

Community Garden Grows And Grows

by Nathan Meunier

HARDWICK — With a little extra elbow grease this year the Hardwick Community Garden is set to grow.

Organization of the community garden was recently taken over by Hilary Hoffman of the Hardwick-based Center for a Biobased Economy. The non-profit organization, which includes members from various local farms and agricultural businesses, was formed last year to promote agricultural opportunities and products for farmers in the area.

Under new direction, the garden is ready for revitalization as the number of people interested in participating has already spiked dramatically over the past year, said Hoffman. The garden is located near the river by the Cottage Street Bridge and has been a place where local folks can rent small plots to plant their seeds and test their green thumbs.

"There's a lot more happening with the garden this year," said Hoffman. "Last year, there were only two plots and at this point we have 13."

Hoffman said she's expecting a few more registration forms to come in and would like anyone else interested to register before the weekend of May 20 and 21, when a work session and orientation will be held at the garden.

The CBE received a \$1,500 grant from the New England Grassroots Environmental Fund, which will be used to set up a picnic table, soil amendments, mow the perimeter, make signs and set up a bulletin board at the garden site. They also received a small grant from the Community Garden Network to promote sustainable agriculture through community gardening, she said. If things go well this year, Hoffman said she will try to get grant funding to install a water pump near the garden.

Through the help of many businesses and organizations the garden will be greatly expanded this year, according to Hoffman. The town has offered use of as much land as needed for the garden, she said, and Town Manager Dan Hill will bring in some sand for the kids to play with. Vermont State will plant a soy bean dem-

onstration on a plot of the garden. North Hardwick Dairy will use its equipment to plow and till the garden, and will provide organic manure to fertilize the garden.

High Mowing Seeds, of Wolcott, is renting a 50 by 50 foot plot, which will be open for anyone in the community to work on. The food grown on this plot will then be donated to the local food pantry and the community kitchen, said Hoffman. High Mowing Seeds will also give out a selection of seeds for people to use in the garden. High Fields Institute of Hardwick will do on-site composting and will hold a composting workshop later in the season as well. A sign for the garden is also being designed by local artist Marie LaPre Grabon.

Aubuchon Hardware will donate between \$200 and \$250 worth of garden tools, and Poulin Lumber has been approached as well, she said.

"It's a lot more interest this year. I think a lot of people are interested, it's just a matter of reaching more folks and letting them know it's available," said Hoffman. "It's a really great thing; for \$20 you can get a (20 foot by 20 foot) plot tilled and plowed, organic cow manure and tools to use. The resources are right there."

Hoffman feels the area is ideal for a community gardening space with its close proximity to the Lamoille River for watering crops, room for children to safely run and play in the open, in addition to room for some parking.

A few items are still required if anyone is willing to donate them, she said. Between 15 and 20 wooden pallets are needed for composting, light buckets will be needed to get water out of the river, and any other tool donations will be accepted. Materials are available for a weather-proof bulletin board although volunteers are needed to help build it, she added.

An open work weekend will be held on May 20 and 21 for those who have already rented plots or others who wish to volunteer their efforts for the community plot. Hoffman said seeds will be available and the weekend will serve as an orientation for people who are involved. She said anyone who wants to sign

up for a plot should do so before the opening weekend.

"Another reason this can be successful here is there's so much sustainable agriculture going on around us," Hoffman said. "There's a lot of people, resources and know-how to draw on."

For registration information, contact Hoffman at 533-2598 or e-mail hardwick_community_garden@yahoo.com.

The Hardwick Gazette, Wednesday, May 10, 2006
