

Planting SEEDS

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A potluck dinner set for Wednesday will help bring attention to a program designed to help foster environmental stewardship and sustainable agriculture.

SEEDS — Social Entrepreneurship Environmental Design and Sustainability — was started this past year by St. Olaf College Class of 1982 alumnus and Northfield residents, Greg and Nancy Carlson.

The Carlsons started the program by purchasing 50 acres of land south of Northfield.



St. Olaf SEEDS intern Chelsea Wagner displays harvested produce she and Natasha Hegmann, another intern, helped plant and grow. (Photo courtesy of Natasha Hegmann)

“This year has been an experiment for me and Nancy and some other people. We have learned a great deal. Now, we’re able to reflect on what went well and improve on what needs work,” said Greg Carlson.

There are a variety of projects happening on the 50 acres of farm land — including community family gardens, charity gardens, a honey business, chickens and pigs coming in next week — but the SEEDS program focuses on St. Olaf interns from the Leaders for Social Change summer program.

Intern tasks center around growing, planting and selling produce along with taking care of the chickens and connecting with other growers in the community and charitable gardens.

“The students are learning economics, marketing, they’re blogging, they’re telling the story. There is a whole array of learning,” said Nancy Carlson.

Though this is the first year of the SEEDS internship, the interns have succeeded in sales negotiations with the Just Foods Co-op, Bon Appetit food services at St. Olaf and other farms.

They will also start cooking classes at the Community Action Center and are in talks with two retirement communities to have produce stands on certain mornings. They also sell their produce in downtown Northfield at the Riverwalk Market Fair every Saturday in the summer, said Natasha Hegmann, summer SEEDS intern.

A community potluck is scheduled for Wednesday, where the interns will serve homemade bread.

“I’m really excited (to be a part of SEEDS) because there is not much emphasis on the value of agriculture and manual labor at St. Olaf. I’m proud to be a part of (SEEDS). Sometimes it’s tough being the guinea pig, but there is definitely a lot of room for even more student involvement,” said Hegmann.

The other parts of the Carlson land are being used by eight other families to create gardens for their own produce. An agri-preneurship program started by Reginaldo Haslett-Marroquin also allows two Latino families to use part of the tracts of land to start new produce-based businesses.

Greg Carlson said that this inaugural year 10 families used the land, but he hopes up to 30 families can eventually grow food for the community and themselves. He also hopes to start a volunteer program connected to the charity gardens — whose produce is given to the local food shelf.

“A lot of (our health care problems) revolve around not eating well. If we can create a space or an environment where people eat well and the reason they eat well is because they enjoy the land and they connect what they’re eating to where it is actually coming from, we’ll be healthier as individuals, healthier as a community and healthier as a country,” he said.

“We hope this grows into something bigger. It really is about community building. In today’s world with food being shipped from all over — and who knows how healthy it really is — we know where it comes from. It’s part of a bigger movement that’s happening all around us,” said Nancy Carlson.

Rachel Torgerson is an intern for the Northfield News. Reach her at 645-1115.

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SEEDS OPEN HOUSE & POTLUCK

WHERE: On the SEEDS farm, south of Northfield on 115th street.

WHEN: Garden tour will start at 5:30 p.m. on Aug. 4 and dinner will be served at 6 p.m.

BRING: A plate, utensils and a dish to share.

FOR INFORMATION AND DIRECTIONS: Visit <http://www.seeds2010.wordpress.com>