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urban grown



The Newsletter of Cultivate Kansas City

December 2011

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Urban Agriculture Grows in Diversity, Complexity, Scale and Connectivity

Changes brought by urban agriculture movement stand to improve lives for generations to come.

By Katherine Kelly, CKC Executive Director

Here are some end-of-the-year urban ag numbers to make you happy and hopeful for a healthy, well-fed, and sustainable future:

- Since 2004, 58 urban farms have been started in the KC metro area.
- Those 58 farms added some 45 acres in fruit and vegetable production.
- Many of those 58 farms explicitly identify as urban farms, claiming the importance of their community as central to their mission.
- In 2011, there were 66 farms growing on more than 73 acres of urban land.



Urban agriculture in Kansas City takes many forms and is growing rapidly. Shown here is the Homegrown Garden at the Kansas City Art Institute, one of KC's latest urban agriculture sites. Photo by Molly Brooks during the 2011 Urban Farms & Gardens Tour.

- Those urban growers sell at 19 farmers markets, 13 on-site stands and through some 26 CSAs.
- At least 10 of them regularly donate produce or identify as a charitable activity and at least eleven of them identify education and training as central to their mission.
- Every single one of those 66 plus urban growers inspires other urban growers. They share their knowledge, seeds and transplants, and passion with home gardeners, community gardeners, the schools their children go to, their friends, relatives, customers and everyone they come into contact with.

And we believe that these numbers are an undercount. There are old-time farms that aren't on the web or connected to our "new" farmer networks, as well as a number of growers who just choose to stay below the radar.

And here's the bigger picture in Kansas City:

- In 2004, there were 14 farmers markets in the Kansas City metro area feeding city residents. In 2011, there are nearly 40, with more in the works.
- A growing number of the markets now accept SNAP funds and are actively educating their customers through demos, hand-outs, and partnerships with area agencies.
- In 2005, there were 2 markets that were organic/sustainable. Today, there are 10 that define themselves as organic/sustainable.
- In 2010, Kansas City, MO passed codes to more fully support food production in city neighborhoods. In 2011, Roeland Park allowed for small scale keeping of chickens as pets. In 2011, a Missouri state joint legislative committee was charged with learning about urban ag across the state and developing a report and recommendations on promoting it as a beneficial activity. Municipalities across the metro are starting to look at their codes, zoning, and efforts to promote urban food production and healthy food access.
- There are new leaders (Rosedale growers and organizers, the Grown-in-Ivanhoe folks, the Food Policy Coalition, to name just a few), new business models (the Urban Farming Guys, BadSeed/Urbavore and others) and new training and education models (Mitzvah Gardens, Boys Grow) showing up all over town.
- Like a good organic system, Kansas City urban ag is seeing increasing diversity, complexity, scale, and connections.

As the Cultivate KC staff talk to other growers, food leaders and activists about 2012, here is some of what we are hearing:

- Plans for expansion and diversification: folks want to grow more food and feed more people.
- Education and outreach is increasingly important as we seek to get more people eating healthfully and locally.
- Plans for repositioning and focusing farms and marketing efforts. Like other businesses in this economy, farm businesses are having to work harder to define themselves and find their unique niche in an economy that is almost overwhelmingly dynamic and reactive to state and national politics, world trade and finances, food and nutrition trends popping up faster than foxtail in late summer, and increasing muddying of the local-foods-waters as corporations lay claim to "local" and "farmer-grown" language.
- A greater commitment to multiple bottom-lines and multiple farm goals: more farmers are aware that they aren't just growing vegetables, they are growing health, community, and the local economy and that they are part of a national movement that is big and important.
- A growing awareness that the extreme weather conditions we've seen over the last few years are almost certainly going to be the norm, not the exception. More farmers are talking about water catchment and conservation, about soil building to help make plants more resilient to weather changes, about choosing varieties that can handle environmental stresses. No one has "the answer" but growers sure are putting their minds to this.

In short, lots of success, lots of growth, and no shortage of big and small challenges! The issues we face are not simple issues but neither is our ability to address them. We need to consciously keep building our grassroots capacity to grow and distribute food, we need growers around for the long haul, not just for the short-term glamour of the local food movement. We need consumers who put their values into action, knowing that healthy food and a strong local economy are essential for a good quality of life. We need to keep our focus on the future, making choices every day that will increase the health and well-being of our children, their children, and their children. With every one of our good minds working together to change our city and our world, we'll see the results in the lives, health, and well-being of generations to come.

From all of us at Cultivate Kansas City, we wish you happy holidays with lots of good, local food, love, and joy.

