


# SEEDS OF

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**A**fter arriving at Wilson in 1987 as a young biology professor, Brad Engle was disappointed when the College sold a stand of old-growth forest to a logger. The woods were part of the Lehman Farm, an 18th-century farmstead the College purchased in 1974.

Like his colleague in the biology department, Tom Cheetham, Engle had an interest in a field then known as ecology, which examined the interrelationships between the environment and living things. After Gwendolyn Jensen became president of Wilson College in 1991, "she came to Tom and I and said, 'I'd really like you to think about possible ways we might use this land and this farm to benefit the College,'" said Engle, now an associate professor of biology and chair of the Physical and Life Sciences Division.

Jensen was interested in how the 100-acre farm could benefit the College financially and academically, Engle said. "She pretty much painted it as a blank slate," he said.



Steve Moore plows with draft horses during his time as Wilson farmer and center for sustainable living director.

# TENTIAL

Fulton Center Growing Into A Brighter Future  
BY CATHY MENTZER





PHOTO BY MATTHEW LESTER

Photos, from left. Sunflowers grow alongside greens at Fulton Farm. Former FCSL Director Steve Moore is known as the “Gandhi of Greenhouses.” The Fulton Farm’s Owens Barn is shown during its restoration. Former FCSL Program Manager Matt Steiman, right, harvests end-of-season tomatoes.



Marking its 20th anniversary this year, Wilson’s Richard Alsina Fulton Center for Sustainable Living sprouted from both practical and idealistic visions. College officials wanted to make use of the farmstead it had owned for nearly 20 years. Engle, Cheetham and others had a vision of caring for the land, preserving history and natural resources, and pursuing a new movement of environmental sustainability. The visions blended and evolved in 1994 into what was then known as Wilson’s Center for Environmental Education and Sustainable Living. The center—which promotes earth-friendly practices such as sustainable food and energy production, land and watershed stewardship, conservation and preservation—provides oversight of the College’s Fulton Farm and Robyn Van En Center, an information resource for community-supported agriculture with a national CSA database. But while the Fulton Center has achieved many of its initial goals, work continues for the Fulton Center to reach its full potential.

“You’ve got something special going on there ... very forward-thinking, very well-supported,” said Steve Moore, a farmer and one of the first directors of the Fulton Center. “It may be the time for a full bloom.”

### AN IDEA TAKES ROOT

After being approached by Jensen about ways to use the Lehman farmstead, Engle and Cheetham brainstormed, engaging other faculty in the process. “The collective idea was it would be nice to use this land as a model of sustainability,” Engle said. “At that

time, sustainability was not a mainstream term. There were very few colleges that had a program in sustainability.” They envisioned three main ideas: using the farm for small-scale organic food production for the College; creating a curriculum in environmental studies; and involving the campus community with the land, “but with no specifics,” he said with a laugh.

They developed a white paper, followed by a grant proposal for seed money to create a sustainable living and education center. Jensen and former trustee Carol Schaaf Heppner ’64 took the proposal to the Eden Hall Foundation, which in 1994 provided a \$235,000 grant—the full amount requested—to start the center, hire a director and pay operational costs for three years. Later that same year, the Klein Foundation provided a \$50,000 grant to build a greenhouse. That September, the College hired its first director, Rima Nickell.

In a 1994 newspaper article, Nickell—who had a background in organic farming, land use planning and natural resource management—said the center would demonstrate how to live sustainably by “establishing an organic farm and eventually constructing an energy-efficient director’s residence and a conference facility with reference materials ....” While the organic farm is well-established, the residence and conference center were never realized and are no longer part of the Fulton Center’s plan.

The College hired Moore, a progressive local farmer who was becoming widely



known for his innovations in sustainable agriculture, to consult on the construction of the center's first solar greenhouse and production techniques, and later hired him to run the College farm. Nickell departed in 1996 and Moore took over the additional responsibility of Fulton Center director, ushering in an era of growth, experimentation and innovation.

### A TIME OF GROWTH

Moore moved into Wilson's farmhouse with his wife and daughters, ran the farm, led workshops and demonstrations, taught classes and became the go-to source for news reporters writing stories about the latest developments in sustainable agriculture and energy. "He was the guru," said Edward Wells, who was hired in 1997 as Wilson's first environmental studies professor. "Everyone came to him. He used to run workshops for Amish and Mennonite farmers on draft horse farming. He was one of the smartest people I've known in my life."

Famously dubbed "the Gandhi of Greenhouses" in an article by a nonprofit organic farming research organization called the Rodale Institute, for his mastery of using solar greenhouses and building healthy soil to produce vegetables almost year-round, Moore launched a community-supported agriculture program at Wilson in 1996 to encourage local farmers to adopt the model—a then-novel approach to save small, family farms and connect people to the source of their food. In a CSA, subscribers provide farmers with needed revenue at the beginning of the planting season and then

share in the harvest, as well as the risk, of the farm operation.

