



## Drip Irrigation Comes to the Common Good Garden

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The Brunswick-Topsham Land Trust (BTLT) is in its second year of hosting a thriving community garden at our 321-acre farm, Crystal Spring Farm. The Tom Settlemire Community Garden further diversifies the farm, which features a 350-customer CSA and sheep herd operated by our tenant farmer, 5 miles of trails, and a popular Farmers? Market sporting 40 vendors on Saturday mornings. These programs are all part of our work to support local agriculture.

In the garden?s first year, we attracted hundreds of volunteers to build and maintain the garden, leased all 72 individual plots, provided mentoring for first-time gardeners, collaborated with a local mental health nonprofit to provide a plot for vocational training, attracted three eldercare facilities which are providing raised bed gardening for their residents, and more.

We were particularly delighted to collaborate with the Mid Coast Hunger Prevention Program (MCHPP) by providing a 6,000 sq ft ?Common Good Garden? (CGG) where organic produce is grown for the MCHPP food pantry and soup kitchen. MCHPP serves over 3,000 Mid Coast families at risk of hunger, and the organic vegetables raised in the CGG help them meet the growing demand for food. Last year, volunteers raised 1,241 pounds of butternut squash, potatoes, onions and carrots in the CGG for MCHPP?s programs.

The biggest challenge in the CGG last year was watering. 6,000 sq. ft. is a lot to water - ask the volunteers! The garden does not have electricity and is served by an on-site well equipped with a solar-powered pump. Water is pumped into above ground tanks from which ploholders and CGG volunteers haul water in buckets and watering cans. Hand watering the CGG was time-consuming and physically challenging for some volunteers, and the scheduling and watering monopolized everyone?s time.

Working together, BTLT and MCHPP decided to pursue a drip irrigation system for the CGG. This was no small task, because the drip has to work with our solar-powered water supply system. With the help of some truly dedicated volunteers led by a retired electrician and hydrologist/engineer, planning for a drip irrigation system for the CGG has been underway since winter. Thanks to the generosity of Kitchen Gardeners International?s Sow It Forward grant and other funders, we were able to purchase a pump, solar panel, and pressure tank to power the drip system, along with the drip supplies.

The system was designed and installed entirely by volunteers who collectively spent hundreds of hours researching the system and components, acquiring materials, digging trenches for water lines, installing water lines, building equipment sheds, assembling and wiring solar panels, installing a pump and pressure tank, installing drip header hoses and distribution lines, testing the lines, etc. Truly, it takes a village to complete a project like this!

The system became operational in June, just in time to germinate MCHPP?s squash and carrot seeds. It is now hard at work, watering onions, squash, carrots, broccoli, lettuce, and other crops in the CGG. Doreen, the Garden?s volunteer coordinator, is THRILLED beyond measure that, thanks to eight timers quietly

moving water around in the CGG, she can focus her volunteers' efforts on planting, weeding, and harvesting! With the help of the drip irrigation system, MCHPP hopes to significantly increase yields this year. Its 3,000 clients will have access to even more beautiful, organically-grown produce this fall!

While MCHPP clients are the primary beneficiaries of the CGG, it appears from the smiling faces of volunteers in our photo albums that many others benefit from this program ? getting outdoors, gardening in community with others, and knowing their work will put fresh food on the plates of those in need.

Thanks to the inspiration and commitment of our garden committee, the Tom Settlemire Community Garden is a beautiful place. You can watch lambs in the pasture, bluebirds in the birdboxes, or just sit on a bench and watch the plants grow. We will continue to invite the local community to enjoy this special place by hosting garden tours, maintaining demonstration gardens, cultivating new volunteers, developing curriculums for on-site education by school groups, and more. In short, we want our Community Garden and CGG to be much used and visited community resources that promote local agriculture and getting outdoors!

Image (optional):

