

## St. Mary Organic Farm Report (January – July 2010)

St. Mary Organic Farm is in the middle of a remarkable growing season. This report outlines only a small portion of the work we've accomplished in the last six months.

### Community Garden

- We are in the second season as a community garden. The change from a community supported agriculture operation (CSA) has proven to be a wise move. Community gardens are flourishing in Michigan and around the country as interest in gardening has soared. Community gardening affords the opportunity for experiential learning because people work the land themselves, becoming reacquainted with their relationship with – and reliance on – the land. There is a high investment when gardeners grow exactly which vegetables and herbs they desire, shape their plots and tend to their crops. Their personal satisfaction and pride is obvious as the season progresses especially for new growers. Community members share knowledge, seeds and seedlings, recipes and their harvest. One of our gardeners with a talent for woodworking created a sign for his neighboring garden plot, the residents from St. Rose Senior Center. Another gardener helps the seniors from St. Rose with their plot upkeep every week. Many people have forged new friendships.
- All 29 available community plots this spring were filled but because some plots are the growing space for several gardeners, the number of people benefiting from the garden exceeds 75. This excludes the ten gardeners who lost their raised beds this spring due to barn cats. For the first time, it became prohibitive to grow vegetables in the raised beds. All eight raised beds are currently growing flowers until next year and the difficulty around the cats has been a learning experience.
- Because of the early heavy rains and unusually hot weather, 2010 has been an early season for harvest with an abundance and variety of colorful organic food with some heirloom varieties.

### Michigan Prisoners Reentry Initiative (MPRI)

- For the fourth year, SMOF is partnering with the Monroe County parole system. Every Friday some parolees fulfill community service requirements by working in the garden. This year the garden became the featured work project of the Michigan Reentry Program for Monroe County and is reported to be their most active project. The state director from MPRI visited the garden and viewed a slide show of the garden created by a parole officer. The director found the creative collaboration of Monroe County parolees and St. Mary Organic Farm impressive.

- While this partnership has benefited the County and the parolees, it has also been an invaluable contribution to the garden. The parolees have expanded the shade garden in the gathering space, built new paths, tamed weeds in flower and garden beds, mulched around bushes. They also grow food for God Works and Lord's Harvest Pantry when it opens.

## Volunteers

- The partnership with the parolees has advanced largely due to the volunteer work of one of our garden members. As former director of Monroe County Probation Services, our volunteer knows the "crew" and their needs very well. He volunteers with the parolees in the garden every week and has taken an overall interest in beautifying the garden and finds it rewarding. He has donated stunning glacial rocks.
- Another gardener and volunteer took the perennial garden under her wing last year and is continuing to exercise her green thumb this year. The flowers and art work are extraordinarily beautiful. She and her husband have donated supplies, served refreshments to the parolees, added plants, enlisted the help of a photographer friend to take pictures, created greeting cards, and encourages the other volunteers with weekly progress from the flower garden.

## Honeybees and Butterflies

- With so many beautiful flowers and vegetables, our endangered "buzzy" friends are feasting and flourishing in the garden. Our beekeeper reports "I know the bees are doing a good job pollinating because I could see lots of bees flying out and veering toward the garden. Looks like we have at least 200 lbs of honey so far!" Honey will be bottled and for sale soon.
- We have observed many Monarch butterflies dancing around the flowers and milkweeds. Milkweeds and nectar sources are declining due to the widespread use of herbicides reducing the population of monarchs. Our goal is to become a certified Monarch Waystation. The monarchs know it already.