Reach Katherine at katherine@cultivatekc.org.

Common Ground Program Offers New Opportunities for Urban Agriculture

Kansas community makes public land available for new farming ventures and community gardens.

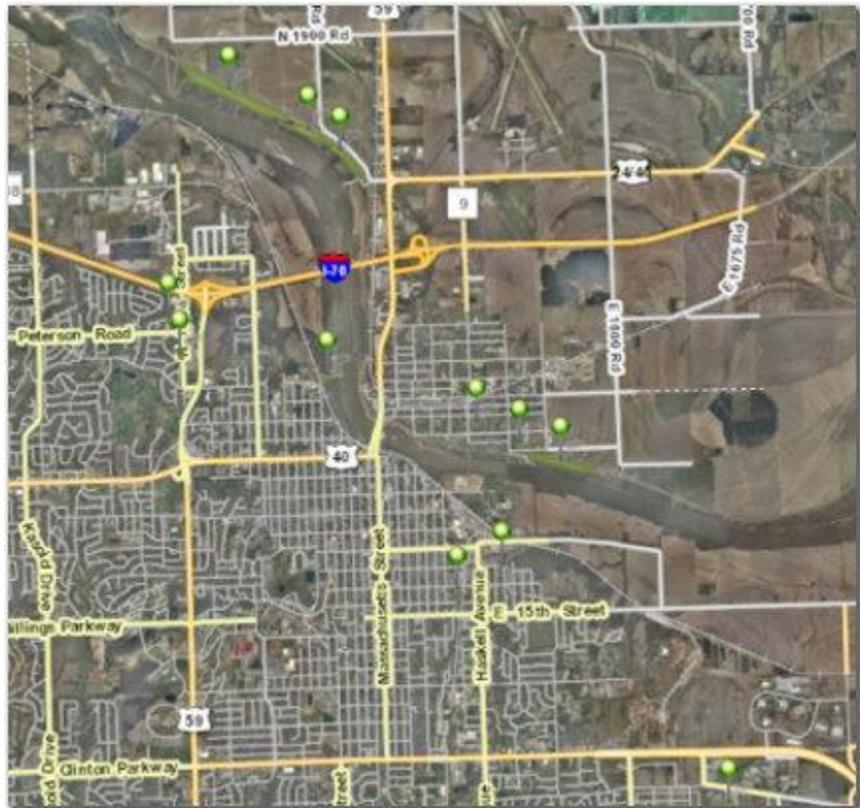
By Jennifer Smith, Horticulture Extension Agent for K-State Research and Extension in Douglas County, KS

Lawrence and Douglas County, KS, are piloting a unique program to make land more available to new farmers while also addressing community food access issues. The program, Common Ground, makes twelve city- and county-owned sites available for license, “for the cultivation and sale of plants, herbs, fruits, flowers, or vegetables, either as for-profit or not-for-profit enterprises.”

Common Ground sites range from one-third of an acre to twenty acres and will be licensed for one dollar per acre per year. While many cities across the country are exploring policies to support urban agriculture, Common Ground is unique because it requires program participants to develop a “community benefit plan” with their application.

“I’m most excited about seeing creative solutions to address our local food access issues,” says Eileen Horn, who helped develop Common Ground. Horn is the sustainability coordinator for Lawrence and Douglas County and serves as the staff liaison to the Douglas County Food Policy Council.

Suggestions of possible community benefit plans listed in the program’s Request for Applications include providing mentorship/apprenticeship opportunities to other growers, participating in educational outreach, or donating a percentage of produce to schools or food pantries.



Twelve sites in and around Lawrence, KS, have been selected for inclusion in the Common Ground program (see article for detailed site locations).

Horn says the idea came about after she and another Douglas County Food Policy Council member attended a Community Food Security Coalition conference.

“We brought the idea back to the Food Policy Council, but at the same time [City] Commissioner [Bob] Schumm was asking me how we could get more gardens in the community.”

The City of Lawrence already leases property to area farmers, but the sites available through Common Ground are considered to be either too small for large-scale production agriculture or unsuitable for a long-term lease.

“We really want people to think of this as an incubator or a jumping-off point for new growers,” Horn explains, “or as an opportunity for community gardens.”

In addition to a community benefit plan, applications require completion of a form, a narrative of production plans and maintenance practices, design drawings, a simple business plan, and acknowledgement of program policies and procedure. Community gardens are excluded from the business plan requirement.

Of the twelve sites, only three are irrigated, but most can have water meters installed at the expense of the licensee.

