



Click Icon to visit website

FARM WELL NEWSLETTER

THE BI-WEEKLY NEWSLETTER OF FARM WELL WI

SUBSCRIBE

FEB. 2022, ISSUE 7



FARM ROOTS RUN DEEP AT SIN SINAWA

WRITTEN BY LAURANA SNYDER

"What is there in nature worth living for that is not here? All is found at Sinsinawa" -Father John Volz, OP 1897

Agriculture has been the way of life at the Sinsinawa Mound since Father Mazzuchelli first arrived here in the early 1840s. Father Samuel Mazzuchelli, born in Italy in 1806, belonged to the Dominican Order of Preachers and traveled as a missionary priest of the Northwest Territory (which is now the states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, Michigan and part of Minnesota). Fr. Mazzuchelli purchased 800 acres in southwest Wisconsin in 1844 from George Wallace Jones, who later became a US Senator from Iowa. In 1847, Fr. Mazzuchelli established a community of Dominican Sisters in Sinsinawa, Wisconsin, to help him carry on his mission of preaching and teaching. By 1860 about 120 acres were under cultivation at the Mound, producing wheat, corn, oats, peas, beans, potatoes, and hay. Livestock at the Mound included horses, milk and beef cows, oxen, and swine. The sisters of Sinsinawa had established for themselves a partially self-sustaining farm to support the Mound residents which included sisters and students from St. Clara Academy. In addition to farmland the sisters also had access to the forests surrounding the mound. These forests would have contained nuts, berries, and an abundance of wildlife all of which would have supplemented the residents' diets.

The sisters of Sinsinawa Mound continued to grow, improve, and change with the times. A greenhouse was constructed on site at the turn of the 20th century, and improved upon in 1941. This greenhouse would have served many purposes such as starting seedlings for the summer garden and growing flowers for use in the St. Clara Chapel. Many Sinsinawa Dominican novices and sisters alike worked in the greenhouse over the years, all pitching in to help grow food for their community. Many of the sisters recounted fond memories of working the land with one sister fondly recounting the hard work of harvesting melons and being rewarded in turn with fresh juicy slices of melon and "from our seated positions on the end of the cart, we shot watermelon seeds from our mouths and laughed heartily at our expertise!" **[Continues on page 2]**




**Stories from SW Wisconsin:
Self- and Community-Care**

Register at swbhp.org

Annual *Virtual Summit* | March 10th, 2022




You Should Know About - the Summit: Stories from SW Wisconsin: Self- and Community-Care

Since 2017 the Behavioral Health Partnership has hosted an annual Summit to celebrate the past year and set the stage for the next year's community-based behavioral health work. This year's Summit is co-sponsored by Farm Well and will focus on deep self- & community-care in response to the extraordinary levels of stress we've all been living through given the pandemic.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Building Stronger Relationships:

- **Virtual- Thu, 3/3 7-8PM**
- [Link](#) to register

The Water We Swim In:

- **Virtual- Fri, 3/4 11:30AM**
- [Link](#) to register.

The Summit:

- **Virtual- Thu, 3/10 8a-3:30p**
- [Link](#) to register



Diversity has been a trademark of the Mound over the years. Originally intended to operate solely as a dairy farm, it also grew oats, barley, corn, alfalfa, chickens, and hogs. Not to mention an exceptionally varied four-acre garden that included an orchard and vineyard. New construction began at the Mound in the early 1960's to accommodate rising Congregation membership, prompting a relocation of the farm and an expansion of farm operations. By 1977 250 of 500 acres were under cultivation, producing 2,000 tons of hay, 6,500 bushels of corn, and 4,000 bushels of oats. The garden and greenhouse also teemed with an abundance of vegetables, including novelties like citron.

Also during this time sisters worked with Grant County offices of Agriculture and Conservation to offer classes in environmental education to students, teachers, and adults in the tri-state area. All of this growth prompted the Sinsinawa Congregation at their 17th General Chapter of 1982, to state: Because we see ourselves a co-creators with God conserving the land's productive power and natural gifts, nurturing the land so that future generations will not be deprived of its full benefit, we encourage the continued practice of stewardship of the land, and the study, in cooperation with the neighboring communities, of possible new models of land use. This proclamation came at a time of environmental reckoning, with growing concern in rural America about the widespread misuse of land practices, over application of pesticides, and degradation of water quality.

During the 1980s the small-scale family farm was on the decline, with large corporate farms taking over the American market. Economic hardship was rampant and the sisters were facing a hard question to answer: "What changes are needed to make the farm run with no deficit and maybe even a profit?" The Land Stewardship Committee of the Mound studied strategies to increase income and decrease expenses, but to no avail. By the early 2000s leadership came to a decision regarding the farm; it was announced in May of 2004 that the farm would cease operations. The kitchen garden would still continue however, as well as collecting the bounty from the orchard and vineyard. The majority of the farmland and pasture was rented out to a local who continues to rent to this day. And in 2017 a new farming operation began: a collaborative farm.

The goal of this new undertaking is to provide land, education, infrastructure, and mentorship to beginning farmers. The collaborative is designed to provide farmers with the resources they need without the need for a large amount of capital to get started. First year farmers pay no land rent and the years that follow include a graduated rate based on time at the farm and acreage desired. Participating farmers are encouraged to share information and help each other out when needed. The collaborative is also an organically certified operation, with an emphasis on regenerative agriculture and sustainable farming methods. Since its inception the collaborative has seen seven different operations with one farm succeeding in purchasing local farmland in 2019, another opening an urban operation, and in 2021 one farm was able to transition to working solely on their operation without the need for alternative income.

In accordance with the 1982 statement to look at "new models of land use" staff have begun improving native oak woodlands and prairie restoration efforts have begun to increase pollinator habitat. Public offerings are on the rise too with several talks and hikes around the Mound planned for the 2022 spring/summer seasons. A section of the Sinsinawa Dominicans land ethic statement acknowledges the sisters commitment to "sustainable and regenerative practices [that] nurture Earth's natural abundance and create resilient living systems." With this objective in mind, agriculture can and will remain a rich and valued part of Mound heritage and its future is looking bright.

A Legacy of Agriculture at Sinsinawa lecture will be offered on Earth Day 2022 (Friday, April 22nd) at 6-7pm open for all those interested in learning more about Sinsinawa history. [Click here to learn more about the Sinsinawa Collaborative Farm!](#)

Farm Well is funded by the Wisconsin Partnership Program at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health through its Community Impact Grants Program

