



Newsletter



Somerton Tanks Farm is the product of a partnership between the **Philadelphia Water Department (PWD)** and the **Institute for Innovations in Local Farming (Institute)** a 501 (c) (3) non-profit corporation. In 2001 PWD and the Institute merged their strategic planning and agriculture expertise to work toward their shared vision of a greener City, to help protect the city's waterways and to attract sustainable agriculture businesses to Philadelphia.

PWD is an award-winning, nationally respected public utility. The Department takes a comprehensive approach to develop and implement solutions to urban water pollution problems. The Institute is a volunteer run, non-profit organization dedicated to developing sub-acre farming techniques and providing training and support to urban farmers.

News of the success at Somerton Tanks Demonstration Farm is spreading. This year we were honored to receive official visits and enthusiastic support from **State Representative Susan E. Cornell** and **US Representative Allyson Y. Schwartz**.

Somerton Tanks Farm was mentioned in The WorldWatch Institute's 2005 publication *Eat Here: Reclaiming Homegrown Pleasures in a Global Supermarket*, by Brian Halweil.



Photo by Nicole Shelly

Do You Want to Purchase Fine Chemical Free Vegetables and Become a Part of This Success Story?

You can become involved by joining our **Community Supported Agriculture** program or by patronizing our stands at farmers markets and at the farm. For details on where and how to buy farm produce please email nicoleshelly@hotmail.com



Photo by Jen Leary

We did it, and two years ahead of schedule. When we set out to prove the financial viability of urban agriculture in 2003, we established a goal of \$50,000 per year in gross sales from a half acre. This goal was to be achieved by the end of 2007. Agricultural experts said it could not be done, and their skepticism was warranted because average sales from a half acre on a conventional multi-acre farm in Pennsylvania is \$3,000. But in 2005, during the nine month season, we produced \$52,200 from our half acre.

The Project is becoming a magnet and a resource for entrepreneurs seeking to blend their city lifestyles with a farming

profession; for community organizations seeking ways to bring nutritious food and more greenery to their neighborhoods; for rural farmers seeking to coax more out of their fields; and for public officials and policy makers seeking ways to regenerate and build sustainability into our cities.

What began as a slow conversion process among diverse stakeholders is becoming a spectacular collaboration. Together we are writing a new chapter in Philadelphia's economic and agricultural history.

Feasibility Study – Conceptualizing The Future Urban Agriculture Industry

The Pennsylvania Department of Community & Economic Development has provided a crucial tool for actualizing our vision of a future agriculture economy. They have awarded the Institute a First Industries Planning Grant to research the impact that a thriving agricultural industry would have on Philadelphia.



Senator Michael Stack spearheaded an effort to acquire significant State funding.

Photo by Kacie King



Representative Sue Cornell visited the farm with Institute President Roxanne Christensen and PWD Director of Economic Development Nancy Weissman.

land to identify sites suitable for conversion to agricultural use. The Institute has hired Urban Partners, an expert economic development consulting firm, to perform much of this research.

We received tireless support from **Senator Michael J. Stack and his staff** to help us acquire this significant grant. Vital assistance was also provided by **Senator Vincent Fumo, Representative Sue Cornell, the PA Department of Agriculture, the PA Department of Environmental Resources, Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences, the US Natural Resources Conservation Services, Philadelphia Commerce Department, Farm to City and the Food Trust.**

The feasibility study will evaluate and document the economic, environmental and community impact of an agricultural economy, determine the smallest site size and the minimal amount of labor needed to run a self-sustaining farm business, identify the steps and supports necessary to bring this new industry to life in Philadelphia, develop some of the basic tools needed to establish a foundation for commercial farming and conduct a survey of vacant

Photo by Nicole Shelly



Family Dinners – A Note from CSA Member David Biddle

When early spring rolls around, dinnertime discussions in our family often turn to two things: first of all, we start talking baseball (all three boys play); second, we begin to fantasize about the upcoming growing season at Somerton Tank Farms and all the exotic, fresh, organic vegetables we will receive at the Mt. Airy CSA every Tuesday evening. We know that it's only a matter of time before we can begin cooking Somerton Tank spinach omelets and burritos. Luscious baby spinach and olive salads are also a favorite late evening snack after baseball games. And we love grilled beef and pork roasts covered with heaps of sautéed kale, broccoli raab, and mustard and turnip greens.

By autumn, with baseball winding down, we carefully savor our food from Somerton Tank Farms. We know that our weekly trips to the CSA are numbered and that soon we will return to the dreary life of traditional city dwellers, dependent upon veggies from stores and markets. Cold, snowy days are coming. We put away our bats and gloves, and dream of next season filled with fresh, crisp greens, homeruns and perfectly fielded grounders.

A New Method for a New Era of Farming

In partnership with PWD, the Institute operates the Somerton Tanks Demonstration Farm which serves as the test bed for the SPIN farming method. **SPIN** (for **S**mall **P**lot **I**ntensive) takes the conflicts posed by increasing urbanization and limited space and turns them to the farmer's advantage.

SPIN is the secret to our success. Our half acre is separated into 280 individual plots many of which are planted and harvested 3 to 5 times each season. One challenge this presents is how to retain healthy soil. Our sophisticated crop rotation system does just that, along with cover cropping and generous use of compost. The SPIN method, the knowledge, well-honed skills and hard work of **Farmers Nicole and Steve Shelly**, and the strong support from trainees and volunteers, together produce the tasty, nutritious vegetables enjoyed by our many customers.

