

# **2010 FINALIST**

## **A Call to Farm: Farmshare**

“FarmShare reconnects farmers and consumers as co-producers of the foodscape. The strategy uses social media to pool all the resources of Brooklyn into a crowd-sourced decentralized farm. Voting for local food with their forks already, Brooklyn food activists will pool their time and their waste in A Call to Farm.”

## **Assessment Summary from the BFI Review Team**

This initiative was submitted by Stacey Murphy under the name of BK Farmyards to the 2009 Buckminster Fuller Challenge and was reviewed by the jurors as a finalist. The entry submitted this year by the same team assumes prior knowledge of the underlying concept, which, simply put, is a strategy to turn under utilized private and public land in Brooklyn, NY into small scale vegetable farms. The core of the strategy matches homeowners with a 'farming service' to cultivate their 'fallow' land. A portion of the crop yield would be given to the owner in return for use of the land. The rest would be sold at local farmer's markets. Since then they have had success in building the social and physical network for urban farming in Brooklyn, NY and they are preparing to develop and launch Call to Farm:FarmShare. They propose that this online social networking site will help scale out and make more efficient the connections and discussions happening on the ground with this movement. The interview centered on the approach and implementation of the social media in the overall initiative. It was clear that Stacey has engaged a quality tech person to help bring the site to fruition and she demonstrates a track record of bringing communities together. The qualities that captured the attention of the review team and jury last year are still apparent - it demonstrates the personal integrity and individual initiative for growing a strategy in a thoughtful iterative way. Stacey Murphy picks up on the present trend in urban agricultural thinking and has created a model that relatively soon will complete a proof of concept and move into a place where the model can be replicated.

**VIDEO:** A short video on the original concept-  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vDxBEUOImjI>

# Entry Application

A Call to Farm: FarmShare

## **Project Team:**

Stacey Murphy - Founder of BK Farmyards

Justin Gerry - Logistics Manager of BK Farmyards

Wes Reid - Senior software developer / architect

## **Summarize your proposal in 50 words or less.**

FarmShare reconnects farmers and consumers as co-producers of the foodscape. The strategy uses social media to pool all the resources of Brooklyn into a crowd-sourced decentralized farm. Voting for local food with their forks already, Brooklyn food activists will pool their time and their waste in A Call to Farm.

## **Describe the critical need your solution addresses. 50 words**

Urban farmers need organization to give political voice to the movement and legitimize these workers as farmers. The logistics of urban farming forces hundreds of farms to act individually, scavenging for land and resources. To make urban farming a viable business, new infrastructure is required for sharing experience and resources.

## **Compare and contrast your initiative with at least two leading initiatives addressing the same critical need. In comparison to these initiatives why is your proposal more likely to effect change and make a distinguishing impact? 200 words**

Decentralized urban farming has many advantages over vertical farming's glass towers. Vertical farms are costly ventures: high real estate costs and building maintenance add significant costs to the produce as well. Vertical farms are not viable in lower income food desert neighborhoods.

Cultivating a network of existing private yards not only defrays real estate costs but also encourages teamwork between farmers and consumers. As a network, these farmyards are reproducible, cost effective, and safer than large central urban farms.

My Farm, among countless urban farming businesses, has many backyard farms in San Francisco, but no interactive online network available for new farmers to use. Sharing Backyards is an interactive map that allows people to find their farming match online, but finding land is not biggest barrier to urban farming.

Unlike most urban farming proposals, we are giving people tools to enhance their community's health: to give citizens power to be their own land stewards. Any urban farming project is fatally flawed if it doesn't address the city as a system. We need a network that learns to grow local, just, and healthy food in our densest urban centers.

**Explain your initiative in more depth and its stage of development. 200 words**

Farmshare, web-based platform, allows users to share all resources of urban farming: from donated seedlings grown on a windowsill to a borrowed wheelbarrow for hauling soil. The interface mimics familiar tools such as google maps, twitter, and facebook: users can view each others farms, volunteer for a day, or donate ten pounds of coffee grounds for compost. This allows many citizens to become stewards of the landscape. As a barter system between many participants, bragging rights of who donated the most waste to a farm could result in a share of the bounty.

Simple graphs, maps, and diagrams will chart trends in urban farming. The platform can track how much waste is diverted from landfills; who was instrumental to starting and maintaining a farm; and what the radius of influence is around farms. This data can be used to convince local officials what new bills or grants will be helpful to local food and economy.