Horn emphasizes that Common Ground is a pilot project. “This is really a learning experiment that will help us understand what model works best. We have this resource of land, and we want to strengthen the local food system. Whether that means working with farmers or developing more community gardens is something we have to learn. We want to be very transparent and see what sticks.”

Interested individuals, businesses, and nonprofit organizations are encouraged to apply for use of Common Ground sites by 5 p.m., Friday, December 16. The Douglas County Food Policy Council will review applications and make recommendations to city and county commissioners by late January. Applications and more information are available at http://lawrenceks.org/common_ground or by contacting Eileen Horn at ehorn@lawrenceks.org.

Of the available sites, the first six are recommended for community gardens and the last six are recommended for market farms or community gardens. Sites marked with an asterisk have an active water meter available.

- Burcham Park (0.79 acres) 2nd Street and Indiana Street*
- John Taylor Park (0.41 acres) 200 North 7th Street*
- Future park site at Peterson and Iowa (1.17 acres)
- Future park site at Peterson and Iowa (1.68 acres)
- Adjacent to Burroughs Creek Trail (0.34 acres) east of Garfield and Delaware, along trail
- Vacant lot at 12th Street and Brook Street (0.33 acres)*
- Riverfront Park I (6.81 acres) can be subdivided
- Riverfront Park II (6.78 acres) can be subdivided
- Riverfront Park III (26.13 acres) can be subdivided
- Riverfront Park IV (6.76 acres) adjacent to mountain bike trails, can be subdivided
- Vacant Lot at 8th Street and Oak Street (0.9 acres)
- Future DG County Public Works site (4.40 acres) adjacent to County Jail

Reach Jennifer at smithjen@ksu.edu.

Kansas City Urban Farming Pioneer Dies at 45

At Troostwood Youth Garden, Ericka Wright set the standard for successful urban agriculture.

By Katherine Kelly, CKC Executive Director

This past November, Kansas City lost one of our first and most passionate urban agriculture leaders. Ericka Wright, 45 years old, passed away, leaving behind hundreds of people she has fed, inspired, motivated and taught.

Ericka was the founder, farmer, and director of Troostwood Youth Garden, a three-city-lots farm at 52nd and Paseo in Kansas City, MO. She started the garden program more than a decade ago and ran it until her death, growing wonderful food, training young people in growing, eating, and selling organic food, and organizing a weekly on-site farmers market. She was a grower, an educator, an advocate, and a leader in our urban agriculture and local food movement.



Urban farmer Ericka Wright at Troostwood Youth Garden in 2005. Ms Wright, who suffered from muscular dystrophy, passed away on November 9, 2011.

Ericka by virtue of her personality and her life circumstances was a powerful force for change. With limited financial resources, Ericka and the people she worked with transformed their corner on 52nd and Paseo into a place of beauty, order, and abundance. Motivated by her muscular dystrophy and the constraints it placed on her, Ericka asserted the power of organic food and active living as the best possible response to her health issues. As part of a community facing many challenges, Ericka chose to advocate, educate, and act, believing firmly in the potential for change and growth.

She was someone who reached out and found resources and people to support her in her life's work. In 2005, Ericka and her family--including her mother Mary Wright, her nephew Justin Burrell, and her niece Regina Baker--apprenticed under the Growing Growers Training Program, working with urban farmer John Kaiahua as their farmer, teacher and mentor. In 2008, Ericka's other niece, Jessica Baker, was signed up as Troostwood's own Growing Growers apprentice. Ericka applied for and received grants to develop her youth program, receiving funding from SARE and from the City of Kansas City, MO. She engaged with educational agencies like University of Missouri's Research and Extension and Lincoln University Cooperative Extension, using their expertise and resources to build her urban farm and her community.

The Troostwood Market is a key market in the Beans&Greens program--Ericka noticed early on in the economic downturn how her neighbors didn't have any cash to buy food; they were relying almost entirely on SNAP for their grocery purchases. Her awareness of this and her commitment to helping her neighbors eat healthy was an important impetus in the start-up of the Beans&Greens program. In 2011, the Troostwood Market generated \$4400 in SNAP sales and Beans&Greens match, a hard won increase over 2010 that involved a lot of neighborhood outreach, talking, teaching, and advocacy on Ericka's part and the part of others helping her.

