

**Growing Hope Farm  
Sarah Martin-Mills  
Founder/Director**

Growing Hope blends a multitude of community needs to bring about both local and global impact. We engage marginalized people groups to help us grow organic food, to be purchased by the community and then all profits are donated to Mennonite Central Committee's food security program. The owners of the farm do not take a salary and there is only one seasonal paid employee a year. The majority of the work is completed by volunteers.

Growing Hope Farm has been in operation since 2016. We found quick partners in the region like the Waterloo Region Catholic School Board, Waterloo Region Public School Board, Ray of Hope and Lutherwood. It was clear from that start there is a need for opportunities for people experiencing barriers in their lives.

What we provide is different. We've heard it from participants and from organizers. There is an investment and energy that comes from the participants when they are working outside, when they can see the results of their efforts immediately and when they are given chances to do something they have never tried before in their life.

Participants learn numerous skills when they come and volunteer at Growing Hope Farm. They learn:

1. Customer Service – interacting with customers on the farm
2. Basic Animal Care – feeding, watering, giving injections, cleaning housing, collecting eggs
3. Landscaping – weeding, cutting grass, pruning trees/bushes, deadheading
4. Building – basic repairs of buildings/fences

Participants also learn many soft skills that come from working outside, working with animals and knowing that the work they are doing is helping people overseas.

1. Problem Solving – walk through what to do when issues arise.
2. Gain Confidence – See the fruits of their labour very quickly, see that they can make a difference and know they are helping those less fortunate overseas.
3. Gain Perspective – by helping people who are less fortunate than ourselves we are able to gain perspective of our situation and see that we can change our situation.
4. Benefit from horticultural and animal therapy – many studies show that working with plants and animals are very therapeutic in general. The women are able to engage in this all while giving back.

Growing Hope Farm is funded by the sales of the produce and a few small grants. We do not currently have any base funding. The farm is currently looking for base funding from community organizations and various levels of Government.

Sarah Martin-Mills has been working since 2016 to have women from Correctional Service Canada in Kitchener to come and have work releases and/or the escorted temporary absence (ETA) at the farm. Sarah has completed the training and been approved for both the work release and the ETA. Once she was approved in 2017 it was her understanding that she could begin either program, however CSC provided a number of obstacles that proved very difficult and lengthy. Growing Hope Farm was able to have one woman complete a work release in late 2018 after two years of working with CSC. CSC acknowledged this was a successful program and placement. Sarah requested to begin ETA's since

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many more women are eligible for this type of programming. This request was made with hostility from CSC.

The obstacles from CSC over the past three years in trying to have women come and volunteer on the farm have been numerous. Emails were not returned. Phone calls were not returned. Training needed to be completed twice because so much time had elapsed. When speaking to managers and wardens they were rude. Sarah was told she was approved for the programming and then another training needed to be completed, another warden needed to sign off, another security clearance needed to be completed. This happened multiple times over the past three years. Sarah was never told the full process that needed to be completed. CSC staff would say the farm was approved and then ask for another report/training/fingerprinting/insurance upgrade, etc. Each new request took months to complete because staff were very slow to respond to emails/phone calls.

Two objections were noted by CSC in 2019 by the Deputy Warden. She stated that the farm is too big for the women to come and be properly supervised. However, two site visits had been completed by that time in 2016 and 2017. The staff had stated that the site was a good fit for the program because it was a small farm and Sarah could see the whole property with ease at any given time/location. The other objection from the Deputy Warden was that ETA's were not a priority. They needed to focus on year end and segregation policies.