

# COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE AND THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES AS LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

## Introduction

The Dallas County Farm and Care Facility is at a crossroads in its history. Much is at stake and many issues need to be resolved. In order for the Dallas County Farm and Care Facility to survive and prosper into the future, the county must determine its priorities and goals for the farm and explore economic and marketing approaches that will allow the farm and care facility to develop a new and viable identity based on its roots. Community-supported agriculture (CSA) and the National Register of Historic Places were investigated as potential landscape management practices for the Dallas County Farm and Care Facility as part of the LA 562 course.

## Inventory and analysis

The focus of this project is on economic and marketing strategies that Dallas County can use to develop a strong concept for the county farm. In taking inventory, I zeroed in on information related to the farm's past and present economic status, marketing strategies, labor force, and products. This information was put together from class interviews with Dave Boots, Karen Smith, and Jeff Logsdon, two site visits, and newspaper articles and photographs gathered by Strauss Hsieh for the LA 562 class.

## Economic and marketing information

The Dallas County Farm and Care Facility started out as the county poor farm and produced a wide range of products. Residents worked on the farm and constituted a plentiful labor force. The farm was self-sufficient and excess farm products were sold on the market. Farm operations included dairy farming, egg and poultry production, beef and hog production, hay, corn, and oat crops, and vegetable gardens. Horses were used in farming operations.

The farm remained a strong and viable operation with a good-sized labor force until the 1980's and 90's. The increase in farm acreage coupled with a decrease in available labor led to the loss of the dairy farm operation, egg and poultry operation and the vegetable gardens.

Currently, Dave Boots is in charge of running farm operations and has three or four people from the Care Facility working for him. The current number of residents is approximately 76, most of who are elderly and unable to work on the farm. Raising cattle and hogs for meat production is the farm's main operation. When ready for the market, the cattle and hogs are sold in Marshalltown and other places. Some are reserved to provide meat for residents of the Care Facility. The crops include hay, corn and oats, which are used as feed for the farm livestock. Excess crops are sold on the regular market.

The Dallas County Farm currently makes 8 cents on the dollar according to Dave Boots. Jeff Logsdon and the County Board of Supervisors say the farm costs the county \$100,000 per year.

## Management

Through inventory and analysis, management goals for the Dallas County Farm were identified. These included the following:

- Preserving the Dallas County Farm and Care Facility's farming tradition
- Making the farm a model for research and education by increasing ties to DMACC and Iowa State University and implementing alternative farming practices
- Protecting and conserving the natural plant and animal communities on the site
- Increasing the connection between the farm, care facility residents and surrounding community
- Serving as a historical resource

Two marketing approaches were investigated as potential landscape management practices for the Dallas County Farm that could achieve these goals. Community-supported agriculture (CSA) was one and inclusion as part of the National Register of Historic Places was another.

### Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is a partnership between farmers and community members working together to create a sustainable local food system (Gradwell, DeWitt, Mayerfeld, Salvador, and Libbey 1999, p. 1). It is a marketing strategy that bypasses the middleman in food production systems, reducing costs to both farmers and community members. "CSA creates a direct economic and social partnership between food producers and local community members. This form of agriculture strengthens connections between people in the community and between people and the land" (Gradwell, DeWitt, Mayerfeld, Salvador, and Libbey 1999, p. 3).

In 1995, three CSA projects began in Iowa. By 1998, there were 25 CSA systems in the state involving more than 40 farms. These farms provided a wide variety of products including fresh vegetables, fruits, meat, fiber, and dairy products (Gradwell, DeWitt, Mayerfeld, Salvador, and Libbey 1999, p. 1).

Each CSA is different because the system is based on farm or garden location, community and farm goals and needs, and agricultural practices (Van En, Manes, and Roth 2000). There are four main types of CSA systems:

- Farmer-driven: The farmer determines the annual budget, crops, and distribution schedule and takes care of production. The members simply pay their share and pick up or receive their products.
- Member-driven: The members determine the budget, crops, and distribution schedule and hire farmers to provide their products.

- Farmer-farmer co-op: Several farms will work together to draw up the annual budget, crops, and distribution schedule. They will also take care of production and will help each other.
- Farmer-member co-op: The farmers and members share responsibilities in determining the annual budget, crops, and distribution schedule. Members will also aid in planting and harvesting operations. Sometimes, land is co-owned by the farmer and members.

All four types of CSA systems operate on the same basic principles. Organizing members of the CSA plan a budget including production, salary, distribution, and administrative costs. This will determine the number of members the CSA can support and the price of each membership or share is calculated (Gradwell, DeWitt, Mayerfeld, Salvador, and Libbey 1999, p. 2). Community members become shareholders by paying in advance for the products. CSA memberships can be paid in single or multi-payments. Prices may range from \$150 to \$800 depending on the season length and the variety and quantity of products provided. Members and shareholders typically include local families, restaurants, grocery stores, and co-ops.

Most CSA's in Iowa provide between 5 to 20 pounds of vegetables once a week for 10 to 25 weeks. Quantities average from \$5 to \$15 worth of vegetables per week for each membership share (Gradwell, DeWitt, Mayerfeld, Salvador, and Libbey 1999, p. 2).

Some CSA's provide door-to-door delivery, some have central pick-up sites and in others, members come to the farm for their vegetables and other products.

