

Best Practice

Delisle Crops for Community

CONTACT

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THE PRACTICE

Sports and recreation facilities are very important to residents of the Town of Delisle and the surrounding area. As the recreation facilities continue to see increased use, the need to upgrade or at the very least maintain them is critical. Having the financial resources to make this possible can sometimes be challenging in a small community. Shawn Colborn saw an opportunity to raise money by growing crops on town-owned land and donating the proceeds back to the community to help improve recreation facilities.

The four-year fundraising project called Delisle Crops for Community completed its first year in 2013. In year one, the project raised \$68,623.43. Through an application process, this money will be made available to community groups wishing to undertake a project to improve recreation facilities in the community

THE PROCESS

The project started as an idea from Shawn Colborn. The concept of growing a crop and using the proceeds for the betterment of the community had been discussed in the past, but the challenge had always been not having any farmland to grow the crop on. The town purchased a parcel of farmland (193 acres) for future development in the spring of 2012 and Colburn saw an opportunity. In August 2012, a group representing Delisle Crops for Community presented the idea to town council. Council approved the project and agreed to provide the land rent free for the next four years, with the understanding that the proceeds of the crops grown would be used for recreation facility upgrades in the community.

The next step for the committee was acquiring sponsorship to help with the cost of growing the crop. A natural fit was to approach local fertilizer manufacturer, Agrium, to find out if they would be interested in supply the fertilizer for the first year of the project. Agrium was so impressed with the idea that they agreed to cover the cost of all crop inputs (fertilizer, seed, crop protection products, etc.) for the duration of the four-year project. With the town and Agrium on board, finding volunteers and equipment to seed and harvest the crop was the next challenge. They approached the local John Deere dealership and explained the project. Similar to Agrium's response, Cervus Equipment John Deere agreed to help supply some of the machinery needed to seed and harvest the crop over the four-year period. These were critical milestones in making the project a success.

All the planning and promotion of the project is done by the Delisle Crops for Community steering committee, made up of representatives from community organizations. The seven members were responsible for project promotion through media contact, budgeting, bringing in sponsors, and recruiting volunteers.

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THE RESULTS

On top of funds raised for community recreation facilities, the project has boosted community spirit. There are already members of the community discussing projects that they could undertake using the funds raised.

On March 1, 2013 they launched the project; a sellout crowd of more than 150 people enjoyed a catered supper, casino night, and had the opportunity to listen to speakers explain the project and the potential benefits it could offer the community. There was a sense of excitement in the community after this event.

Mayor Dave Anderchek hosted a community barbeque on September 10, 2013, the day the crop was harvested. In addition to the 180 elementary students in attendance, approximately 120 residents and local volunteers attended the event.

The project has also given the Delisle Crops for Community committee members a chance to further educate students, in the classroom and in the field, about how food is grown and the importance of sustainable agriculture.

Project updates from the Delisle Crops for Community committee members are provided at council meetings.

The biggest challenge faced was securing sponsorship for the project, to allow it to be profitable. With four-year commitments from both Agrium and Cervus Equipment John Deere, these challenges have been overcome.

LESSONS LEARNED

Like many new initiatives, there are naysayers, and there are doers. The committee members and a number of other members of the community have seen what great things can be accomplished when dedicated people have a goal in mind and persist. A key lesson learned was that had the committee members listened to the initial skepticism by the small minority of people, and not forged ahead, a huge opportunity would have been missed.

The only key area that the committee would recommend doing differently is to error on the side of over-communicating. Early in the project, there were a lot of questions, and because the project took some time to get off the ground, at times it left community members with unanswered questions. Through print media articles, promotional brochures, and community events, communication about the project is becoming more frequent and consistent.