BK Farmyards is now in the concept stages for Farmshare. We have sketched up the website interface and detailed how the user would use each feature. Our next step is to determine what features are critical to starting the project and what features will follow later.

**How does your strategy and approach respond creatively and comprehensively to key social, cultural, economic, ecological, and technological issues which shape the condition you are seeking to transform? Why is your strategy a breakthrough and what makes it a preferred state model? 300 words**

BK Farmyards has been building a network of farms across Brooklyn, and noticed two major opportunities. The first opportunity is that tons of organic waste is required to sustainably rehabilitate the heavily contaminated soil, and luckily much organic waste is currently heading to the landfills instead. It would take a while for a city to efficiently track all coffee grounds, food scraps, newspapers, cardboard, wood pallets, and leaves separately; however, these are tasks that community groups and start-ups can accomplish. One community garden in Park Slope collected 2000 pounds of leaves in one weekend last year. The strength of a city is its density of resources, but those resources are useless if there is no infrastructure for sharing.

The second opportunity we encountered was thousands of Brooklynites who want to help local farming succeed. They volunteer on farms, vote with their forks, and compost, but they are eager for more. Using tools we already understand in a new way can result in the construction of many new farms in dense urban areas. Farms already work through social connections, but Farmshare magnifies the reach of individuals.

By 2010 Gen Y will outnumber Baby Boomers and 96% of them have joined a social network. We are in a communication revolution that is reorganizing our communities, and social networks are better predictors that people find others with shared values. Successful companies are acting more like party planners and aggregators than traditional advertisers. Our strategy addresses the thousands of people who are hungry

for local food making them agents of their own community change. Trying to farm as a profitable entity is very difficult and most farmers sacrifice crop variety in order to cover their costs. Farmshare allows the community to share some of the start-up 'costs' of the farms ensuring the long term success of the farmers.

**Describe your implementation plan. What are the priority milestones you intend to achieve in years one (1) through three (3)? 200 words**

Year 1

The initial platform will take approximately 4 months to develop and we plan to have participants Spring 2010. Once launched, we will collect feedback about the user interface and additional features people would like to see. Another round of development would follow with a time frame dependent on the feedback. We are predicting this complete cycle would take eight months.

For the project to succeed, we need active participants. The first people we will introduce to the platform are people who are already heavily engaged in the business of sharing. We will not publicly announce Farmshare's readiness until there are several hundred users in place.

Years 2-3

As the site is a visual indicator of the local food revolution, we will publish data regarding the number of new farms, the amount of produce grown, and the amount of waste diverted from landfills. This information can be used to understand what local government can do to help support sustainable food systems.

As Farmshare takes off in Brooklyn, we will roll the platform out to other urban farming centers. We will target local businesses that already have a large local food following to host the site and tell us what makes their area unique.

**Please provide details regarding the team and/or partners you have assembled, the team's experience and qualifications, and your ability to execute your implementation plan. If applicable, include details about external validation and/or support your strategy has received to date. 200 words**

BK Farmyards has spent the last year acquiring contacts in all realms of food, land, and politics. Our backyard farming is expanding quickly, and next year we are partnering with The High School for Public Service on an acre of land and developer Peter Moore Associates to develop a new building typology centered around a farm. Working through various sites and clients, BK Farmyards has a unique understanding of the resources required to farm in a very dense city.

In addition to our 500+ volunteer list, we also have the contact lists of Rooftop Farms, Slow Food NYC, Just Food, Added Value, Brooklyn Based, to name a few. Many of the Brooklyn foodies are growing seedlings in their apartments with grow lights and composting their kitchen scraps: we intend to make all of them partners in the local food revolution.

We will also partner with a freelance senior software developer / architect with ten years experience for the website programming. BK Farmyards has a New School industrial design intern who will help design the user interface.

We plan to leverage the political efforts of the Brooklyn Food Coalition: its neighborhood meetings are starting to question local politician's agendas in public forums. We will also bring our ideas in front of Mayor Bloomberg's PlaNYC team who is in the process of reviewing the city's sustainability plan to include food.

**What are the primary obstacles that might prevent your initiative from being realized? How do you plan to overcome them? 150 words**

Any user based strategy requires a large and active user base. According to Feltron's data ([http://poptech.feltron.com/wwas\\_21.html](http://poptech.feltron.com/wwas_21.html)), food consumes 68% of user driven content online as compared to the 12% of media sources. This shows the extent of the online resources available for this initiative. The project relies on viral marketing, so we will launch the initiative on Facebook and Twitter.