Moore can still see in his mind's eye the farm's CSA subscribers striding across the lawn to the farmhouse porch to pick up their weekly shares of produce. Some members paid full price for a share of the harvest, some worked on the farm to get a discount and some paid more than their share just to support the idea. Others couldn't afford it, but their church paid so they could have access to healthy food each week.

"When they hit the front porch, everybody was the same," Moore said. "You still got 10 tomatoes and five peppers. It made food an egalitarian issue and everybody had the same right to the same healthy food, regardless." He paused. "I really liked that, as you can tell, and I, as a farmer, and we, as Wilson, played a part in bringing that about."

Moore also founded Wilson's Robyn Van En Center in 1998 with a \$48,000 grant from the Environmental Protection Agency for CSA development in the Northeast. "We had the number one grant in the nation out of 600 applicants," Moore said. "The CSA movement was just barely getting started in the United States and really, Wilson College was at the forefront of making things happen in the Northeast."

Originally staffed by an intern, Jayne Shord, and subsequently by volunteers and part-time employees, the Van En Center provides information about CSAs and the CSA movement to farmers, news media and other interested groups around the nation

and abroad. The center also manages a national database of CSAs.

Now a consultant and instructor in the environmental studies department at North Carolina's Elon University, Moore left Wilson in 1999 after, in his words, becoming "burned out." The College recognized the need to divide the work he performed into two positions—center director and farm manager—and for a year, Wells and Shord served as CSL co-directors. During that time, Wilson student Tonami Jones '01 organized a community meeting that led to the creation of Chambersburg's South Gate Farmers Market—now the North Square Farmers Market—of which Wilson is still an anchor member. Shord, working in her capacity at Wilson, helped found the market and the South Central Pennsylvania Farmers Association.

In 1997, with initial funding for the Fulton Center evaporating, Wilson alumna Lucille Tooke '40 gave \$100,000 to endow it, followed in late 1999 by \$1 million from Susan Breakefield Fulton '61 for an endowment to honor her late husband, Richard, a former Trustee, lawyer, farmer and conservationist for whom the center was renamed. Susan Fulton later made gifts to the Fulton Center to rehabilitate the Owens Barn and part of the Tooke Farmhouse. She also provided funding to underwrite energy conferences hosted by the center.

After Moore's departure, the College hired Matt Steiman in 2000 as farm manager and Inno Onwueme became the next center



Photos, from left. A low-head dam on the Conococheague is removed. Farmhands gather spring onions. Workers prepare solar panels to be installed at Fulton Farm.

director. Since Steiman, three others have served as farm manager—Mary Cottone, Eric Benner and Sarah Bay, the current manager, who arrived in 2012. Steiman was promoted to Fulton Center program manager in 2005 and when he left, he was replaced in 2007 by Chris Mayer '07. After seven years, she is the longest-serving head of the center for sustainable living.

## POSITIVE CHANGES ON THE HORIZON

Among the Fulton Center's successes, community members, school children, farmers and renewable energy and sustainable agriculture advocates have visited the center and its organic farm, seven acres of which are used to grow produce. Wilson made a formal commitment to sustainability by incorporating it into its mission statement and signing the American Colleges and Universities Presidents' Climate Commitment to pursue climate neutrality. In recent years, the College has experimented with biodiesel production, wind power and solar electric arrays. The farm grows organic food for the dining hall and a farm stand, as well as the community-supported agriculture program. The Fulton Center has preserved historic buildings and land. Dam removals and other projects have improved the Conococheague Creek's water quality. The College has received recognition for its environmental stewardship and preservation efforts, including winning two Pennsylvania Governor's Award for Excellence in 2001 and 2003.

However, Wilson has found it difficult to achieve the initial goal of integrating the academic curriculum with the Fulton Center and connecting it to the campus community. "We need a bridge between the farm and the curriculum and the culture of the College," said Wells, now director of the Environmental Studies program. "Some of our students don't know we have a farm."

Mayer shares Wells' frustration. "One of the tenets of sustainability is continual improvement," she said. "What we're doing is a process and there'll always be room for improvement."

As the Fulton Center begins its 20th year, there is cause for renewed optimism, according to Wells, Mayer and others. The farm's designation in December as U.S. Department of Agriculture-certified organic should open doors for research and funding partnerships. In addition, a feasibility study is underway to examine a new academic program involving food—food policy, safety, access or security—that may finally be the link between the Fulton Center and academics the center's founders envisioned. Bay said she looks forward to strengthening that connection.

To celebrate the Fulton Center's 20th anniversary, the College has organized several events. Spring Convocation on Feb. 11 kicked off the celebration with a special program about the Fulton Center that Susan Fulton attended. On April 26, volunteers planted native trees and shrubs to

expand the riparian buffer along the Conococheague, as part of a joint effort with Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay's Pennsylvania office. On June 6 during Reunion Weekend, an evening bonfire with music and food will also recognize the center's birthday.