Ericka leaves behind a host of people who worked with her: first and foremost her family and the many young people who were part of her summer employment program; also Marty Kraft of the Niles Home for Children Garden, John and Judy Kaiahua of J&J Farm, the staff of the Beans&Greens program, Dave Lawrence of the Kansas City Food Circle, Tina Wurth with the Lincoln University Cooperative Extension's Urban Impact Garden, the Benedict family who sells at her Troostwood Market, and many many other

farmers, growers, neighborhood leaders, and food activists. Her impact as a farmer and community leader has shaped our city and our lives, and we will deeply miss her.

Reach Katherine at katherine@cultivatekc.org.

Former Community Farm Apprentice Hired to Run Farm Incubation Program

Entering the field without experience, Warren Kittler took advantage of available lessons to build professional excellence.

Warren Kittler recently became the Growing Farmer Training Program Manager at Community CROPS in Lincoln, NE. Not unlike Cultivate KC, Community CROPS is a young organization that is experiencing rapid and exciting growth. CROPS began in 2003 with one community garden. Today, CROPS manages fifteen community gardens across the city, runs an incubator farm with a 100-member CSA, and recently began a youth program in partnership with local schools. Learn more at the organization's website www.communitycrops.org.



Warren Kittler (in white shirt) at Greeley Gardens in Kansas City, KS.

By Warren Kittler, Community CROPS

I still remember my first interview five years ago at Cultivate Kansas City (then the Kansas City Center for Urban Agriculture). I was a graduate student in music performance at UMKC with no vegetable growing experience--hardly an attractive resume for a field hand on an urban organic farm. Somehow, I made it on the team that season, and I hit the ground running. Katherine Kelly showed me how to harvest spinach efficiently, Daniel Dermitzel philosophized while we weeded with stirrup hoes, and the rest of the field crew pushed me to eat, work, and think like I never had before. I discovered fennel, tasted a Hakurei turnip for the first time, spent hours baking in the sun while picking green beans, and fell in love with vegetables and the people who grew them.

After leaving the farm at the end of the season, I worked part-time for urban farmer Laura Christensen at Blue Door Farm. Laura modeled perseverance, generosity, and creativity; I learned how to build a hoop house, how to make do when circumstances turn against you, and how to keep smiling through it all.

In 2009, I started my own market farm, Greeley Gardens, on two abandoned lots on the corner of 17th and Greeley in the Quindaro neighborhood of Kansas City, KS. As I spent hours picking up trash, hauling in manure, and planting peas and collard greens, my neighbors started to notice that something unusual was happening on the block. Children would take a break from riding their bikes to taste a tomato, older folks would stop to chat, and some people even bought transplants to start their own gardens.

I met Angela Greene, another farmer in my neighborhood, and when I wanted to expand my farm, she encouraged me to join Cultivate KC's Farm Business Development Program. Through the program, I learned how to run an



Warren Kittler teaching a workshop on season extension at Community CROPS in Lincoln, NE.

attractive farmers' market stall, how to start transplants in a greenhouse, and how to keep production consistent for my seven-member CSA. Cultivate KC's Cathy Bylinowski supported me as I experimented with no-till production methods, and she helped me learn many finer points of vegetable growing. I also got to work alongside the staff and farmers in the New Roots for Refugees program. Rachel Pollock challenged me with her ability to dream big and make things happen, and the refugee farmers' joy and astonishing work ethic continually inspired me to keep a positive attitude even in the longest, hottest summer days.

Urban farming certainly wasn't easy. My neighbors sometimes helped themselves to the vegetables I grew, and occasional vandalism discouraged me. My "day job" working as a high school teacher and later as a program manager at The Urban Scholastic Center helped pay my bills, but limited the time I could spend growing vegetables. My wife and I dreamed of buying a house with acreage, but we knew it would be years before we would be able to farm full-time.

Earlier this year, an opportunity arose that caught my attention. Community CROPS, a non-profit organization in Lincoln, NE, was hiring a program manager for their Growing Farmers Training Program. The current farm program manager was leaving for graduate school in August, and her replacement would need to have growing, teaching, and program management experience—a perfect fit for me. At the end of June, I drove up to Lincoln and spent a day touring the farm, asking questions, and going through the interview process; two weeks later, CROPS offered me the position.

I've been in Lincoln for four months now, and every day, I'm thankful for what I learned at Cultivate KC. From simple harvesting techniques to CSA management, every experience I had has prepared me for today. Five years ago, no one would have guessed that a graduate student who had never seen a potato plant would have ended up directing a farm program. That I've come this far is a testament to the mentors I've had—especially those at Cultivate KC. Thank you to all who had a part in shaping my life, and I look forward to partnering with you in the years to come!

Reach Warren at warren@communitycrops.org.

