

RED WIGGLER

COMMUNITY FARM

WORK LEARN GROW



Creating fertile ground to nourish a healthy and inclusive community.



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25 YEARS AND GROWING



VISION

Creating fertile ground to nourish a healthy and inclusive community.

MISSION

Red Wiggler is a sustainable farm where people with and without developmental disabilities come together to work, learn, and grow healthy food.

HISTORY

Founded in 1996, Red Wiggler first dug into the soil on a 2.5-acre farm in Comus, Maryland. The idea came to Founder and Executive Director Woody Woodroof after working in group homes in Arizona. Through this experience, Woody saw the need for both healthier food and more meaningful jobs for adults with developmental disabilities. The idea evolved from gardens and composting services to a full-fledged organic vegetable farm employing adults with developmental disabilities who grow food for the community. Through a partnership with the Arc Montgomery County, Woody spent that first season working and learning how to farm with five Growers, growing food for a 12-member Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program and two farmers markets.

The farm moved in 2005 to its current location on Ovid Hazen Wells Park in Germantown, Maryland. Through a public/private partnership with the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, Red Wiggler currently leases 13 acres, with plans to expand. Now serving over 1,900 community members, Red Wiggler has a 120-share CSA program, distributes more than 30% of organic produce to low-income households through Farm to Group Home and Farm to Food Bank programs, employs 15 adults with developmental disabilities, and regularly hosts field trips and volunteers.

The name "Red Wiggler" is a nod to the worms that work as unsung heroes to create fertile ground so that plants are more likely to be successful. In much the same way, we work to create conditions so that everyone in our community can become successful.

WORK

GROWERS

Meaningful and fair employment for adults with developmental disabilities is the principle on which Red Wiggler was founded. Beyond just a job, Red Wiggler supports Growers in skill development and leadership. Growers carry out and lead others in planting, harvesting, selling produce and more.



LEARN

EDUCATION

Youth and adults alike are welcomed at the farm to experience firsthand where their food comes from. Red Wiggler provides tools to each participant and seeks to inspire them to environmental stewardship and healthy eating.

SERVICE LEARNING

Beyond volunteerism, service learning opportunities are available to all community members, with and without disabilities, and provide the chance for self-growth and learning. Volunteers are part of our farm team and support the day-to-day activities of the farm.



GROW

COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE

In addition to our on-farm CSA program, where community members pick up a share of produce each week at the farm, Red Wiggler also provides food to low-income households through our Farm to Food Bank and Farm to Group Home programs.



GROWER PROGRAM

Red Wiggler employs adults with developmental disabilities, providing meaningful work, fair wages, and vocational support for a historically under-employed population. The job title “Grower” explains the integral role played by these employees. Growers are involved in all aspects of farming and distribution, including planting, harvesting, field and facilities maintenance, tool usage, and greenhouse management. Through setting, tracking, and evaluating annual goals, Growers strive toward independent work and take pride in the progress they have made. They gain a professional identity as farmers and find meaning in their ability to give back to the community through growing and distributing healthy food.



Inclusivity:

Growers work alongside volunteers, field trip attendees, and other program participants, often leading activities that foster an inclusive work environment. The inclusive environment at Red Wiggler means that youth and adults with and without developmental disabilities are working together toward the common goal of growing healthy, organic vegetables for the community.

Skill Development:

Growers are evaluated on 52 skills including farming tasks, tool use, and customer service skills. Skill development is tracked over time to ensure individual growth for each Grower and to further production goals of the farm. Each Grower also has individual goals that are developed over the course of the season and supported by Red Wiggler staff and job coaches from social service agencies. Individual goals may be skills-based or specific to vocational and social development. In situations where efficiency and timeliness are concerns, Growers are assigned tasks that they have already mastered. At other times, they are assigned tasks primarily for skill development and personal growth. Each Grower has a place in the bigger picture of Red Wiggler, contributing to the larger goals of the farm by doing what they're best at or what they're working on.



EDUCATION PROGRAM

Red Wiggler hosts youth and adults with and without developmental disabilities for tours, field trips, workshops, and consultations for farm-based educational experiences. The farm provides opportunities for participants to engage in hands-on activities that promote environmental stewardship and healthy eating in the following ways.

Field Trips:

Students with and without developmental disabilities come to the farm for experiential learning. Our Education Program Coordinator creates accessible, inclusive tours and activities that are catered to the needs of each visiting class and relate to their respective classroom curricula. The focus of these tours includes sensory exploration, interaction with nature, awareness of nutrition and the food-growing process, sustainable farming practices, and environmental responsibility. Activities take place in our growing fields, discovery garden, greenhouse, and barn. All experiences—including nutrition education and, when possible, food prep activities—are carried out using Red Wiggler produce. Visits to the farm vary from 45 minutes to 2 hours.



Learning for Independence Job Site:

High school students from Montgomery County Public Schools' (MCPS) Learning for Independence program utilize Red Wiggler as a vocational training job site. Supported by Red Wiggler's Education Program Coordinator and MCPS support staff, Learning for Independence students work on a 1-hour volunteer project at the farm. Their time on the farm includes being introduced to new tasks, skills, and tools; discovering strengths and preferences; and practicing transferable job skills (e.g., signing in and out, completing a task as a team, etc.).

