

# GCC to add farm ed courses for 2015

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GREENFIELD — Old MacDonald had a farm, but could he make a living?

With a grant of almost \$50,000 from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Greenfield Community College will start up new courses in sustainable agriculture, along with free teacher-training workshops for local high school teachers who are bringing farm-based curriculum components into the classroom.

This initiative is called Educational Networks for Growing an Agricultural Economy (ENGAGE), and the community college is teaming up with six area high schools: Greenfield High School, Franklin County Technical School, Turners Falls High School, Mohawk Trail Regional High School, Smith Vocational School and Four Rivers Charter School.

The new courses will be offered over the next two summers, according to Abrah Dresdale, GCC's food and farm systems program coordinator.

This summer, Kyle Bostrom, owner of Bostrom Farm in Greenfield, will teach a new three-credit course on "Introduction to Sustainable Farming Skills" to both area high school students and to GCC students in the college's Farm and Food Systems program.

Also, Executive Director Deb Habib, of the Seeds of Solidarity Education Center in Orange, will offer a 15-hour professional development workshop on "Sustainable Food Production" for high school teachers. That workshop will be held on GCC's campus, using the college's permaculture garden, organic vegetable garden and "near-zero net energy" greenhouse.

In the summer of 2016, the introductory Sustainable Farming Skills course will be offered again, and offered free for targeted students. Also, a course on Sustainable Farming Leadership will be offered to GCC students who have taken the Farming Skills course.

Besides providing money for two new courses and workshop, the grant will pay for a part-time program assistant position; it also provides stipends for teachers who take the professional development workshop, and supports curriculum development and internships.

After a century of decline in the number of farms, Franklin County has seen a resurgence of farming over the past seven years — along with an increase in the market value of farm products, and the growth of farmers markets. The former Smith Vocational High School changed its name to Smith Vocational and Agriculture High School, to emphasize that farming is taught there, too. This year, the Hawlemont Regional School in Charlemont is piloting its agriculture-based curriculum for grade school students. And school vegetable gardens and greenhouses are no longer the novelty they once were.

“This grant will help build a stronger educational pathway for young people in our community who would seriously consider farming as a way of life,” said GCC President Robert L. Pura. “The more collaboration GCC has with the public schools, the stronger the probability of success for all of our students.”

“Everyone will learn from each other,” said Habib. “And, in the long run, everyone in the community will benefit as sustainable agriculture methods help promote food resiliency and mitigate climate change.

Bostrom said agriculture is a growing industry that is becoming more important to our food security, supply and overall economy. “Agriculture needs trained and educated people to grow and support the industry,” he said. “The introductory skills course will be an on-the-ground, hands-on approach to small scale production agriculture. It also will include content on the ecological and economic aspects of farming.”

The funding comes for a US Department of Agriculture “Secondary Education, Two-Year Postsecondary Education, and Agriculture in the K-12 Classroom Challenge Grant.”

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