

# Urban farm school ready for Fredericton launch next spring

EMMA DAVIE The Daily Gleaner

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The farm at 577 Hillcrest Dr. in Devon on Fredericton's northside will be home to the province's first urban farm school.

Photo: Emma Davie/The Daily Gleaner

Fredericton residents can soon learn to farm right in the heart of the city's northside.

The Urban Teaching Farm Project is launching a pilot project in March that will see about a dozen students learn to farm in a 32-week, full-time course.

"There's a huge potential here," said Claire May, outreach co-ordinator for the project.

"In New Brunswick, there's a shocking amount of farmlands just sitting there. Paired with that, the sad stat is the fact that in New Brunswick we import so much of the same food that we export."

May said the focus of the project will be on growing vegetables. Three days a week will be hands-on in the fields getting practical skills. One day a week will be off-site, touring other nearby farms to learn about other farming options, such as livestock operations, which can't be housed on a farm within city limits.

The other day of the week will focus on classroom and theory.

"In terms of making farming a viable career, having the business training, marketing, budgeting financing, all that side of it is almost equally as important. So we want to make sure that we have a strong training on that side of it too," May said.

"It's maybe not realistic that graduates from our program are going to jump out right away and buy property, buy land and start their own operation that fall or that spring. But to go on and be skilled farm labourers at other farm operations to get their own sense of what to focus on ... like a food security advocacy path working in local food systems."

May said the project started to come together under the New Brunswick Community Harvest Gardens in November 2015.

They began looking at available land and gauging interest. In March, they completed a feasibility study to see whether there was any interest in the program.

"The findings were very positive and all signs pointed to yes, so we're continuing on," May said.

Until next March, May said they'll be preparing the eight-acre site at 577 Hillcrest Dr. in Devon.

"It's a farm, and it's always been a farm, but it's not great for vegetable production, so it needs some soil and the land needs some work to prepare it to grow vegetables," she said.

May said she hopes to be one of the students in next year's pilot project.

"I'm pretty passionate about local food and helping to realize what we can actually produce and how we can be more self-sufficient," she said.

"We hope that once the program is up and running and successful, that it can be replicated around the province. There's no other similar training to this in Atlantic Canada right now."

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