

# THE CAMPUS FARMSTAND PROJECT



## OPIRG McMaster Carbon Footprint Reduction Grant Proposal

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*on behalf of OPIRG McMaster Working Group PEAS*

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## Inspiration for the Project

The creation of PEAS: Promoting Eating Alternative and Sustainably was an outcome of the Summer 2008 Canada Summer Works placement with OPIRG. One of the summer project's focuses was to build relationships with individuals and organizations within Hamilton's local and alternative food movements. These relationships have been maintained and fortified via PEAS as we are working towards incrementally closing the gaps between McMaster at the city with respect to food.

One such gap is the unavailability of locally and sustainably grown produce for purchase in either Westdale or on McMaster's campus. As a community, we are extremely fortunate to be proximate to the Green Belt and its abundant farmland but you wouldn't know this by examining the food options on campus. The idea for a campus farmers' market subsequently arose which would provide a convenient on-campus outlet for the McMaster and West Hamilton communities to access local and organic food.

## Project Objectives

- 1) Provide an outlet for the sale of local organic produce for the McMaster and West Hamilton community.
- 2) Open up an untapped market to the farmers to support them and provide income security (embedded in the larger objective to preserve our local farmland).
- 3) Make positive community-oriented use of public space on campus which is otherwise only used as a thoroughfare for pedestrians.
- 4) Promote individual and community health by making fresh healthy food accessible in terms of both convenience and cost.
- 5) Bring together individuals and communities around food (to be largely accomplished through special events centered around and sponsored by the Campus Farmstand).
- 6) *Reduce our carbon footprint by reducing the energy input required for the production, packaging, and transportation of our food!*

## Status of the Project

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PEAS has already been collaborating with the McMaster chapter of the Golden Horseshoe Biosciences Network (GHBN), the McMaster Sustainability Office, and farmers to develop a proposal for the Campus Farmstand. We will be presenting the proposal to the newly formed Campus Sustainability Advisory Committee on April 2<sup>nd</sup> to seek their input and approval (to be hopefully followed by approval from university administration).

We have also approached ManoRun Organic Farm in Lynden and Simpler Thyme Organic Farm in Freleton to inquire whether they would be interested in supplying the farmstand with products to sell. Both farmers excitedly agreed. ManoRun and Simpler Thyme are two of only four small sustainable family farms in the greater Hamilton area specializing in produce as it is extremely challenging to make a decent living through organic farming in the city. This is largely attributable to the lack of farmers' markets in the city limits at which farmers can access a market to sell their yield.

### **Current Farmers' Markets in Hamilton**

#### Jackson Square/Downtown Farmers' Market

The Jackson Square/Downtown Farmers' Market is the most accessible for the McMaster and West Hamilton community. There are however very few actual farmers with stands at the market as a majority of booths are occupied by either wholesalers or small-scale processors. There are no organic options at the Jackson Square Farmers' Market. The market does have good hours as it is open all day Fridays, Saturdays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays.

#### Ottawa Street Farmers' Market

The Ottawa Street Farmers' Market does host exclusively farmers, although it is located a half hour or more away from McMaster and Westdale on the HSR. Furthermore, this market is only open on Fridays and Saturdays rendering it inaccessible the rest of the week. It is unknown whether this market offers organic options or not.

#### Concession Street Market

The Concession Street Business Improvement Area (BIA) hosts a Saturday morning and early afternoon farmers' market on Hamilton Mountain. This market poses similar issues of inaccessibility as the Ottawa Street market as hours are limited and a lengthy bus ride is required to get there. It is also unknown whether this market offers organic options or not.

#### Makers' Market

The Makers' Markets are downtown craft, artisan, and local food markets which run Saturday mornings from late Spring to early Fall. Last year, organic growers Simpler Thyme and West Avenue Growers, an urban farm project, sold food at the markets (which were held bi-weekly, alternating between Ferguson Station and Christ Church Cathedral on James Street North). It is far more accessible than the Ottawa Street and Concession Street markets but since they only run on Saturdays, accessibility becomes an issue again.

Given the current geography of farmers' markets in Hamilton, there is undoubtedly a niche for the Campus Farmstand to fill.

# Project Logistics

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## **Farmstand Personnel**

PEAS volunteers will be scheduled to set-up, operate, and take down the farmstand. A common reason why markets fail or farmers are hesitant to participate in them is that they do not have the time to run a farmstand or market booth when they need to be in the field *growing* the food. Both ManoRun and Simpler Thyme were thrilled that there would be volunteers there to sell the produce on their behalf as an in kind service and noted that they could not participate otherwise. The farmers would need to simply drop off the items at the beginning of the day, and pick up any leftovers and money at the end. A stipend, in the form of produce, would be provided for the volunteers.

PEAS is also currently working with the Sustainability Office, Bridges, MacGreen, and Diversity Services to introduce more sustainable food options to Bridges, the on-campus vegetarian café. The café's manager said he would be interested in purchasing any unsold produce for the café and also mentioned the possibility of putting in specific orders which farmers could drop off at the farmstand for him when it is in operation.

## **Location**

While the exact location of the Campus Farmstand has not been decided, we would like to host it somewhere central on campus, especially as it will be garnering publicity in its first season. We are thus thinking of having it either in the Mills/Student Centre quad or in close proximity to the McMaster Hospital from which we expect to attract an abundant summer clientele.

## **Schedule**

We would ideally like to start the farmstand in early-to-mid May 2009 and continue it for as long as the growing season allows (probably into October 2009). The farmstand will be an annual undertaking spearheaded by PEAS, eventually becoming a permanent fixture of McMaster's landscape during the growing season.

Since most other markets in the city are open on weekends, we would like to operate the farmstand mid-week, starting with one day a week for its first year. The farmstand would open in the morning and would close shortly after the end of the work day, giving people enough time to make purchases on their way home.

## **Clientele**

Although the market will be on campus, it is open to absolutely anyone to access. Since local and organic food is more often than not more expensive than conventional produce available at the grocery store, we would like to work with the McMaster BreadBin (the student food bank service) to arrange subsidies for its users. As the project expands, we would like to pursue similar partnerships with other organizations, agencies, and individuals to make the farmstand as affordable as possible for the largest number of people without compromising the income and livelihoods of the farmers.

# Project Expenses

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It is our plan that the farmstand will more or less sustain itself after a few initial startup costs. It is worth noting here that neither PEAS nor the university will be taking any profits or compensation from the project. All we ask of the university is to support us and approve the usage of space. Operation and management of the farmstand will be on an exclusively volunteer basis, minus the negotiation of a stipend in the form of produce from the farmers.

The following are some costs we do expect to incur:

- cash box and maintenance of a float (\$100)
- two transportable plastic folding tables (\$150)
- canopy\*
- baskets/bushels for produce storage and display (\$75)
- tablecloth (\$20)
- permanent banner (to be designed and professionally printed) (\$50)
- promotions costs (flyer printing, newspaper ads, etc.) (\$100)
- logo design (\$50)
- special events (\$250)
  - live music
  - potlucks
  - volunteer appreciation
  - bus trips for farmstand customers to visit the farms (ManoRun and Simpler Thyme)
  - interactive/community activities i.e. an outdoor family gardening workshop
- odds and ends i.e. tape, coin rolls (\$100)

\*we will likely be able to borrow one from the Sustainability Office

Our costs estimates above total just under \$900 and we expect would cover our expenses for two years. We are thus requesting the full \$1,000 to operate the farmstand for the follow two growing seasons after which point we would like to seek out small enterprise grants and/or money from the university to support the project.