

# Northern Westchester EXPRESS

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## Farmer to work soil for food bank

Quarter-acre site will yield a crop of sweet potatoes

By Rob Ryser

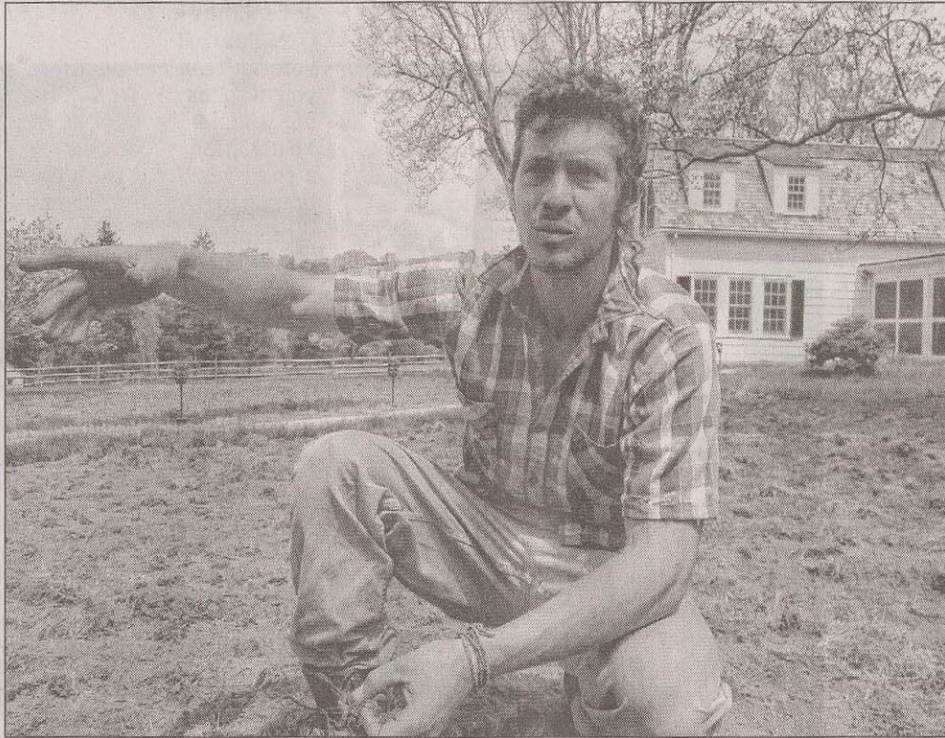
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**BEDFORD HILLS** — What if some of the largest lawns in the suburbs were farmed to feed some of the hungriest families in Westchester County?

That is the larger vision behind a partnership between a land trust and a food bank to grow sweet potatoes to serve to needy families later this year.

Under the shade of a towering sugar maple and bordered by dogwoods and other flowering trees, friends of the Westchester Land Trust gathered with supporters of Food Bank for Westchester to break ground on a quarter-acre sweet potato garden.

The sweet potato crop will be farmed by 25-year-old John Jay High School graduate Doug DeCandia, who has a foot in both nonprofit organizations and who already



Doug DeCandia of Lewisboro will farm a quarter-acre garden of sweet potatoes behind the Westchester Land Trust headquarters on Harris Road in Bedford. The crop will later be distributed to Food Bank for Westchester clients. ROB RYSER/THE JOURNAL NEWS

has tilled about half of the garden behind the Land Trust's Harris Road headquarters.

"The importance of growing good, fresh food organically is that it contains more nutrients that are not in

canned food or foods that people are buying in the grocery store or the gas station," the young farmer said

at a May 3 news conference. "This is food that is coming from the soil."

Indeed, as anyone who has ever had a garden knows, there is a lot of hope and energy in the beginning of the planting season that are centered on the soil.

The hope is that Westchester Land Trust's network of landowners will want to form similar garden partnerships to raise crops that will go directly to the food bank's network of needy seniors, families and children.

Already the Land Trust runs a Farmers Match program that pairs farmers who have no land with property owners who have nothing but land. And the food bank operates four other garden sites in Westchester that raise beans, winter squash and greens for the hungry.

The latest garden partnership between the nonprofits grew out of DeCandia's participation in the Land Trust's Farmers Match program and his position overseeing the existing gardens for the food bank.

"Because he was in our

network, we asked him about the possibility of growing here at the Land Trust," said Eileen Hochberg, the trust's director of conservation outreach. "Also, we were sitting here with a backyard of grass and we said, 'Let's use it and contribute towards the local food movement.'"

Food Bank for Westchester chose sweet potatoes over tomatoes, for example, because they are harvested only once and they grow without too much maintenance. They also are very healthy or, in DeCandia's words, nutrient dense.

The food bank, based in Millwood, will ensure the sweet potatoes get to the right people. The charity even provides recipes.

"Fresh produce for a lot of people is different than what they get at the supermarket, so the knowledge of how to prepare it is limited," DeCandia said.

"Food Bank makes sure clients have all the information about the food — from where it comes from to how to serve it," he said.