

✉ Mailing Address:  
150 Allendale Road #1115  
King of Prussia, PA 19406

📍 Physical Address:  
530 W. Germantown Pk.  
East Norriton, PA 19403



## About Us

Sweet Fields is an organic farm and education center located within Norristown Farm Park, a public park and working farm in the western suburbs of Philadelphia. Our property is highly visible and accessible – we border the highly traveled Germantown Pike, are on SEPTA's 90 Bus Route, and a public path in the park directs the thousands of visitors each year directly through Sweet Fields.

## Our Mission

Our mission is to increase healthy eating and inspire sustainable living for our local community, especially for residents facing food insecurity. We will achieve this by growing organic produce, donating to food banks, increasing the accessibility of fresh produce in food deserts, and hosting educational programs for all ages. We are leasing 7 acres from Montgomery County, which includes the use of a 19th century barn.

## History

The Sweet Fields team began meeting in August 2014 with the goal of finding property for an organic farm and education center. After much research and business planning, they decided to pursue Norristown Farm Park and met with county representatives on March 25, 2015. Meetings with county representatives and planning continued until June 21, 2016 when a ten-year lease was signed for 7 total acres—six tillable acres and one acre that contains a barn. We received 501(c)(3) status in May 2016; all donations are tax-deductible and our EIN number is 81-2078284.

## Our Impact

We are uniquely positioned to tackle two major issues in our local area. The first

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issue is food insecurity and poor nutrition. Norristown is an economically struggling borough, with 23% of the population below the poverty line. Some areas of Norristown are considered food deserts by the USDA, and food insecurity is a major problem. According to the CDC, 24.6% of the population of Montgomery County is obese. Poverty and food deserts are a major cause of poor diet. 23.2% of the population in Norristown is below the poverty line. In Montgomery County as a whole, 37% are below the SNAP threshold for poverty, and almost 45 million dollars in additional money is required to meet food needs. Poverty disproportionately affects women in Norristown. 26.8% of women are below the poverty line, and 32.6% of female-lead households are below the poverty level. Households with children headed by a single woman have a 30.3% rate of food insecurity, and women living alone have a 14.7% rate of food insecurity.

According to a survey from the International Food Information Council Foundation, half of those polled believe that it is easier to do their taxes than to eat healthfully. Nutrition education is a major barrier to healthy eating. We are actively working on creating nutrition programs for the entire community, but also particularly for the low-income population and for children. We are already approved to accept SNAP benefits, and have established a relationship with CADCOM to distribute produce from our farm to local food banks.

The second issue is science and STEM learning experiences for local struggling school districts (primarily Norristown, but we are close enough for Chester and Philadelphia to access our teaching tools as well). Sweet Fields is working with the local Norristown Area School District, which reports low proficiency levels in math, science, and literature; 80.6% of students are economically disadvantaged.

Proficiency levels in Science/Biology are low:

Norristown Area High School - 51%  
East Norriton Middle School - 50%  
Eisenhower Middle School - 41.75%  
Stewart Middle School - 34.58%

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The Director of Science, Technology, and Engineering identified hands-on science experiences as a critical need for the students. So, consulting with him, we came up with the ideas for our education center projects – these are learning opportunities for the students that would also provide fresh produce to low-income families, and generate income so that the projects can sustain themselves. Please see the next section about our education center for further details about this.

We are in the process of collecting data to directly measure our impact.

## The Education Center

Our education center is what will set us apart from typical farms. As just mentioned, science education is an immediate and ongoing need of the Norristown Area School District. The education center will be comprised of educational attractions such as:

**Mycology Center** – students will learn about biology and the fungi kingdom, decomposition, and the unique way that fungi “eat.”

**Hydroponic Greenhouse** – integrating science, engineering, sustainable agriculture, and technology. Hydroponic growing typically produces more yield per square foot as well.

**Edible Garden Scavenger Hunt** – Participants are given a basket and nutrition-based clues about fruits and vegetables. They then walk through a garden and attempt to pick the produce that matches the clues. Answers are revealed at the end and participants keep what they pick.

**Specialty Gardens** – A water-based garden to teach about water conservation and aquatic life, a pollinator garden to teach entomology, and potentially a rock garden for special species and geology.

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**Soil Technology** - Students will see how a Raspberry Pi (computer that fits inside an Altoids tin) is specially programmed for testing soil indicators like moisture level, acidity, nutrient levels, and temperature. They can also program a Farm Bot to automate growing in the greenhouse.

**Rolling Greenhouse** – different crops have different growing cycles. A rolling greenhouse allows us to extend our growing season by moving the greenhouse over different crops and different points of the year. Students learn about botany, plant lifestyles and pollination, and photosynthesis.

These, and potentially additional stations, will create a “rotating classroom” and will be an excellent opportunity for students visiting the property to learn about sustainable agriculture, plant science, environmental science, and nutrition. In addition to the hands-on learning experiences, we’ll have educational events for all ages. We will offer coupons and scholarships so that cost is never a barrier to learning. Here are some educational events we’re currently planning:

Gardening Workshop	Lots of Nutrition Programming
Fair Trade Lecture	Stroud Water Research Center Activity
Healthy Lifestyle Seminar	Permaculture Class
Sustainable Business Network Presentation	American Chestnut Foundation Program
Botany Mini-course	Sustainable Agriculture Discussion

## The Farm

Farming will most likely begin in February 2017, and we are in the process of raising funds to have a successful and financially stable year. We will have a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) style program that offers residents a weekly box of produce. A-la-carte vegetables grown by Sweet Fields will also be available at farmer’s markets. Anyone can participate in a work share style

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program, which allows a community member to work in exchange for produce. Sweet Fields will also offer pick-your-own flowers, pumpkins, and berries with the hope of expanding to include an orchard soon. We are approved to accept SNAP benefits and are currently applying to accept FMNP benefits as well. We'll be donating fruits and vegetables to local food banks through our relationship with CADCOM.

In an effort to provide access to fresh fruits and vegetables for the entire community, and to maintain our own financial sustainability, we will sell produce to restaurants, schools, and other local organizations. We have already established relationships with businesses who stated they would purchase from us. We spoke with Norristown Area School District's Food Council members about integrating local veggies into school cafeterias. This may also serve as a way for the students to connect with the farm and nutrition – "Sweet Fields Rutabaga Fries" might just become the most popular item on the menu, and students would simultaneously discover that rutabagas are loaded with potassium, calcium, protein, and vitamin C.

## Active in the Community

We are also creating an enjoyable community gathering space where residents of Montgomery and nearby counties can come together to learn, meet their neighbors, and appreciate nature. Students from Penn State created a landscape architecture design for the property, and we will most likely attain Level 1 Arboretum status within the first year. Many species will be labeled for visitors.

In addition, we have made countless partnerships with local businesses, organizations, and educational institutions. We're working with them so we can pull from a variety of expertise to deliver the best possible product for our neighbors and visitors. Please see our website for a full list of organizations and businesses that have helped and supported Sweet Fields.