

NWSA placements with Southeast Alaska Guidance Association (SAGA) help Calypso Organic Farm

AmeriCorps Field Team members Wes Millar, Beth Gaughan, Libby Klancher, Tyler Wade, Josh Farmer, Pat Lindley, and Alex Johnson, are passionate about water conservation, farming, and land use in the Fairbanks region of Alaska. They learned a lot about organic farming practices at Calypso Farm and Ecology Center from Tom Zimmer, Ecology Center Director. Calypso Farm is a Community Shared Agriculture Program in Ester, Alaska providing educational and employment programs and garden crops to the areas surrounding Fairbanks. The farm was trying to increase production, but was in need of a second, larger irrigation pond to sustain additional crops and lacked the time and labor to complete the project. The AmeriCorps Field Team decided to help.

The team contacted local and corporate businesses to obtain materials for postcards and flyers to recruit volunteers. Evaluating other resources in the community, the team displayed flyers promoting a two-day irrigation-pond construction event at local businesses and attended the Renewable Energy Fair at Chena Hot Springs, handing out flyers and talking to the community. They also reached out to the Calypso Farms volunteer base.

On August 24 and 25, 2007, the Field Team, assisted by Tom Zimmer, directed over 20 volunteers in addition to two SAGA crews, in the construction of the new irrigation pond. With tools in hand, volunteers were directed on lining the pond, clearing brush and trees around the construction site, hauling materials, and building fencing. During the volunteer event, the Field Team hosted a celebration of food and community at the farm with a raffle and “slow” food buffet.

After the two-day event, the Field Team and volunteers had a 90,000-gallon irrigation pond that will fill itself naturally with winter snow, sustaining yearly irrigation to crops. The team achieved their goals of community outreach and direct service with Calypso Farms. The short-term effects from this project are the farm’s exposure to the community and expansion of the practice of sustainable agriculture. The long-term effects from this project are a higher crop-yield and for years to come. For this team, the most rewarding part of the CAP was helping out Calypso. As they later wrote “We always knew we could make a difference, we all have in different ways, and this is an example of us coming together to make a difference [as a team].”