## The Lord's Harvest Pantry

- St. Mary Organic Farm is a member of the newly established Lord's Harvest Pantry board and is partnering with them to bring local, nutritious food to the needy in Monroe County through its food bank. SMOF has designated two plots to grow food with the help of Speckled Frog Learning Center and the Monroe County parolees. Some other garden members are or will be giving their harvest surplus to the food bank and the seniors from St. Rose Center. Since the Lord's Harvest Pantry has delayed its opening, produce is delivered to God Works through the Monroe County Opportunity Programs. St. Mary Organic Farm and the IHM Justice, Peace and Sustainability Office are collaborating in hosting Jeff

### **St. Rose Senior Center**

- St. Rose Senior Center has been part of SMOF for two years because of their relationship with one of the IHM Sisters. In 2009, SMOF provided surplus food and offered information to the senior center's director on recipes and healthy food selections. This year the seniors decided to grow their own food at SMOF with the help of our garden volunteers. Together we planted their garden and assist them with their weeding and harvesting.

### **St. Mary Organic News**

- The electronic weekly information sent to the gardeners and supporters over the last several years has evolved this year into a bi-weekly electronically formatted newsletter. St. Mary Organic Farm News, which includes gardening advice, prayers and quotes, recipes, health tips and legislative alerts, is sent to 200 people. We've had requests for newsletter subscriptions from Texas, Montana and Oregon. The newsletter is uploaded and assisted by the work of the Communications Office to the IHM website.

### **Food, Inc.**

- The widely acclaimed movie, an expose on the American food system, was presented to MH residents and staff, garden members and supporters and to the Cristo Rey students at the MH. One garden supporter, an Eastern Michigan University nursing professor teaches her nursing and returning students about health and the American food system with SMOF copy of Food Inc.

### **Schools**

- SMOF presented educational workshops to freshman and sophomore classes and middle school children from the Detroit area. These students learned about composting, vermiculture, companion planting, bees, and the long term effects of diet and nutrition and its relationship to our epidemic of chronic disease.
- SMOF hosted Loyola University environmental students again this year. SMOF offered the students an experience and discussion on the spirituality of the garden while the young people helped with SMOF spring clean-up.

### **Annual Blessing of the Land**

- SMOF gardeners and supporters participated in blessing the gardens with a special welcome from the IHM president. As always, gardeners brought a colorful

## Tours

- SMOF gives garden tours to various groups who are touring the Motherhouse through Monroe Campus Long Range Planning (MCLRP) and who request a specific tour of the garden. The groups this year included master gardeners, garden clubs and schools.

## Sustainability Team

- SMOF is working with the River Raisin Institute, MCLRP, Campus Spirituality and the IHM Justice, Peace and Sustainability Office to create tangible tools in sustainability. The Sustainability Team is expanding what has previously been offered as “Motherhouse Tours” into a new tour program that will be called “Sustainability Education Tours. SMOF will be a featured element of these new tours. In addition to re-imagining the MH tour script, we are beginning to develop “add-on” modules for groups who are interested in a particular aspect of sustainability. SMOF will be the first module in the series.
- SMOF is collaborating with Jay Biernat an intern with the River Raisin Institute this summer, to develop a children’s educational program on campus using learning tools such as the garden, beehives, cosmic walk and prairies.

## Earth Day

- SMOF partnered with other IHM departments for a MH Earth Day event celebrating ways we honor Earth at the Motherhouse with residents and employees. The excitement was palpable among the 25 departments whose displays noted green products and processes that are part of MH operations.
- SMOF also helped plan the annual Earth Day event for Monroe County. We set up a SMOF educational display and our beekeepers gave a presentation on honey bees.

## Tree Carvings

- As dead trees were being removed from the IHM campus, SMOF asked the Leadership Council to save a couple of trees to add an artistic reflection to the landscape. Working with Big Mac Landscaping Services, we enlisted a local artist, Kirt Bausman, to carve several animals on a tree outside H-wing. Another tree on the west side of the MH will be carved this fall with the IHM logo, the word “Welcome,” and flowers.

## Bird Watching

- SMOF is partnering with Monroe Parks and Recreation to offer an activity to observe and record birds that live or pass through the IHM campus. This should provide a good opportunity to learn about our feathered neighbors.
- We may continue to offer birding activities on a regular basis.

St. Mary Organic Farm and other sustainable gardens and farms are a magnetic force for life.

Sharon McNeil  
July 9, 2010

