Charney is Information Resources Manager with the New England Small Farm Institute and a member of the Small Farm Quarterly Editorial Team. She can be reached at [madeleinec@smallfarm.org](mailto:madeleinec@smallfarm.org) or 413-323-4531. This article first appeared in the NOFA Mass News May-June 2006, and is used with permission.

Coming soon to  
NACF

Simple Gifts Farm

CSA  
Shares Available  
[jbp@the-spa.com](http://jbp@the-spa.com)

The Barker-Plotkins kept their business name, Simple Gifts Farm, and transferred it from Belchertown to the new site in North Amherst.

Check out Cornell's  
Small Farms Web Site!  
[www.smallfarms.cornell.edu](http://www.smallfarms.cornell.edu)

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## FARM FOLLIES

### You Know You're a Farmer When...

- Your animals live in more expensive buildings than you do.
- You can remember the fertilizer rates, seeding rates, and yields on your farm for the past 10 years, but you forget your wife's birthday.
- More than half of your clothing comes from fertilizer or seed dealers.
- Your dog rides in the truck more than your wife.
- Weddings and other family events are planned around planting and harvesting.
- Friends buy a house with a two-acre garden, and you calculate how many bushels of corn it would grow.
- Your wife finds nuts and bolts in the bottom of her handbag instead of loose change.
- An afternoon off means getting up four hours earlier.



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