

Natural Resources Conservation Service New Hampshire



Plowshare Farm: Shifting the Lens from Disabilities to Abilities; Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Partners with Innovative Individuals and the Land

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Plowshare Farm came about in the early 2000s as an idea proffered by Donat Bay and Kimberly Dorn. Over 40 years ago, Donat found his life vocation in the work of Camphill Communities, and the distinctive social culture they inspire. Camphill is an international movement of intentional communities designed to meet the needs of children, youth and adults with developmental disabilities through a combination of community life, the arts, and work on the land. There are over 100 Camphill communities worldwide, and 11 communities throughout the U.S. Donat lived in communities in Holland and New York before coming to New Hampshire where he shared his family home with four people with special needs. Plowshare describes itself as:

A community whose primary task is to serve those in need of special care . . . [with] a wide variety of activities which support Plowshare Farm's striving to be a vessel for the balanced and healthy unfolding of the human being. [Plowshare is] a group of people – coworkers and their families, residents, apprentices, and volunteers who live together in what we call lifesharing homes. We are a biodynamic farm. We are a bakery, woodwork and candle-making workshops. We are a vocational training center for people with special needs who join us during the day time. We are a 'safe port' for those who, within their lives' journeys, need some time in a haven for repair. ...We are a place where the line between caregiver and care receiver is blurred through the understanding that we each have something to learn from the other and that caring for someone or something else is often a very fine path for self-development.

In 1990, Donat's organization received a 60-acre donation. Those fields became the beginning of what is now over 200 acres at Plowshare Farm in Greenfield, NH. At the time, Kimberly worked as a school teacher where she saw children who could thrive in a community environment. Her eventual encounter with Donat presented the opportunity for both of them to cultivate a comfortable space for children and adults alike. Their aim was to create a place where diverse people could live, work, and grow while contributing to the well-being of each other. They both brought that outlook into their endeavors at Plowshare.

Natural Resources Conservation Service New Hampshire



Many people with varying disabilities have come to call Plowshare home. At the farm, there is one primary community space along with four houses, all of which were built by the people at Plowshare using environmentally friendly materials. They also produce approximately 99% of their own energy through geothermal and solar. While many of the solar panels are professionally designed, one in particular was fashioned on site by the community members at Plowshare using aluminum cans. An ordinary waste product has found new life by bringing energy to the farm. Exploring unique alternatives helps meet Plowshare's need while keeping new ideas and possibilities bubbling.

Three cows are milked daily to provide the majority of dairy requirements for those who live and visit. Milk is turned to yogurt, cheese and butter. Plowshare consistently uses every bit of the animal without leaving behind any waste. This extends to butchering. While they believe the best way to butcher an animal is the most humane way, they are additionally conscious of respecting and fully using the product after butchering. For example, bones are soaked for days to create broth for soup which is reputed to be, delicious.

A composting greenhouse, along with two high tunnels built with NRCS financial assistance adorn the landscape. Produce is grown year-round in the high tunnels. NRCS has also provided financial assistance for a pollinator habitat which is an important example of how nature teaches the processes necessary to achieve sustainable food production. Currently more projects are underway in their forest land. Timber stand improvements are in progress to weed out undesirable species in favor of healthier trees that provide better timber and wildlife habitat. Draft horses remove the nonvalue trees which are taken from the forest land without creating any of the erosion problems usually caused by larger machinery. Also with NRCS' help, this coming spring, a riparian buffer will be installed to stabilize a stream bank and provide wildlife habitat and foraging opportunities. Plowshare also hopes to incorporate some of the vegetation into basket weaving projects.



Natural Resources Conservation Service New Hampshire



The remarkable people who have come to call Plowshare home are invested in many individual creative and productive endeavors of their own. Sheep’s wool is given over to fiber weavers to create doorstops, seat cushions, purses, guitar straps, and rugs, along with a multitude of other items. However, it is not merely wool that goes into these products. Plowshare continually remains conscious of how to reuse and recycle. Old plastic shopping bags may find themselves as part of the weavings for a handbag. Other projects can include anything from candles to charcoal.

At Plowshare, the idea is firmly held that everyone has a right to become involved in meaningful work where they can see the results of their labor. Anyone can have a task within a trade. What may be waste, weed, or junk in one place can easily be gold in another, as evidenced by Plowshare’s ability to turn something used into something interesting and new. The same mantra applies for people too, where everyone has their different gifts to give. When you put someone in a box, their self-determination becomes limited within those boundaries. The environment of Plowshare is able to effectively release people from these societal constraints. As Kimberly says, “Plowshare’s community is like a wheel. The people are like the spokes, everyone is equally needed and has a place.”

If you are interested in supporting this local nonprofit, consider visiting their community store in Wilton Town Center, NH, or contact them by phone at 603-547-2547.



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