Implementing a community-supported agriculture system has many benefits and advantages. It "helps create an economically stable farm operation in which members are assured the highest quality produce, often at below retail prices. In return, farmers and growers are guaranteed a reliable market for a diverse selection of crops" (Van En, Manes, and Roth 2000). It puts food dollars back into the local economy. It provides additional labor sources for farm operations through working memberships, apprenticeships and internships and community volunteers. Community members gain access to the farm for educational and recreational opportunities such as field days, picnics and festivals. Farm diversification and sustainable agricultural practices are encouraged because members prefer to receive a wide variety of products (Gradwell, DeWitt, Mayerfeld, Salvador, and Libbey 1999, p. 2-3).

## **Community Supported Agriculture and the Dallas County Farm and Care Facility**

There are several ways in which implementing a community-supported agricultural system would benefit the Dallas County Farm. It would allow the farm to return to its roots as a diverse farm operation while remaining economically stable. The main reason farm operations currently consist of beef and hog production is due to labor shortage. The CSA approach would allow the county farm to take advantage of additional labor sources through working memberships, student apprenticeships and internships (from DMACC and ISU), and community volunteers. The Care Facility residents could also play an increased role in the farm operations since the work involved is more diverse. They can aid in setting up distribution tables, baked goods tables, and crafts tables, and become involved in canning operations (of surplus produce), drying flowers

and herbs and other activities. Farm operations can expand to include egg and poultry production, alternative crops, and vegetable, flower and herb crops.

The CSA approach would also encourage sustainable and organic farming practices. Having a wide variety of produce allows for crop rotation, integrated cropping, succession planting, and cover cropping. The farm would be able to continue its livestock production in addition to expanding into other operations.

The County Farm would be strengthening the local economy by adopting the CSA approach. Although the county would still be putting dollars into the farm as a member of the CSA as well as overseeing operations, these dollars would be going back into the community. The ties between the community, the farm, and the care facility residents would be made stronger through this bond.

Finally, the CSA approach is very flexible and custom designed for each farm. The Dallas County Farm has a diverse landscape, consisting of woodlands, a wetland, cultivated fields, and pastureland. All of this makes the possibilities for the farm endless. The CSA approach would allow for this and encourage the application of permaculture principles.

## **National Register of Historic Places**

The National Register of Historic Places is an official federal list of districts, sites, buildings, structures and objects significant in American history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, and culture. The Register is administered by the National Park Service. Being included in the Register is very significant and brings additional pride and recognition to the surrounding community.

In order for a property to qualify for registration, it must have historic significance and integrity. This can be at national, state or local levels (National Park Service 1995). In addition to being at least 50 years old, it must meet one of the following four criteria:

- Association with historic events or activities
- Association with important persons
- Distinctive design or physical characteristics
- Potential to yield important information about prehistory or history

Properties are nominated to the National Register by State Historic Preservation Offices of the state in which the property is located. Usually, the state nomination forms are prepared by the staff of the SHPO, but private individuals and organizations, local governments and other groups often initiate the process and prepare the necessary documentation. These forms are then submitted to a state review board by the SHPO, which makes a recommendation to the SHPO to either approve or disapprove the nomination. If the SHPO and the state review board agree on the nomination, it is forwarded to the National Park Service to be considered for listing (National Park Service 1995).

The length of the nomination process varies from state to state depending on the state's workload, planning and registration priorities and the schedule of the state review board. The

process takes a minimum of 90 days at the state level and if the nomination is approved and forwarded to the National Park Service, the NPS will make a decision within 45 days (National Park Service 1995).

Instructions for completing the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form are available online. The forms and additional sheets are available from State Historic Preservation Offices, Federal preservation offices and the National Park Service. The State Historic Preservation Officer for Iowa is:

Tom Morain  
600 East Locust Street  
Des Moines, IA 50319-0290  
515-281-8837  
[tmorain@max.state.ia.us](mailto:tmorain@max.state.ia.us)

## **The National Register of Historic Places and the Dallas County Farm and Care Facility**

The Dallas County Farm and Care Facility is one of the few remaining county farm and care facilities in Iowa. It is very important in state and local history. All but one of the original buildings is still on site and in relatively good condition. All of the land on the farm will qualify as Century Farm land in just a few years. Inclusion in the National Register would be additional prestige and recognition to the surrounding community and the state of Iowa.

The groundwork for the nomination process has been laid by the members of the LA 562 class, especially Strauss Hsieh. Some of the historic data available at the care facility, including photos, news articles, and land acquisition records, has been compiled into a CD for future reference.

The Historic Preservation Fund provides grants to aid in the nomination process and to help fund surveys, restoration, and other activities. Tax credits are also possible. There are many other organizations that may be interested in becoming involved with the Dallas County Farm and Care Facility and which could provide additional funding for a museum or other archive space.

## **Recommendations**

The Dallas County Farm and Care Facility would best be able to achieve all of its management goals by adopting both Community Supported Agriculture and the Historical Registry as part of its landscape management plan. The CSA approach would provide the economic and marketing strategy that the farm needs in order to stay financially viable into the future. It would also serve as a historical symbol of Iowa's vanishing family farms and how these farm operations can adapt in order to survive. Inclusion into the National Register of Historic Places would reinforce the Farm and Care Facility's importance as a historical resource and establish a strong public image for the property. The two approaches together lead to the development of a concept that reflects the farm's role as a research, educational, and community resource based on both historical and modern trends.

## References

Gradwell, S., DeWitt, J., Mayerfeld, D., Salvador, R., and Libbey, J. 1999. Local food systems for Iowa. Pm 1692. Ames: Iowa State University Extension. 4 p.

National Park Service. 1995. National Register of Historic Places. <http://www.cr.nps.gov>.

Van En, R., Manes, L., and Roth, C. 2000. Community Supported Agriculture. University of Massachusetts Extension. <http://www.umass.edu>.