

While farming is a part of Southeastern Pennsylvania's community character, in recent years our family farms have seen their bountiful legacy end. Often, financial reasons prevent the tradition from continuing on – just like one Wrightstown, Bucks County resident who joined the police force when he could no longer afford to tend his farm. However, townships are desperate to hold on to their local food heritage. Over the past several years, Wrightstown has kept farming in its town by successfully merging traditional farming practices with an innovative idea: community supported agriculture.

In the beginning, it was an ordinary piece of township land, much like the land owned by many suburban Pennsylvania communities. Now, it's a thriving farm, supported financially by the 170 families who purchase its fresh, organic produce. These families can pick their own snow peas or cherry tomatoes, and they each spend about 6 hours per year working on the farm, further involving them in their local sustainable food system. The farm also supplies its produce to a farmer's market, held at Middletown Grange.

From soil to cover crops to corn stalks, the process wasn't easy. Through the persistence of residents, led by Environmental Advisory Council member Robin Hoy, the CSA came to fruition. In addition to rows upon rows of vegetables, the property houses two buildings. One serves as the farmer's residence and the other will soon be converted to an educational facility and housing for farm interns. While interns work under the mentorship of farmers in the community, the building will serve as an "incubator" for future farmers of our region and beyond.

"As fossil fuels get more expensive, food will get more expensive," said EAC member Robin Hoy. "Fertilizer, herbicide, and transportation all use fossil fuels and it's completely not sustainable."

CSAs provide sustenance for communities that want to support and eat locally grown, organic food. To promote additional sustainable food systems like this, the EAC supported the creation of the Bucks County Foodshed Alliance, which networks local farmers with residents, restaurants, and educators.

Hoy says that EACs can play important role in promoting and starting CSAs in their towns. She suggests starting with an inventory of township-owned property that could support farming activities. She recommends talking to municipal supervisors to gauge their interest in supporting CSAs. To get off the ground, she suggests looking into the funding opportunities available from the Department of Environmental Protection, the Sierra Club and The Sustainable Development Fund.

EACs are helping to start CSAs in other parts of Pennsylvania too, such as efforts by Stroud Township EAC in Monroe County.

For more information about EACs, how your community can start an EAC, or how it can help promote sustainable agriculture, contact Jeanne Ortiz, EAC Network Director at 215-592-7020 x103 or at jortiz@pecpa.org or Robin Hoy, Wrightstown EAC at ecorobinhood@comcast.net.