"Farms are life forces of a community," Bay said. "If you want to get down to the food aspect, it's in politics; it's in economics, sociology. The idea of farming is ingrained in every little aspect of society. It's all there. It's all connected. That's what I believe."

Like other Fulton Center managers, Mayer brought her own interests to the job while continuing to focus on core sustainability issues such as energy conservation and promoting healthy, local food to the College and community. For the past five years, she has organized a workshop series called "F.R.E.S.H. (Finding Responsible Eating Strategies for Health)." She has planned an annual "Energy and You" conference to educate area residents and business owners about saving on energy costs by using alternative energy technologies.

"I guess my overall goal with that is creating this awareness, giving people information and letting them decide," Mayer said. "They need the awareness before they can begin to appreciate the environment, food, community, neighbors, clean water, their world—and then they can act on it. It's all connected."

With the help of a five-year, \$433,612 grant for environmental education from the

WE HAVE TO SET LEADERSHIP EXAMPLES FOR OUR COMMUNITY AND FOR OUR STUDENTS. IT'S A LIMITED PLANET AND WE REALLY HAVE TO BE GOOD STEWARDS FOR THE FUTURE.

—Wilson President  
Barbara K. Mistick



Margaret A. Cargill Foundation, the Fulton Center has overseen a number of new sustainability-related facilities on campus, including a charging station for electric vehicles with rooftop solar array at the art annex building, an outdoor classroom and composting toilet at the farm and last summer, a new produce washing station and pole barn at the farm. The pole barn is equipped with a solar array to power an irrigation pump and electric tractor.

But the Fulton Center also is in need of a focused direction, said Mayer, who plans to develop a new strategic plan. "There's never enough time to do that visioning and planning," she said. "We could look at things like certificate programs in sustainable agriculture. I'd love to see a lab and a classroom and a teaching kitchen."

Through the Fulton Center, the College has served as a leader in sustainability issues and can be proud of that, said Wilson President Barbara K. Mistick. "We have to set leadership examples for our community

## RICHARD ALSINA FULTON CENTER F

**1974**

Wilson bought Lehman farmstead

**1991-94**

Center for Sustainable Living concept developed

**1994**

Eden Hall and Klein Foundation grants provided seed money to open the center  
Center for Sustainable Living launched and first director hired

**1995**

Environmental studies major began at Wilson

**1996**

Robyn Van En Center founded  
Wilson College established a community-supported agriculture program



PHOTOS BY MATTHEW LESTER



Photos, from left. Fulton Center for Sustainable Living Program Manager Chris Mayer '07 is the longest serving head of the center, joining in 2007. Fulton Farm Manager Sarah Bay sets produce out for pickup. Solar panels cover the roof of a pole barn.

and for our students. It's a limited planet and we really have to be good stewards for the future."

Mistick, Mayer and others are encouraged by recent positive developments, such as the USDA designation of Fulton Farm as certified organic. "I think our greatest hope is that we'll get more opportunities for students to do research projects up there," Bay said. "Having certified organic land to work on is a wonderful asset. It's probably going to open doors in ways we're not even thinking about."

The farm is also certified naturally grown, a peer designation that will continue. But Mayer worries about staffing to keep up with the certification requirements. "We need more full-time staffing at the farm, especially now with this USDA certification," she said. "The increased record-keep-

ing alone is going to demand way more of someone's time."

The Fulton Center has faced staffing problems at other times as well. Since its inception, interns, AmeriCorps Volunteers and part-time workers have staffed the Van En Center. "We've turned down speaking engagements because we have no budget for travel," Mayer said. "If we had a full-time person, we would be able to take a look at mission and visioning."

The staff could expand if the feasibility study leads to a new food program, Mayer said. "I think that has the potential to blow the socks off of things," she said. The results of the feasibility study are expected to be released soon.

"The thing that's wonderful about doing the food study here is, we sit in south-

central Pennsylvania, where the family farm is still a big part of the economy," Mistick said. "Having academic communities that are positioned to deal with those issues is important."

Engle called the prospect of research projects for students at the farm exciting and expressed optimism about the potential for an academic program involving food. "I think it has tremendous potential," he said. "Depending on what comes out of it, it would be a program that directly links the farm and the center into the curriculum. I think all along that's what we envisioned." **W**

## OUR SUSTAINABLE LIVING MILESTONES

**1997**

Lucille Tooke gave \$100,000 endowment for the Center for Sustainable Living

**2001**

Fulton Center won Governor's Award for Environmental Excellence

**2002**

Interpretive trail opened

**2004**

Wilson won Greater Chambersburg Chamber of Commerce Historic Preservation Award for Owens Barn restoration

First conference on sustainability and environment held

**1999**

Susan Fulton gave \$1 million endowment, center renamed Richard Alsina Fulton Center

**2000**

Wilson College was founding member of Southgate Farmers Market

**2003**

Fulton Center won a second Governor's Award for Environmental Excellence

**2013**

Fulton Center received U.S. Department of Agriculture-certified organic status