More information is available through rchristensen@infocommercegroup.com

Somerton Tanks Farm

2005 Trainee Mira Kilpatrick and Volunteer Gerard Olson

On the Farm by Mira

The season is winding down. Especially for me: my first year traineeship is over soon. I've been looking forward to a break, but dread leaving the work I love, good food, and of course, Nicole and Steve. The weather has been cool and breezy and beautiful since Autumn has graced us with her presence, there have been some particularly gorgeous days on the farm. And things are slowing down, allowing us to focus on end of season farm tasks. Cleaning up, seeding cover crop, planting GARLIC! And most exceptional, working on the hoop house.

It's not entirely simple - revisiting, geometry and mathematical theorems, not to mention the grunt work of driving so many pipes into the ground. Steve keeps mentioning John Henry. But it's all really exciting in regard to Somerton and my future farming endeavors as well. It's been a hard season, but completely inspiring and fulfilling. I've learned so much, have much more direction than when I started and know more than ever that this line of work is where I want to be. It's been nice to be near my parents, farming with good people, cooking for hours with my boyfriend and sleeping hard with the sandman. Nothing beats it.

Mira successfully completed her 2005 in-field training. As part of the Somerton Tanks program she is now enrolled in "Tilling the Soil of Opportunity", a small business development course for agricultural entrepreneurs. In 2006, Mira will return to our field as an Assistant Farmer where sub-acre farm business management will be emphasized.

Our thanks to the Philadelphia Workforce Development Corporation for their 2005 financial support of the Somerton Tanks Farmer Training Program



Photo by Nicole Shelly

STF's 2005 FABULOUS TEAM MEMBERS

Our thanks to you for helping to make this project a success

Funders

Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture
 Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development
 Philadelphia Workforce Development Corporation
 The Honorable Michael J. Stack, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Senate
 The US Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Services

Partners

Andropogon Associates
 David Biddle
 Jody Bradwell, Esq.
 Campbell Thomas & Co. Architects
 The Honorable Susan E. Cornell, Commonwealth of PA House of Representatives
 Nancy Adams Drye, CFRE
 Fair Food Project
 Farm to City
 Farmers Market Alliance
 The Food Trust
 The Honorable Vincent J. Fumo, Commonwealth of PA Senate
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 Harmony Essentials

Johnny's Seeds
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 Market Gardening Concepts
 Metropolitan Bakery
 Mt Airy Greening Network
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 Philadelphia City Planning Commission
 Philadelphia Commerce Department
 Philadelphia School District
 SE Pennsylvania Resource Conservation & Development Council
 Abby Pozefsky

RSquared Video
 Amy Semenuk
 Somerton Civic Association
 Betsy Teutsch
 US Department of Agriculture - Agricultural Research Service

Volunteers

Larissa Kilpatrick
 Elizabeth Kriso
 Gerard Olson
 Tom and Barb Shelly
 Judith and Dave Weiner
 Betty and Dave Weissman
 Abigail Wright
 Ned Wolff



Photo by Nicole Shelly

Photo by Nicole Shelly



The farm's new hoophouse.

Growing Beyond \$52,200

We will continue to push for greater revenue from the demonstration farm. Towards this effort the **Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture** has awarded us a grant to purchase two hoophouses in which we will conduct cold weather growing experiments. A hoophouse is simply an unheated, plastic and metal structure that is taken down during warm weather.

In November 2005 **Farmers Nicole and Steve Shelly, trainee Mira Kilpatrick and volunteers Gerard Olson and Abigail Wright** constructed our 14' x 96' hoophouse on top of the one-half acre field. Once we master the challenges of strong winds and icy temperatures we predict that revenue will increase to well over \$60,000 per year - without increasing the "foot-print" of the field.

Somerton Tanks Farm
 c/o The Institute for Innovations in Local Farming
 2220 Kater Street
 Philadelphia, PA 19146

Agri-Tourism Comes to Philadelphia

In 2005 over 140 people visited the farm. Tour groups were sponsored by the Greater Philadelphia Tourism & Marketing Council, the Delaware Nature Society, the Culinary Guild and the Sustainable Agriculture Internship Training Alliance. Visitors have traveled from Western Pennsylvania, New York, Vermont, Ohio and Delaware just to see the farm.

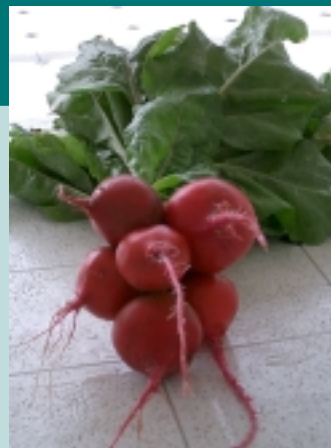


Photo by Nicole Shelly

Institute's President Speaks at PASA

In February, 2006, the Institute's **Roxanne Christensen**, along with **Wally Satzewich** and **Gail Vandersteen** (our agricultural advisers and the masterminds behind the SPIN method), spoke at the Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture's annual conference in State College.

An overflow crowd of 130 farmers filled the room to learn about the unique techniques that have made Somerton Tanks Demonstration Farm so financially productive. The speakers detailed how SPIN can help professional farmers maximize revenue, and how it eliminates the two big barriers to entry in farming: sizable acreage and substantial start-up capital. You can find more information about the SPIN technique at spinfarming.com.



Photos by Nicole Shelly

PWD's Public Education Program

This year the Philadelphia Water Department's Public Education Unit introduced a new Water and Soil program based at Somerton Tanks Farm. Targeted to school students, the program teaches how land use affects water quality, environmental health and human health. For more information call 215-685-4935.

