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One of the New Farmers Passing Through New Entry Sustainable

Madeleine Charney
Granby

Grace Mwanza: Immigrant? Farmer? Nurse? Mother of four children? She is all these things at once and so much more. Upon arriving in the U.S. from Zambia in 1985, she and her growing family joined her cousins who had already settled in Massachusetts. She initially found a career as a Licensed Nurse Practitioner but was clearly open to other vocational possibilities.

Grace Mwanza

Having grown up on a 100-acre farm in her homeland, Grace's ears perked up when she heard about New Entry Sustainable Farming Program (NESFP). The mission of NESFP is "to assist socially disadvantaged and other underserved individuals with agricultural backgrounds to successfully enter farming in Massachusetts" (http://nesfp.nutrition.tufts.edu/). NESFP also aims to enrich the vitality and sustainability of the region's agriculture by supporting self-reliance and food security in these populations and within their communities. There is an emphasis on growing culturally appropriate foods locally in underserved areas.

Training through NESFP follows a logical progression. The basic course, *Explore Farming!* led Grace to first consider the challenges and rewards of farm ownership—to think realistically about the financial feasibility and time commitment of starting and growing a farm business. After taking a hard look at the farming life, she was ready for the *Business Planning* course. In this step she selected a suitable enterprise and explored matters of budgeting; marketing and promotion; materials and equipment; and strategies linked to her thoughtfully designed plans. With those plans in place, she developed practical skills during *on-farm workshops*, which focused on topics such as organic production and marketing; food and farm safety; greenhouse management; small equipment use and maintenance; irrigation; and soil and water conservation. Grace also became familiar with technical aspects of farming such as seed ordering and propagation; pest management; record keeping; sourcing equipment and supplies; and land access issues. The convoluted process of obtaining permits and understanding regulations was also illuminated.

In April 2009, Grace was one of 23 new farmers to proudly graduate from NESFP! This meant that, like each new farmer, she was eligible to lease land on an NESFP training farm in Dracut or Sutton (up to 1 acre for the season at the cost of $625). Grace's half-acre farm in Dracut is now alive with a mix of organic crops. She takes full advantage of the site's unheated greenhouses, storage sheds, irrigation system, small equipment, produce wash stations, electric fencing and general farm tools and supplies. Tractors and custom tractor services are available for an additional fee. This season Grace's bounty includes lettuce, sweet potatoes and cucumbers, which she sells at World PEAS (People Enhancing Agricultural Sustainability), a cooperative formed in 2005 by NESFP to help immigrant and refugee farmers sell more produce to new audiences at higher prices. To local African churches Grace quite successfully sells collard greens and maize, a staple food of many African countries. A local African store and an African restaurant have already put in advance orders for her sweet potato greens, a delicacy that fetches an exceptionally high price. Some of the greens will be frozen and used throughout the year. This season she is trialing turnips and has been savoring the results at home with her family.

She and her husband, who grew up on a farm in Liberia, have four children (ages 7, 14, 19, and 25). The three younger ones have a designated day each week during which they help out on their mother's farm. Grace is also continuing her studies to become a Registered Nurse. She believes that the problem of obesity can be allayed by teaching her children about nutrition and showing them firsthand how food is grown and where it comes from. Her strong background and continued education in nursing fuels her belief that good eating habits begins at home.

After three years on her training farm, Grace will be assisted to transition to her own independent farm, if she so desires. And if she chooses that path, NESFP will remain by her side, providing individual technical assistance to meet her long-term goals as a farmer.

So far, NESFP has assisted two farmers with purchasing farms through USDA's Farm and Home Loan Program. They have also facilitated the startup of independent farm enterprises for seven other graduates. In addition, qualified beginning farmers and experienced growers may locate land or expand their acreage through NESFP's farmland location and matching service. Grace's innovation, passion, and success in her new enterprise suggest that she'll join these ranks in the future.

For more information about NESFP, contact Kim Fitch at nesfp@tufts.edu or 978-654-6745 or go to http://nesfp.nutrition.tufts.edu/

Three Grazing Workshops Left

NOFA/Mass grazing workshops still to come this season include:

Raising Meat Goats and the FAMACHA System, Aug. 4, West Suffield, Conn.

Grazing Basics, Aug. 25, Great Barrington, Mass.

Multi-Species Grazing for Meat Animals II, Sept. 15, Concord, Mass.

All are $5 and do not require advanced registration. Please see www.nofamass.org/programs/organicdairy/grazing09.php for times, locations and other details, and contact winton@nofamass.org with questions.

Grazing at Summer Conference

Workshop offerings include the **2nd Annual Grazing School** on Saturday, Aug. 8. These seven workshops and pasture walk are open to all conference participants, and will provide information to farmers about starting a grass-based livestock operation or improving their existing operation.

Livestock Blog in Action

The Extension team has launched the NOFA/Mass Livestock Blog (http://www.nofamass.org/programs/organicdairy/blog/). It is updated regularly with news and resources of interest to our members who raise livestock. Please check it out and send suggestions for postings to winton@nofamass.org.

Raw Milk Dairy Day Coming!

Raw Milk Dairy Day will be held Saturday, Sept. 12. Raw milk farms around Massachusetts will be open to the public, with farmers showing visitors around and explaining the basics of raw milk. Watch the NOFA/Mass website for farms and times.