

Nonprofit Farm Group Emphasizes Benefits Of Growing Organic

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Posted: 11/15/06

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The Daily Northwestern

While Evanston might not seem like prime farm land, members of a new local group want to educate residents about their food sources by growing organic food on a working farm.

About 25 people met Tuesday night at the Lake Street Church, 607 Lake St., to discuss The Talking Farm, a proposed nonprofit community agriculture and education center designed to be a local, organic source of food. The Talking Farm is part of the Evanston Food Policy Council, a division of Network for Evanston's Future.

President Carolyn Zezima said founding members gave The Talking Farm its unusual name because they envision it as: "The farm that has something to say."

The 2-to-3-acre farm will offer a variety of fruits, vegetables, herbs and live plants for sale, as well as prepared foods such as salsa and jams.

Group members also plan to offer classes for both adults and children in food preservation, home gardening, and cooking with organic foods. Both employees and volunteers would run the farm and receive on-site training.

"The main purpose is to grow the freshest, most nutritious food and to make it available as widely as possible," Talking Farm Secretary Debbie Hillman said.

Although members of the organization met formally for the first time last spring and the group is in its early stages, Zezima said she hopes members will be able to find a plot of land by next spring and break ground in time to have a harvest next fall.

Although she would like the land to be in Evanston, Zezima said it might be in Skokie or another nearby city.

"I'd like to have broad-based community involvement by the middle of next season and begin our educational programs almost immediately," Zezima said.

Hillman, who also co-founded the Evanston Food Policy Council, said the idea for The Talking Farm originated during an Earth Month event in April 2005. The council hosted

a panel of speakers about food-related topics, and Hillman and other members of the council thought they should involve Evanston residents in the food production process.

"We were looking for a real concrete project to involve the community in," Hillman said. "If we have a farm here and people see where their food comes from they feel they can do something for their community in a real concrete way."

Hillman stressed the importance of Evanston growing some of its own food as opposed to relying totally on outside sources.

"If our food supply was cut off today, where would our food come from?" Hillman said.

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