



LOUISIANA ORGANIC CENTER OF EXCELLENCE

History

In the midst of the chaos left by Hurricane Katrina, a unique haven for over 150 displaced residents of New Orleans has been established just north of Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Built by philanthropist Frank Stronach, Magnaville Farms is a residential organic-farming community that has 49 homes for hurricane displaced families outside of the small town of Simmesport.

Residents of Magnaville Farms are invited to live on the farm rent-free until 2010 in return for 8 hours per week of community service. While no one is required to work within the operations, Magnaville Farms and the Louisiana Organic Center of Excellence (LOCE) will create fair enterprise employment opportunities and will develop business and asset building opportunities for the residents at Magnaville Farms and surrounding communities. In the meantime, these former New Orleans city-dwellers are adjusting to their new rural life. Most of the original residents have expressed interest in staying in or near Magnaville Farms as they rebuild their lives, find employment, go to school and begin to build community with one another.

Magnaville Farms, is a recognized 501(c)(3) Not for Profit organization that is promoting commercialization of micro farming enterprises to create fair share employment, provide economic opportunity and stability for displaced and disadvantaged citizens and to assist in rural community development in Louisiana. Magnaville Farms is acting as the umbrella agent for the Louisiana Organic Center of Excellence while the LOCE is building an organization, gaining its own non-profit status and developing a separate governing Board of Directors and management team.

To date, Magna International has been the principal funding resource for Magnaville Farms. Magna International is now seeking private and public partnerships to maximize the potential of the Louisiana Organic Center of Excellence. The long-term goal of Magnaville Farms and the LOCE is to develop self-supporting organic enterprises and micro enterprise models that build and sustain the rural economy and community in the Deep South. With that goal in mind, LOCE representatives have established working relationships and partnerships with researchers at Southern University, Louisiana State University, "Community College" and local chapters of 4-H, tourism boards and the Avoyelles parish councils. Together, we are making strides in establishing the LOCE as "a catalyst to develop a flourishing organic economy in the state of Louisiana".

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Purpose

The Louisiana Organic Center of Excellence aims to serve as an educational outreach center with a focus on developing models and promoting the possibilities of small, farm-based micro-enterprises to generate significant additional part-time income and the opportunity to build business and personal assets to rural, low-income residents.

Objectives

For the purpose of this project, the primary objective of LOCE is to empower low-income, underserved rural residents to develop viable pastured poultry micro-enterprise to generate much-needed additional income. Pasturing chickens in farm scale movable pens has proven to be very successful. The pen, sometimes called a chicken and or egg mobile, and chickens are moved as the birds' size and pasture conditions require. Once they are established, pastured poultry operations require minimal attention, making it an ideal occupation for someone already working a full-time job.

Implementing the pastured poultry model has the potential to do double-duty: it is an effective way to increase public awareness about sustainable and organic agriculture and, at the same time, provide a practical training vehicle for teaching management, business and interpersonal skills to those ready to become entrepreneurs.

Projects 2007-2009

- 1) Establish a Micro Farm model and demonstration project.
 - a. LOCE will work with partners at Southern University and Louisiana State University to establish a successful micro farm pastured poultry model and demonstration project. This part of the project will model the organic method of production, including breed selection and best practices in livestock and animal welfare management, as well as region specific pasture management, on farm processing and post harvest handling of meats.
 - b. Work with "Southern University's Small Business Development Center" to create data and record sheets that accurately portray the economic realities of the pastured poultry business.

- 2) Build, certify and maintain a Mobile Processing Unit (MPU).
 - a. One of the major barriers to successfully expanding the practice of pasturing poultry is a lack of approved processing facilities. Therefore, LOCE will work with local, state and federal regulators to develop an approved Mobile Processing Unit (MPU), which will be used to support individuals pursuing a pastured poultry micro-enterprise.
 - b. Develop MPU's as traveling micro-enterprise units.

Projects 2007-2009 (Continued)

- 3) Conduct training for production, business management, and marketing.
 - a. While LOCE will host regular workshops for the general public to increase public awareness about sustainable agriculture, a more formalized training will be developed for serious entrepreneurs. This training will be intensive, hands-on, multi-day programming to empower participants with the knowledge and skills to begin their own micro-enterprise. In addition to the basics of flock and pasture health, participants will engage in a hands-on processing demonstration.
 - b. Work with partner with the newly emerging Avoyelles Parish Community College and Southern University's Small Business Development Center to offer business and marketing skill-building.
 - c. Create a partnership with Big River Economic and Agriculture Development Alliance, BREADA to support new farmer entry into local farmers' markets, restaurants and other retail outlets.
 - d. Develop collaborative and cooperative access to distribution channels and markets.

- 4) Mentor and Monitor
 - a. LOCE will offer support to "graduates" as they pursue their own micro-farm/enterprise. This support will range from production innovations, access to micro financing; publish hands on micro farming literature, economic analysis, ecological impact and asset building strategies for individuals, families and communities.
 - b. LOCE will follow up with participants as they develop their own micro-enterprises to determine the economic impact of adopting small-scale farming.

- 5) Website Development
The LOCE website will
 - a. Be an information rich website that will promote micro enterprises as pathways out of poverty, asset building and community education and development.
 - b. Provide hands on information for enterprise development and production, financial and marketing information for interested entrepreneurs
 - c. Provide information on access to micro-financing.
 - d. Establish links with community development, organic and sustainable, environmental and related economic development sites.

Partnership Opportunities

Initially, there are four key programs within the Louisiana Organic Center of Excellence that afford opportunities to partner with us in developing micro-farming enterprises in underserved communities in rural Louisiana. We are seeking multiple year support and technical assistance for the development of the model micro-enterprise livestock operations; for community building and infrastructure and for establishing micro-enterprises and vehicles for micro financing for underserved, low-income entrepreneurs in the Deep South.