

Salona Farm

McLean's own productive, ecologically sustainable and financially self-sustaining farm in the center of town whose mission is to donate 50% of the harvest to local people who otherwise would not have access to fresh produce, with all operating expenses derived through Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) memberships offering fresh, well-grown produce to families in McLean.

This project would meet and exceed the goals for a community park, and additionally would have the long range goals of:

- Educating students and supporting future farmers
- Creating a network of local public and private open space conserved through active farming use
- Bringing fresh produce into schools
- Increasing the wider community's connection to food and the land generally.



Core Elements

Community-Building

- The farm would be a center of community and identity for McLean, serving as a living reminder of the area's historical and cultural past; would offer people a place to pick their own produce; and would connect people to the land and their food in a way no other project can.
- The project would include a visitors' center/CSA building for farm activities but would also be a gathering place offering historical and environmental interpretation, a location for festivals, workshops, events, classes, etc.
- The project would still support normal park uses such as picnics, gatherings, informal recreation, walking paths along tree-lines, preserved meadow space, or whatever features the community desires.

Core Elements

Conservation Supported by Farming

- The mission of the Willistown Conservation Trust in Pennsylvania is:
 - “to preserve and manage the open land, rural character, scenic, recreational, historic, agricultural and natural resources...and to share these unique resources with people of all ages and backgrounds to inspire, educate and develop a lifelong commitment to the land and the natural world.”
 - They started a farm, and found that there “would be very few things that could help us more in achieving the mission of preserving land and connecting people to it personally than getting into the farming business.”



Core Elements

Vegetable Farm

- The vegetable farm would be the “public face” of the Salona Vegetable Farm's agricultural operations where people could come pick vegetables or walk around the farm, and where the farm would interface with the community as a center of social and environmental awareness.
- Production area:
 - At least two acres would be needed at Salona.
 - Another 6-12 acres could be either at Salona or at any nearby location so long as the land could be used by the Salona Farm organization under a long-term arrangement.
 - For example, other Park Authority land could be allocated to a Salona Farm project and most of the Salona land could be allocated for other park uses.



Core Elements

Vegetable Farm – Local Food for McLean

- Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is a program where farms sell “shares” of the farm's harvest to people who sign up to come and pick up their fresh produce each week.



- Half of the produce grown on the farm would be sold through a 220-member CSA, providing the McLean community with fresh, high-quality produce.

CSA proceeds would cover annual operating costs!

Core Elements

Vegetable Farm – Helping the Wider Community

- The other half of the farm's harvest (25 – 30 thousand pounds) would be given to **Food for Others** for distribution to our financially struggling neighbors who otherwise would not have access to fresh produce.
- **Food for Others** is Northern Virginia's largest distributor of food directly to people in need. They are excited about this project and they have the infrastructure to handle this volume of produce. Donating half of the harvest would increase the amount of produce they are able to distribute by about 25% - and would represent an infinite increase in food freshness and quality!



Core Elements

Vegetable Farm – Education

- The Salona Farm organization could offer school children and the general public educational programming of virtually any scope and variety:
 - One-time visits, outreach programs to school classrooms, specific class projects, collegiate study, etc.
 - Offering these programs at Salona would allow them to tie in with the whole of Salona's cultural and environmental history.
- Farm-to-school:
 - Fresh, locally-grown vegetables could enhance school lunch programs.
 - Chris Guerre, at the National School Farms Foundation, is working to get fresh produce into schools.
 - Chris would handle this aspect of the farm's programming and has even offered **\$10,000** in startup funds for this project.



Core Elements

Fairfax County Farm Network

A network of public and private land returned to agricultural use under the Salona umbrella.

This project requires long-term, highly-visible base of operations: Salona, and McLean, would be this key catalyst.

- The Salona Farm organization would partner with conservation organizations to leverage the success of the farm at Salona and its visibility as a public project of McLean to encourage land-owners to conserve their land through sustainable agricultural use.
- Fairfax County and the Park Authority own thousands of acres suitable for agriculture.
- These plots, as small as $\frac{1}{4}$ acre, would be managed by future farmers who would gain invaluable experience farming with the critical support and infrastructure of a long-term, established farm at Salona.
- *Chris Guerre currently farms on private land in Great Falls, knows other land-owners who have already expressed interest in having their land farmed, and has already been working towards returning local land to agricultural use.*

Summary

This idea IS possible!

- McLean CAN support this plan, which would benefit the local community, Fairfax County as a whole, and which would serve as a national model of sustainability.
- And yet, Salona would still function as a public park
- All operating expenses would be covered by revenue generated through farm production.



Salona Farm:

McLean's own productive, ecologically- and financially-sustainable farm in the center of town whose mission is to donate 50% of the harvest to local people who otherwise would not have access to fresh produce, with all operating expenses derived through CSA memberships offering fresh, well-grown produce to families in McLean. This project would meet and exceed the goals for a community park, and additionally have the long-range goals of educating students and supporting future farmers, of creating a network of local public and private open space conserved through active farming use, bringing fresh produce into schools, and increasing the wider community's connection to food and the land generally.

