

Evanston activists plant seeds for a 'Talking Farm'

By Deborah Horan
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November 14, 2006

Green activists have chosen a quirky new name for an Evanston farm they hope to establish to "speak" to people about the importance of developing urban food sources: the Talking Farm.

The name gives identity to an idea that has been germinating for months among food policy advocates in Evanston who hope to duplicate successful urban farms in Chicago, activists said.

"We thought the farm could have something to say about how we feed ourselves," said Carolyn Zezima, the farm's president. "We thought it would inspire people to know where their food comes from."

With a name, the group of 25 to 40 volunteers was able to take the first step toward becoming a non-profit organization by filing for articles of incorporation last month, Zezima said. That eventually will allow them to apply for grants and accept donations.

In the meantime, they have already started the education component of their plans--what Zezima called "fostering conversations about how we can create a healthier, more sustainable food system."

The education component will include classes for children and adults on sustainable and organic farming practices and the benefits of growing produce locally.

"People in urban areas don't know where their food comes from," said Debbie Hillman, a founder of the Evanston Food Policy Council and the driving force behind the urban farm.

"You just go to the store, and it's wrapped in plastic," Hillman said. "This is an opportunity for people to be aware of how diversified crops grow."

The activists also have planned for fundraising, marketing, production and site design, Zezima said. Those committees will gather at 7 p.m. Tuesday in the Lake Street Church, 607 Lake St., Evanston. The meetings are open to the public.

The group envisions building an organic farm of 2 to 3 acres that will grow produce year-round in "hoop houses"--similar to greenhouses--for local distribution. The idea is patterned on several successful area urban farms, including Growing Home, which has farms in Chicago and Marseilles, Ill.

Hillman said the group hopes to build an on-site classroom, hold potlucks and harvest festivals, and donate the produce to soup kitchens. But first it must find enough arable land in Evanston, which activists said could take time.

So far, they have considered approaching the park district or the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District, which owns land along the water channels. Other options include the strips of land that run along the "L" tracks.

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