Pre-Vocational Training:

Young adults with developmental disabilities transitioning out of high school or on summer break can volunteer on the farm on an abbreviated workday. Each participant is supported by a job coach, our Education Program Coordinator, and often, a Grower. This program is more focused than general volunteering. During a determined number of weeks, participants are introduced to farm work with the goal of finding their strengths, discovering what they enjoy doing, and learning job skills (e.g., following a schedule, using a time sheet, etc.).

PROGRAMS

SERVICE LEARNING PROGRAM

Red Wiggler provides inclusive volunteer opportunities to youth and adults with and without developmental disabilities on the farm. Volunteers gain knowledge and technical skills by working side by side with Growers, promoting environmental stewardship, and encouraging healthy eating. While the focus of this program is to carry out the tasks needed on the farm, participants are actively learning through the work they are doing. During each volunteer session, participants engage in at least two tasks. The purpose of these tasks is explained to engage volunteers in their importance. In addition to executing farm tasks, participants are engaging with adults with disabilities, either by working alongside or being led by a Grower.



Groups:

Many hands make light work! Red Wiggler hosts groups of volunteers to tackle some of the bigger projects on the farm. Activities include tasks such as harvesting garlic and potatoes, transplanting tomatoes, weeding carrots, and preparing beds for winter. Group visits offer opportunities for community and corporate groups to work together towards a common goal. Many groups use this activity as an opportunity for team-building.

Individuals:

We could not do what we do here at Red Wiggler without volunteers supporting our staff and Growers in the fields. Volunteers expand their skills while also sharing their expertise. As an approved MCPS Student Service Learning site, middle school and high school students who volunteer during the summer to earn credit needed for graduation.



COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE

Red Wiggler is committed to growing food with high environmental standards to promote a healthy community. Our three-part CSA program provides vegetables to individuals in the immediate community and social service organizations that serve low-income individuals and adults with developmental disabilities. Through our CSA, we provide 30 percent of our produce to low-income households. Our gourmet CSA customers receive weekly shares of certified organic produce, as well as newsletters and recipes that promote healthy eating and environmental stewardship. The three parts of our CSA Program are as follows:



1. Gourmet Share: Community members purchase gourmet shares, which are broken into three seasons and picked up on the farm. Community members' time on the farm is more than just a trip to the grocery store. It is also a time to pick flowers and herbs from the pick-your-own area, spend time outside, and learn from our Growers through cooking demonstrations.



2. Farm to Group Home (F2GH): Through a partnership with three social service agencies in Montgomery County, Red Wiggler provides our locally grown produce to residents living in group homes. Vegetables are distributed both as individual household shares and larger deliveries to the agencies to be distributed appropriately. For these shares, we prioritize sending foods that are easy to prepare, familiar, and more likely to be eaten; e.g., carrots instead of pak choi.



3. Farm to Food Bank (F2FB): Red Wiggler makes regular distributions of fresh vegetables to low-income residents in Montgomery County by partnering with two Manna Food Center programs:

- The Smart Sack Program delivers vegetables to low-income students at nearby Fox Chapel Elementary School for lunches, as well as healthy snacks for the weekend.
- Community Food Rescue ensures that we are able to distribute all food grown on the farm, with no food wasted, by delivering food to groups helping people who are experiencing hunger.

Sustainability:

In addition to being a USDA-certified organic farm, Red Wiggler implements other sustainable growing practices. Over the last five years, we have reduced the amount of plastic mulch we use from 13,000 feet to 2,000 feet. By using drip irrigation, we limit water waste. The use of insect-attracting beneficial flower beds, hügelkultur raised garden beds, and reduced tillage increases biodiversity and protects our soil structure. These practices go above and beyond organic standards to promote environmental stewardship.



COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Red Wiggler's programs are built on community involvement. In order to be truly inclusive, we strive to open our farm programs and events to everyone. Throughout the seasons, we invite community members to join us for educational programs and events. Every year we sell out of CSA shares, so we look for other ways to welcome the community. We invite you to join us for an event or workshop to learn more and become part of our community.

ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

Red Wiggler is committed to environmental stewardship. We actively preserve open farmland, creating and maintaining fertile ground through sustainable agriculture. Beyond our certified organic farming practices, we ensure our built environment is deliberate while being focused on function and sustainability.

"The students and families served by our weekend bag program have been consistently asking for more fresh offerings and, thanks to our partnership with Red Wiggler, we're able to make that happen."

Jenna Umbriac
Manna Food Center

"As an agriculture educator, it is rare to find a farm that invests so much energy and attention in the educational experience of volunteers and interns. Red Wiggler demonstrates the social aspects of sustainability better than any farm around."

Meredith Epstein
University of Maryland

"The hands-on exchange between RWCF's Growers, our community college students, and MC faculty has been invaluable as an utterly unique learning opportunity. One of our favorite aspects is how front and center the Growers are as leaders at the farm."

Nik Sushka
Montgomery College



JOIN US

Red Wiggler relies on support from our community. Get involved to support us in furthering our vision to create fertile ground to nourish a healthy and inclusive community by:

- Donating online at www.redwiggler.org/donate
- Volunteering
- Attending an event
- Liking us on Facebook
- Following us on Instagram

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