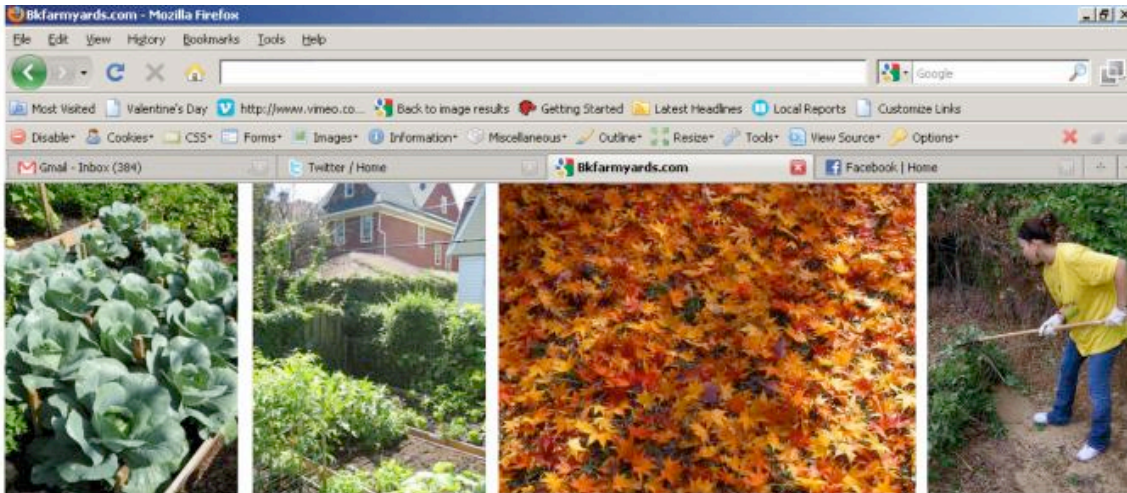
Also, If we cannot provide a useful and easy-to-use tool for people, then Farmshare will only be useful to a select few. The interface needs to be intuitive and simple. This is a design issue that we believe we are equipped to handle with several designers on board. When Farmshare becomes active to the point of craigslist, we will have to contend with spam postings. Like craigslist, we will rely on our users to flag spam as required.

**What range of funding is needed to bring your project to fruition and from where do you anticipate funding will come? Explain how your initiative will financially sustain itself. 150 words**

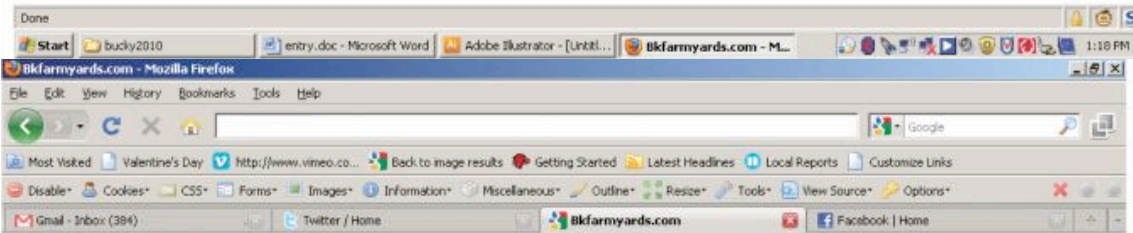
This is a project that could be entirely funded by the Buckminster Fuller Challenge Award, and it could be a self-sustaining proposition if we add local merchant ads to the site, such as nurseries, restaurants, etc.

We anticipate the initial development of the website being spread out over the course of a year. For the efforts of the design team (a design intern, a senior software designer / architect, and BK Farmyards marketing time) we would like to allocate \$60,000.

After we accrue enough users, we anticipate spending some time to make the collected data useful as a political tool. Developing the software appropriately and gathering data for presentations to city elected officials, we are allocating \$25,000. Once FarmShare is wildly successful, we would like to allocate the remaining \$15,000 for phone applications to make this tool useful to farmers who are constantly on the move.