In the short term, Salona Farm would:

- Cultivate 6+ acres with organic, ecologically-sound methods to produce fresh, healthy, high-quality produce for over 220 families in McLean, and distribute an equal amount of food through Food for Others to people within 15 miles who lack access to fresh vegetables.
- Be a center of community and identity for McLean, serving as a living reminder of the area's historical and cultural past, offer people a place to pick their own produce any day of the week, and give people a connection to the land and their food in a way no other project can.
- Include a visitor center / CSA building for farm activities but also as a gathering place offering historical and environmental interpretation, a location for festivals, workshops, events, classes, etc.
- Host educational programs and projects for students of the numerous nearby schools.
- Not conflict with normal park uses such as picnics, gatherings, informal recreational use, walking paths along tree-lines, preserved meadow space, or whatever features the community desires.
- Certainly “remain a focal point of the McLean community and be a space for community-building activities,” as recommended in the Draft Master Plan.

In the long term:

This region is quickly becoming densely developed. In the long term the Salona Farm organization would partner with conservation organizations to leverage the success of the farm at Salona, and its visibility as a public project of McLean, to encourage land-owners to conserve their land through sustainable agricultural use and create a network of farmed land under the Salona umbrella. These plots, as small as ¼ acre, would be managed by future farmers who would gain invaluable experience farming with the critical support and infrastructure of a long-term, established farm at Salona. Fresh, locally-grown vegetables would enhance school lunch programs, which currently are woefully un-fresh and un-healthy.

Organizations expressing interest and support:

- Food for Others, Northern Virginia's largest distributor of food directly to people in need, is excited about this project and has infrastructure to handle the entire volume of produce, which would represent an increase of about 25% in the amount of produce they handle, and an infinite increase in freshness and quality. They could coordinate volunteers to assist with harvesting food.
- Chris Guerre, at the National School Farms Foundation, works towards getting fresh produce into schools and has offered \$10,000 towards startup funding. His goal is to produce vegetables on public and private open space, currently farms on private land in Great Falls, and maintains a list of potentially-suitable farming sites including current offers by two land-owners.

Known obstacles:

- Startup costs: \$75,000 for farm equipment and supplies, plus construction of a CSA distribution / “visitor center” building with parking, power, water, etc; access to greenhouse, storage barn, and metal/wood shop.
- The political timeline / compromise: Accommodating other land-use interests while retaining essential features of the farm.

Core elements of the Salona Farm organization:

Obviously, it would be ideal for all aspects of the farm to be located together at Salona, including the main crop area. However, as there are other proposed uses for parts of the park, devoting this much area to a farm project may not be feasible. Salona would have to serve as the center of the publicly-visible aspects of the farm; however, the production land could be located somewhere else nearby, with produce transported to Salona for distribution.

The following elements would HAVE to be located at Salona (perhaps in the area next to Buchanan St.):

- **Publicly-accessible farm:** This would be the “public face” of the Salona Farm's agricultural operations, where people could come pick vegetables, walk around the farm, and where the farm would interface with the community as a center of social and environmental awareness. Two acres here would be a small, but sufficient, amount of space. Six to ten acres of tilled ground would allow the entire production area to be in this public space at Salona.
- **Salona visitor center / CSA distribution building:** The farm's operations would be funded by CSA members from this area, and so the produce would need to be distributed at Salona, where people would come to pick up their vegetable shares and pick produce from the “pick-your-own” area. This building could also serve as a “visitor center” for the entire Salona Park, interpreting historical and environmental features and offering a space for meetings, presentations, events, etc.
- **Education:** Educational programs for schoolchildren and the general public would need a publicly-accessible location; offering these programs at Salona would allow them to tie in with the whole of Salona's cultural and environmental history.

If not at Salona proper, the following elements of the farm project would need to be hosted nearby (within a 20-minute drive) under a long-term, committed arrangement:

- **Main production land:** Six acres minimum (tilled every year), 12+ acres ideal to allow for a “one year on, on year off” rotation with room to grow. Two separate six-acre plots would also work for this purpose. This land could be publicly or privately owned, so long as it could be used by the Salona Farm organization under a long-term arrangement. Fairfax County, and the Park Authority, hold acres and acres of land; perhaps some of this land could be allocated to a Salona Farm project, and some of the Salona land allocated for other park uses. The Park Authority could support the publicly-beneficial farm without needing to devote the majority of the open Salona land to agricultural use.
- **Storage barn / mechanical shop / greenhouse:** Ideally, these facilities would be located at the core production land.

Rough numbers:

I would be happy to share the data behind these estimations.

- Startup costs, including tractors, equipment, and movable supplies, but not buildings: \$75,000
- Yearly operating costs, including pay for three workers, one manager's salary, and production expenses: \$160,000 (expenses covered by CSA sales)
- Number of CSA shares sold to local families to cover operating costs: 220 shares
- Pounds of food donated to Food for Others: 25,000-30,000 pounds

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