



**Turning a New Leaf** Conference  
Shepherdstown, West Virginia  
November 16, 2013

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## **Track B: Innovations in Urban Restoration**

### **Session B.1 Restorative Agriculture: Allowing natural processes to replenish the land, our bodies and our communities. Margaret-Morgan Hubbard, Eco City Farms, Riverdale Park, Maryland**

Eco City Farms is based in Prince George's County. 75 % of the accessible food is from fast food. All of PG County predominately African American – wealthy county, but relatively poor compared with surrounding counties. There is no Whole Foods, and all four of the port towns in Prince George's County are food deserts.

I am not a farmer, but I have a fertile mind. I really wanted to make something real, so I made a farm in 2010. We have a staff of 5.

We have 2 farms:

1. Edmonston Farm – 5 hoop houses, farm year round.
2. Second farm at a low income housing complex... farming on 3 buildings were torn down. Working on zoning for 2 + years. Autumn Woods Apartments – permaculture – they are trying to organize the community, which is harder than just planting

Composting is key to success. Only with food waste and carbon sources. We get our food waste from Compost Cab - that collects food waste from residents in DC. Vermiculture composting.

Compost is covered with a cloth – like felt – keeps moisture in and protects the compost.

Our goal is to feed people and teach people about food. Built a kitchen in a shipping container and teach intensive urban ag classes with Community College.

50 fruit trees.

We make more \$ on classes, worms, education, than we do on food. Staff is certified in permaculture and composting. Keep lots of bees and support native pollinators. Grey water is recycled and reused. Local youth volunteer to work on the farm. Ducks eat pests and fertilize as they forage. So much of what we have has been donated or left as a farm. Ducks are less destructive than chickens, so we only have ducks.

Community activities: poetry readings, and other events.

Restorative Agriculture: Restore our Bodies, Restore our Community, Restoring farming traditions. Restore soil fertility, cooking, healthy family food traditions,



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**Founding principles:**

- Integrate, don't separate
- Serve multiple functions
- There is no waste, there is no away
- Value biodiversity
- Creatively use and respond to change
- Use local resources.

Margaret's inspirations from youth look much like Eco City farm now:

- New Alchemy Institute in Cape Cod
- Rotterdam

A Farm is a mosaic of interrelated enterprises. Healthy eating and active living (HEAL)

Support your local farmacy – If we ate better we would not have to buy so much medicine... if we did not eat so unhealthily, we may not be so sick.

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Q and A

**1. Fruit trees – difficult to grow due to pests. How do you deal with that?**

Fruit trees are only a few years old, and have not had lots of trouble with pests... we rotate crops, spray compost tea.

**2. How did the community respond when you first got started and what strategy did you employ to engage the community?**

Our coming was seen as an improvement on what was there before – the community has been very receptive. Some members think there are more snakes in their yard due to their compost (perception, not true). The farm is not locked, and it has never been vandalized. Anyone is welcome to walk on at any time. We are well known in the region.

**3. What do you use for mulch?**



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---

All of the trees are cut down by electric utility and we get wood chips from the utility company – we also get leaves from municipalities. Also compost residue.

**4. I am with the Washington Co Heritage Museum. Spudfest - We've had problems with farmer who did not rotate and sprayed, and we want to restore that bed – how do we begin?**

When we did soil tests beneath the abandoned buildings on the second property, we were surprised to find it less contaminated than expected.

Use cover crops, leaves. We use “certified naturally grown” - to market our products and sustainable grown.

**5. Any future plan for hydroponics?**

I do not support hydroponics - We need soil.

**6. What does permaculture mean in this context?**

Bill Moltson – mimic nature in interrelated systems – allowing nature to care for your plants. Permanent culture –many different restorative techniques. Requires rethinking what we eat – many native plants are not used as food.

**7. Please talk about alternative energy sources on the farm.**

Electricity was used for power tools at the beginning. Solar collectors and have outlets throughout the farm. We have some batteries that store power. A few other experiments - dug underneath the high tunnels that gave some heat at night to plants. We do a lot of water recycling. Many low tech techniques. Bio Diesel for truck.

**8. Mural – who painted it?**

Grant – painting by Matt Gifford

**9. Talk about Biochar**

We built a receptacle where we burn wood at high temperature so we have concentrated charcoal – which we put on soil and in compost. This is really much of an experiment at this point.

**10. You talked about difficult with Zoning – if someone was starting this from scratch, where do you begin?**



**Turning a New Leaf** Conference  
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We have created a food equity council and are working on changing the regulations, so it won't be so hard in the future. But you have to have the stars aligned when you start. I don't usually ask permission... then I invite people to be part of it, before people start asking questions in opposition. Part of my job is listing obstacles. I don't want to be an isolated urban farm... I want farms to be integrated into the urban landscape.

**11. I am from Baltimore where there are food deserts. Have you explored the possibility of getting a spot in a corner store that does not sell food?**

We use a CSA model – because our corner store does not sell anything fresh. I think the corner store approach is a good one, but it is not in the culture here – as it is in NYC... I am not sure I want my produce in a gas station environment. A lot of the organic food is no longer organic when it gets to you, as it is stored in boxes with dioxins or other chemicals... you want to get the food as quickly as possible without storage with chemicals. DC Central Kitchen has done a lot of help with corner stores.

**12. Could you talk about good places to go for training in permaculture?**

Many places are bringing experts in locally. Accokeek Foundation had a class that our staff took. We wanted our whole staff to learn together, so we took the classes together. CHEARS.org – has permaculture class emphasizing edible natives.

**13. Montgomery County has an agricultural reserve area, any chance that will happen in PG?**

There is not a lot of ag happening at the Mont Co Ag reserve area... we are working on concentrating development around metro stops.

An Audience member is on the reserve board – this area is 1/3 of the land area in Mont Co. Has 10,000 horses... our group has tried to foster some incubation projects, but much is commodity crops.

**14. When you started the second small farm, is it structured as a community garden, or a farm?**

Sustainability of commercial farming was our emphasis – while we think community plots do work, we are interested in investing in a long term farm.