

Memorandum

To: New Castle Town Board
From: Madeline Wachtel, Rockledge Farm
Date: June 14, 2021
Subject: Rockledge Farm Regenerative Farming Practices

As the Town Board is aware, Rockledge Farm is requesting a special use permit to allow the former Twin Oaks Swim and Tennis Club to be re-purposed as a farm using regenerative agriculture practices. Rockledge Farm will use regenerative agriculture farming practices including permaculture, organic farming practices, minimal tillage, cover cropping, crop rotation, and rotational animal grazing. Regenerative agriculture practices promote a healthier ecosystem by rebuilding soil organic matter and restoring degraded soil biodiversity. These practices, in turn, draw down carbon and improve the water cycle in the environment.¹ Rockledge Farm will approach farming holistically with the aim to promote the healthiest ecosystem possible.

When minimal till practices are used for farming, it ensures more carbon is stored than released and keeps the drawn down carbon underground. This effectively reduces the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and increases the amount of soil carbon available for healthy crops. Minimal tillage practices and mulching also increase rainfall infiltration to help prevent storm flooding. Minimal tillage practices limit soil erosion and enhance soil moisture retention.

Rockledge Farm will dedicate at least 50% of its growing space to perennials—plants that provide harvests for multiple growing seasons. Because perennial plants' roots remain in the ground each year, soil disturbance is extremely minimal and allows soil organisms to thrive in an undisturbed habitat. Soils that aren't disturbed are better able to hold carbon and grow vigorous crops. Perennials have extensive root systems, with the added benefit of storing carbon deeper in the soil where it is more stable.

The sheep, goats, and llamas will be moved every three days to ensure optimal rotational grazing processes. Portable electrical netting will be put up in different sections of the farm to allow for the rotation. This will allow them to graze on fresh grass every three days. When necessary, their diet will be supplemented with hay. The animals will be kept intermingled, with the llamas acting as security for the rest of the herd.

¹ <https://regenerationinternational.org/why-regenerative-agriculture/>

Rockledge Farm will use the sheep, llama, and goat manure as a regular fertilizer on its crops. Llama, sheep, and goat manure is considered cold pelleted manure and has a very limited scent. Three times a week, Rockledge Farm will collect the manure produced by the herd by shovelling the manure into buckets which is then emptied directly onto the farming beds as fertilizer. The buckets will then be washed with a light organic soap to ensure all tools remain sanitized. The chicken manure is collected with hay within the chicken coop. The hay and manure combination is removed three times a week from the coop and stored in a dumpster with a lid. Once a week, the 200lb of manure produced weekly will be removed by a carting company.

Over winter, Rockledge Farm will use a cover crop on the grounds such as clover or hairy vetch. In the spring when the cover crop is cut down and replaced with produce, the chickens will be fed the cover crop. The chickens will also be fed any appropriate crops such as sunflowers that the farm produces in abundance.

Rockledge Farm will only use organic fertilizer and organic pest management products with the OMRI seal of approval. The beds will receive a foliar feeding of diluted kelp emulsion once every two weeks.