# FarmShare



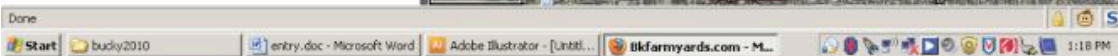
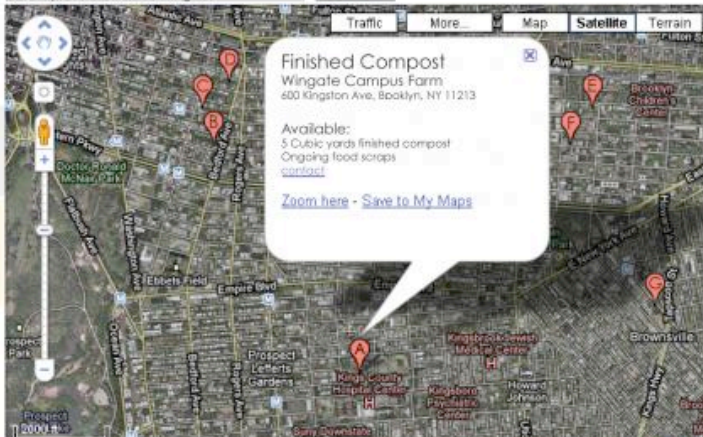
Lee Cardoll  
Mobile Farms Inc  
twitter: rideafarm  
messages (12)

- PROFILE
- FIND
- BORROW
- HELP
- FOOD
- FARMS
- EVENTS

## Farmshare FIND

compost, crown heights

- A
**Finished Compost**  
 Wingate Campus Farm  
 600 Kinston Ave, Brooklyn, NY
- B
**Shredded Leaves for Compost**  
 Crown Heights Community Gr oup  
 Bedford Ave, Brooklyn, NY
- C
**Coffee Grounds for Compost**  
 The Glass Shop Cafe  
 Stirling Road, Brooklyn, NY
- D
**Restaurant Food Scraps for Compost**  
 Soul Food  
 Nostrand Ave, Brooklyn, NY
- E
**Newspaper for Compost**  
 Neighborhood Stand  
 Nostrand Ave, Brooklyn, NY



Bkfarmyards.com - Mozilla Firefox

Lee Cardoll  
Mobile Farms Inc  
twitter: rideafarm  
messages (12)

PROFILE FIND BORROW HELP FOOD FARMS EVENTS

Farmshare FARM mobile farms search

Traveling Farm  
Gowanus, Brooklyn

Farmrides  
Gowanus, Brooklyn

Shipping the Farm  
Gowanus, Brooklyn

Traveling Farm  
Lee Cardoll, Mobile Farms Inc.  
Gowanus, Brooklyn  
4000 square feet  
5000 lbs of Produce sold at local bodegas

Done

Start bucky2010 entry.doc - Microsoft Word Adobe Illustrator - [Unk]... Bkfarmyards.com - M... 1:18 PM



# Interview

Call to Farm: Farmshare

**Can you give us update on the BK Farmyard program and perhaps some examples of the kind of connections you are making that could be accelerated once the website is up and running.**

As BK Farmyards is growing, we are coming up against a technical barrier that I didn't anticipate. We now have too many volunteers; too many land possibilities, too much support to effectively harness all the resources. Each day I receive approximately 10 emails from people who are interested in helping us in some way: starting seedlings in their apartment, donating compost, land inquiries, volunteering, planning events, job opportunities, etc. It would be BEYOND a fulltime job to coordinate and maintain a database of all our available resources. Users managing their own content in an online database would mean that we could find things when we needed them and that these things would be available to all urban food producers from production farmer down to gardener. Instead of me finding the 20 emails I have from people who have offered to grow seedlings, I could search for them in FarmShare and send out a note to all of them at once. I then could do another search for people close to where I needed the seedlings to recruit some people that may not have thought about growing seedlings and convince them to do it. Finally, I could do a search for compost in that area to send the seed growers a source for compost. Perhaps I might also do a search on anyone who had saved some interesting seeds and was interested in donating those. With a couple connections on FarmShare, we could be growing seedlings for the majority of our sites without ever having to invest in a greenhouse, and we could spend more time expanding into new sites instead of coordinating all our resources.

From the consumer end, it means that backyard farmers have an immediate market to sell as much produce as they can. They can search out active farm supporters in their neighborhood and let people know when produce is available. Farmers always have to weather ebbs and flows in the growing season. Sometimes a backyard farmer ends up with way too much zucchini for her market. FarmShare would be a way to find a home immediately for all this produce instead of wasting it.

**I noticed you sent us some notes and was planning to meet a web developer. How did that go?**

We met and discussed the features of the FarmShare website. We explored who might be using it and what their needs would be. We had discussions on the social media aspects. There are a lot of channels that are available and we want to align with the right ones. From a technical perspective, we are exploring how users plug into their record. There is Google, twitter, facebook etc. and we want to see how these would augment their profile with the right directions. We want to Leverage existing technology instead of building our own as much as we can.

