

Farm to Table: High Point Farm and Fountain House

By Abigail Jackson

Fountain House is one of the world's leading mental health organizations, providing employment, educational and housing opportunities to people living with serious mental illness.

High Point Farm, situated in the northwestern corner of New Jersey, is a rural extension of Fountain House. Each week a group of staff and members come to carry out the work necessary to the running of a successful farm. Once here, the group lives communally in the farm's Swiss-style chalet. Members and staff have an opportunity to cook meals together, eat, socialize and develop relationships within the Fountain House community.

Much of the farm work changes according to the season, although caring for our herd of award-winning alpacas and our chickens is a constant. In the winter a lot of time is spent chopping firewood for heating and constructing a variety of woodworking projects using lumber milled on the farm. For instance, this winter, groups built raised beds and planters for the garden and produced all of the lumber for the recent hydroponics project at Fountain House.

With the onset of spring we are drawing up plans for the biggest part of the farm's work: growing flowers and vegetables for use at Fountain House. Over the last couple of years we have been developing the garden so that we now produce a significant portion of the vegetables served in the Culinary Unit. Alongside the regular weekly groups, a dedicated gardening group focuses solely on the garden, performing all of the weeding, harvesting, planting and watering.

Fountain House members and staff derive a great deal of benefit from the farm, as we are able to provide nutritious, organic vegetables during the growing season and organic free-range eggs year round. Last year, for the first time, we also grew a variety of flowers whose vibrant colors were enjoyed at Fountain House. We intend to expand the flower garden in the coming year. Our focus is shifting from alpacas to vegetables and flowers, which we have come to realize fulfills an important health and wellness need amongst our community.