



CT NOFA *Cultivating an Organic Connecticut*

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The Community Foundation for Greater New Haven
Quinnipiac River Fund
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Report on Grant#20080176, by Bill Duesing, CT NOFA Executive Director.

On November 20th the NOFA Organic Land Care Program (NOFA OLC) hosted a successful Organic Turf Management workshop for schools and municipal employees, funded by The Community Foundation for Greater New Haven: Quinnipiac River Fund. The workshop drew ninety-nine attendees (our proposal target was 100) from across Connecticut. We heavily targeted Quinnipiac River watershed towns with advertising for this course, and succeeded in attracting at least one representative from each of eleven of the eight-teen Quinnipiac watershed towns. Quinnipiac watershed towns in attendance were Cheshire, Durham, Hamden, Farmington, Meriden, New Haven, North Branford, North Haven, Plainville, Wallingford and Wolcott. The project was completed within budget and on time.

The Organic Turf Management workshop was formed in response to the need to educate municipal workers and school groundskeepers on organic turf management techniques in order to comply with new legislation banning the use of pesticides on school grounds with children in grades K-8. Key leaders within NOFA OLC and Jerry Silbert from the Watershed Partnership convened to create and present an agenda specifically tailored for this audience.

Chip Osborne, from Osborne Organics, renowned for his work and presentations on organic turf management, was the primary workshop speaker and covered the “How-To” subjects of the workshop, including the difference between a synthetic and natural turf program, creating and managing a healthy soil, proper cultural practices, implementation of a natural program, strategy, budget, and management. Kim Stoner, PhD from the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station introduced NOFA OLC and presented “Why Organic?” Diane Jorsey, from the CT Department of Environmental Protection, hosted a Q&A session concerning the new legislation. Ms. Jorsey has been highly involved in the interpretation and enforcement of the CT legislation. Finally, a case study entitled “Experience Within” featured five speakers who discussed their experiences managing municipal and school athletic turf. Speakers included Bill Duesing, CT NOFA and Todd Harrington, Harrington’s SafeLawns who have been involved with the conversion of municipal fields in Manchester and Watertown. Jerry Silbert, Watershed Partnership; Bob Ceccolini, Cheshire Park and Recreation and Alex Palluzzi, Jr., Branford Park and Recreation presented on their experience maintaining organic athletic turf in Branford and Cheshire.

The course received excellent evaluations, and over 90 percent of attendees rated their knowledge of organic turf management as competent or high upon completion of the workshop. Follow up phone surveys have been initiated and the first round of phone calls has been completed. Conversations thus far have indicated that the greatest barrier to implementing an organic program is grub control and initial program cost. Under the CT legislation even organic pesticides used to control grubs are prohibited. CT NOFA and other invested groups have initiated dialog with CT DEP to work to improve legislation to allow some type of grub control mechanism. Course attendees also reported that NOFA OLC did an

excellent job in educating on organic turf management and have suggested that an online forum might be a useful resource during the process of converting to organic. Such an online forum is now in the planning stages as part of our proposed website improvement project.

The NOFA OLC felt that this workshop served an important need and was a great success. We are very grateful to the Quinnipiac River Fund for providing a grant to enable this work.