**How much data is ready to move directly into this online network once up?**

We're really at the beginning stages still. Right now we have a food network and a map of resources I use to align people with other people. We're deciding what content we want to put on the site. The beta testers will be providing the content initially and this will help us determine the approach. We plan to launch by going to the events where these people are. There are so many channels of content that we would provide some

meaningful streams as a mediator of a specific movement. There are pockets that already have their own blogs and online network, these followers can be leveraged.

**Your local volunteer network (500+) demonstrates the power of individual initiative and motivation. How is your volunteer program currently sustained (financially and the support infrastructure)? What infrastructure or moderation and tech support might be needed to sustain it well online after it is launched?**

I am the moderator of the whole network. People are coming to me for everything. I'm trying to empower the volunteers to take on more of the network and allow the network to self organize a little bit more. For example, the local baking company - Scratch Bread - can connect with it's local consumers to address needs and wants by being in direct communication through the FarmShare network. We can connect producers to consumers in a very dynamic way and the possibility for synergies is incredible. This is already happening in real space and time, we want to accelerate the connections with FarmShare.

**It's taking the internal logic that you've lived and tweaking that system? Can the qualifications of your volunteers be leveraged in this system?**

Yes, Trying to make materialize this knowledge and make it alive is at the core of this project. People are doing it because they are more in control of what they want in life. By decentralizing it, it would allow it to grow.

**What's the sustainable model for the techno infrastructure and people side?**

From a purely chronological standpoint taking a green stand point. We maintain and elevate the user experience by aggregating more content special to them. We are looking at an administration council as a way to delegate content streams. The more we can delegate the responsibility the more we can grow. In the system overall, through notification of errors we would try to get processes as automated as possible.

**You noted that you will not publicly announce FarmShare's readiness until there are several hundred users in place. If this means that you will have a beta period with a private access, how long do you see this period?**

Getting more people involved sooner can be beneficial. We have not decided how to launch. We would probably have 50 users for 1 month, evaluate make decisions and design accordingly, stress testing the system and tweaking the interface. People are doing similar things but they are not realizing their potential. Some of the examples we've looked at have poor interface. When you try to interact no one is on the site. I think this is because the scope is too large. We want to determine the right scope during the beta testing.

We want to make sure the experience is unparalleled. We don't have a detailed release the goal is to roll out the core substance of FarmShare and get immediate feedback and incorporate that into the continued development.

**As you increase your geographic network, you noted that you plan to roll the platform out to other farming centers. Are you planning to develop a main network hub or the tools or modules that can be adopted by pre-existing cooperative networks?**

Take the current market and use that as a model. It's good because it has many conditions for the data collection. We can see how it lives and breaths. We will have primary nodes, secondary nodes and tertiary. Tertiary is going to be based on the user market that the node is operating in. We want to see the low nodes to become administrators.

**What impact will winning the BFC have on your project?**

Being that this is a social network project in many ways, we are looking at opportunities to connect with other organizations that are using systems thinking. The amount of the attention that the projects received is great. Last year my experience was that it spring-boarded my project beyond anything I could imagine. The media attention of winning the project would be amazing. Getting it out into policy circles, it gets attention from all levels of government down to the community. There's a direct relationship to that.

**Please describe the preferred state you envision in which your project plays a catalytic role?**

There is a direct relationship of producers and consumers so there is a creative environment around this that we want to foster. Empowering of the consumer and the farmers to work together is at the core of this effort. Consumers can make demands so they can have a dialogue about what they want from that system. The system enables something else as a result, something healthy and sustainable. We want to be able to measure real connections that are made, but if nothing is happening then it's not working.

**How do you validate, measure success?**

We think we would like to track the number of connections. We'd to feature narratives on these connections and do some sort of data visualization of the information.

**Can you tell us what the next 12 months look like in terms of your project's development?**

We're hoping to get the website up and running by May, the beta version. In summer we would be gathering feedback, and that is as far as it has been developed in my mind.

**What your preferred state model is for the urban farm movement of which your program is a significant part of?**

My preferred state model for the urban farm movement is a mutually beneficial, deep connection between the community and the farmers: they become co-producers of local food. As active participants in food production, the consumers support the farmers, and in return, the farmers will be able to produce more affordable, fresh food for the community. Taking the concept of Community Supported Agriculture and moving it to the city means adapting the notion of 'Support'. This model accounts for food waste as well as food production being a necessary part of the local food movement. FarmShare will be a catalyst for this change as it will accelerate the number of people who are involved in urban food production. In the process, FarmShare becomes an educational tool for policy makers to understand any laws or regulations that would nurture urban food production.