

CULTIVATING FOOD AND FRIENDSHIPS



Linda Dolan, Sequim High School Ecology Club staff advisor, shows Bob Caldwell, Friends of the Fields treasurer, the fertile soil at St. Luke's Episcopal Church that soon will become the Community Organic Garden of Sequim.

Community Organic Garden receives green light

by **ASHLEY ODEN**
Staff writer

A new gardening opportunity is growing in Sequim.

After two years, the Sequim High School Ecology Club's dream of starting a community garden coming true. In collaboration with Friends of the Fields, the Community Organic Garden of Sequim is accepting applications to lease 10-foot by 10-foot and larger plots of land.

The garden, located at 525 N. Fifth Ave., is made up of an approximately 75-by-150-foot field south of the playground. St. Luke's Episcopal Church is leasing the land for \$1 a year. Groundbreaking and construction are due to kick off any day, depending on the weather, and planting will begin in the spring.

"It started with the kids," said Linda Dolan, Community Organic Garden of Sequim founder and Sequim High School Ecology Club staff advisor.

"They wanted to save farmland, but when they found out how much it costs to save farmland they decided to develop a community garden," she explained. "There is a natural connection between kids and gardens. It's about more than gardening – it's about integrating the community."

Even though the students decided against saving farmland, Friends of the Fields still wanted to be involved, said Bob Caldwell, Friends treasurer. "If you can get people to start looking for fresh local foods, that can only help our gardeners and in effect, save farmland."

Friends of the Fields donated \$500 to the Community Organic Garden to get started. More than half of the money will go toward insurance and liability expenses. Sequim First and Sound Community Bank also gave money.

"We've had some really big successes," Caldwell said, as both a Friends and garden representative. "This is a great project that the community obviously wants to get going."

What is a community organic garden?

A community garden is a place where residents can transform unused land into a space to grow vegetables, flowers, knowledge and friendships, Dolan said. People of all ages, abilities and backgrounds are invited to plant individual, family and group plots. Because the garden is organic, no chemical pesticides, fungicides, herbicides or fertilizers will be allowed. The garden will rely solely on the soil, compost and other natural additives to promote plant health and growth.

Sequim resident Melissa Vemi is the first person to lease a lot. Vemi was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis 12 years ago and will utilize one of the garden's raised plant beds. "The place where I am living has a garden but it's not developed," she said. "This will be a raised bed where I can work, grow vegetables and get training on how to become a better gardener."

According to Pam Larsen, Sequim Organic Gardeners club founder, a community organic garden is needed in Sequim. "We've lost control of our local food supply over the last three or so generations," she said. "This year is the first year in history for our country that we've imported more food than we've grown ourselves."

Eating organic foods is the smartest decision a person can make, Larsen said firmly. "If you buy processed or packaged foods, it's probably been chemically altered. During the last 100 years alone, 100,000 new chemicals have been introduced into our environment."

Organizers are seeking community support. Donations in the form of time, money and skill are being sought. Garden needs include lumber for raised beds and sheds, hoses, spray wands, benches, fencing, tools, an irrigation pump, a drip irrigation system, compost, garden art, plumbing, carpentry and rototill experience, organic gardening know-how, fundraising and grant writing assistance, and of course, gardeners.

"This garden can only be a success with the support of the community," said Liz Harper, publicity chairwoman.

Gardeners can lease plots for \$25 per year. Scholarships are available for individuals who cannot afford the annual fee.

Included with the plot lease fee are basic organic gardening classes beginning late winter or early spring 2008.

For more information about the Community Organic Garden of Sequim, to make a donation, sign up for classes or lease a plot, call Harper at 683-7698.

Five reasons to go organic, according to the Organic Trade Association:

- Organic products meet stringent standards. Organic certification is the public's assurance that products have been grown and handled according to strict procedures without persistent toxic chemical inputs.
- Organic food tastes great. Well-balanced soils produce strong, healthy plants that become nourishing food for people and animals.
- Organic production reduces health risks. Many EPA-approved pesticides were registered long before extensive research linked these chemicals to cancer and other diseases. Organic agriculture is one way to prevent chemicals from getting into the air, earth and water that sustain us.
- Organic farmers work in harmony with nature. Organic agricultural respects the balance demanded of a healthy ecosystem. Wildlife is encouraged by including forage crops in rotation and by retaining fencerows, wetlands and other natural areas.
- Organic farming helps keep rural communities healthy. USDA reported that in 1997, half of U.S. farm production came from only 2 percent of farms. Organic agriculture can be a lifeline for small farms because it offers an alternative market where sellers can command fair prices for crops.
- For more information about the organic food industry, go online to www.ota.com.

[Home](#) [Sports](#) [Multimedia](#) [Obituaries](#) [Opinion](#) [Columnists](#) [Calendar](#) [Classifieds](#) [Weather](#) [Contact Us](#) [Local Links](#) [About Us](#)

Exceptional Quality. Extraordinary Value.
The Cottages at Sequim 800.648.8305

MERIDIAN
GREENFIELD

