

# As Needham Community Farm celebrates 10 years, founder reflects on the journey thus far

[www.needham.wickedlocal.com/news/20181009/as-needham-community-farm-celebrates-10-years-founder-reflects-on-journey-thus-far](https://www.needham.wickedlocal.com/news/20181009/as-needham-community-farm-celebrates-10-years-founder-reflects-on-journey-thus-far)



Hide caption

Deb Schmill (left), founder of the Needham Community Farm, poses with Farm Manager Theresa Strachila and current NCF President Susan Shaver at the farm off of Pine Street. [WickedLocal Staff Photo / Stefan Geller]

By Stefan Geller

Back in 2007, Needham resident Deb Schmill was working with several environmental groups in town- including the Green Needham Collaborative and the League of Women Voters Climate Action Committee- when she came up with an idea. She decided to start a farm that would help fight food insecurity and promote environmental education in the community.

“My feeling was that one of the issues that wasn’t being discussed at that time was food: where we get it; the impact of how we grow it; and, in general, people’s connection to it,” Schmill said. “It’s something we have every day but we don’t really think about where it comes from and what the environmental impact is.”

And so, after a lengthy process to secure space from the town, the Needham Community Farm (NCF) was born. It started with a small pilot site located next to the Needham Museum and History Center. After a few years, an acre of space off of Pine Street was added.

### **A decade of impact**

Earlier this month, Schmill and the rest of the NCF celebrated the 10-year anniversary of the program, and the benefits it has been able to bring to the community since its inception.

“It’s definitely a real source of pride. It’s a really wonderful feeling to know that something that I started turned into something that has helped so many people,” Schmill said. “To see it come to this has been a source of pride for everyone involved.”

A wide range of vegetables are grown at the community farm- including turnips, radishes, tomatoes, spinach, lettuce, beets and potatoes. Nearly all of it goes to food-insecure families through the Needham Food Pantry and to the Needham Housing Authority’s mobile market. The NCF also works to educate the community on how to grow food in an environmentally-friendly way and offers volunteer opportunities for

And while the NCF continues to benefit the town 10 years later, what might be the most surprising aspect is that Schmill actually had no farming experience prior to setting up the program.

“It’s funny because I had heard that there were certain people in the town’s administration who called me ‘the farm lady,’ back when I was pushing for it, which cracked me up because I had never really grown anything in my life,” she said.

### **Community collaborations**

Now, as Schmill looks back at how far the farm has come, she said she is pleasantly surprised by how much interest it has garnered from a variety of groups, such as religious communities and local businesses.

“It feels like every year some great new collaboration has come up. It has gone in many directions that I never would have thought of,” she said.

Schmill ultimately stepped down as president of the NCF in 2014, passing on the leadership role to current president Susan Shaver, who has not wavered in her goal to continue the work that Schmill started.

“We work very hard and it feels really good to be able to provide and be part of a solution to ease food insecurity in Needham,” Shaver said.

“My family going back a couple of generations has struggled with food insecurity,” Shaver said. “I understand it at a very personal level.”

Shaver said that the NCF board is currently trying to get 2 to 4 more acres from the town to increase the amount of food that can be grown and donated.

“The more land we have the more good we can do in Needham,” she said.

Hello reader, our article commenting that you would normally see here is temporarily shut down. We still want to hear from you, so we invite you to go to our [Facebook page](#) or submit a letter to the editor.