Change the Food System One Holiday Meal at a Time

"Eat Local for the Holidays" campaign seeks pledges to serve locally produced ingredients.

The Greater Kansas City Food Policy Coalition is an alliance of individuals, organizations, businesses and government representatives from all critical components of our local food system, including health care, agriculture, education, social services, food distribution, government, private business, nonprofit agencies and others. Our mission is to advocate for a healthy food system and promote policies that positively impact the nutritional, economic, social and environmental health of Greater Kansas City. But most importantly, we are also consumers. We want the food eaten by our families, our children and our neighbors to be the best for our bodies, our environment and our local community. To learn more about us go to <http://kcfoodpolicy.ning.com>.



By Mike Strauss, KC Healthy Kids
Communication Manager

Sitting down with the family to enjoy a holiday meal is one of the great pleasures we experience at this time of the year. Relatives from far away may have joined us at the table and it is an opportunity for us to celebrate the holidays, our families and maybe even our local community.

As the turkey or ham is carved and bowls of

peas, carrots and sweet potatoes are passed around the table, we toast each other with a glass of wine. While we enjoy the company of family and friends, we can also make sure we enjoy even more the fact that we have supported our local food producers.

What if the turkey, the vegetables and even the wine we serve during this holiday season were all produced locally? If that is the case, we have supported the local farmer and economy and are eating fresher, more nutritious food, all while making a small, conscious, but significant change.

Serving at least one locally-grown food at a holiday dinner is the goal of the *Greater Kansas City Food Policy Coalition* (GKCFPC) for citizens in the Kansas City area and beyond this season.

With its *Eat Local For the Holidays* campaign, the GKCFPC is encouraging everyone to support the local economy, sustainability and the environment by enjoying a locally produced food, ranging from the main course, vegetables or fruit to desert or drinks.

The benefits of eating local include fresher, more nutritious and varied food choices, while keeping money in the community and limiting the effect on the environment.

"The *Eat Local For The Holidays* campaign is a way for area residents to connect with locally-produced food, support regional farmers and enjoy a wide variety of delicious, local, seasonal foods in new recipes or in family favorites," said Beth Low, director of the GKCFPC.

Among the foods that are fresh now in Kansas and Missouri are apples, pears, broccoli, carrots, peas, pumpkins, spinach, sweet potatoes and many others. Wine and cider are also being produced locally, along with many meats such as beef, pork and poultry.

"Eating local foods keeps your food dollars in the local economy, reduces your carbon footprint and increases the freshness of the foods you are eating," Low said. She added that "it is good for your body, the environment and the local economy. It also tastes great."

Not sure how to find locally produced food? There are a number of ways to access local foods, through farmers markets, grocery and healthy food stores and Kansas City area restaurants. Directories of a number of these outlets providing local foods are available at the *Eat Local For the Holidays* website at www.eatlocalkc.net.

At the website you'll also have the opportunity to pledge to serve at least one locally grown food in holiday celebrations this season; and you can read about why it is important to eat local, view a list of foods that are in season in Kansas and Missouri, browse local food recipes, and find suggestions on how to get involved in creating a healthy local food system.

Those who sign up to take the pledge at www.eatlocalkc.net by December 31 are entered in a drawing for local food prizes.

After enjoying a holiday dinner with local food choices, sit back with family and friends and sip a cup of locally-produced cider and know you are making a difference not only in your life, but in the lives of others. Then carry on the *Eat Local* principles throughout the year, helping yourself eat healthy and keeping your money in the community.

Reach Mike at mstrauss@kchealthykids.org.

Farm Business Training Comes Full Circle as Refugee Starts Urban Farm

For Lay Htoo, home and business ownership in the United States mark a new chapter in a long, difficult journey.



Lay Htoo and her children in front of their new home.

By Jill Erickson, CKC Development and Communications Director

Three years ago, Lay Htoo (pronounced, TOO) took a courageous step. Born in Klay Thoo, a village in the jungles of Burma, she resettled in the United States. So while buying a home is an exciting and anxious time for anyone, it wasn't something she had even imagined possible.

"Because the Burmese military came to our village to kill us, my family had to flee to Thailand," Lay Htoo is quoted on the New Roots for Refugees blog, "we crossed the border and lived in the Tham Him refugee camp...for 10 years."

Lay Htoo is one of 18 farmers enrolled in the Farm Business Development Program at Cultivate Kansas City. She is one of 16 refugees in Catholic Charities' New Roots for Refugees program.

Four years ago, Cultivate Kansas City started the Farm Business Development Program in partnership with Catholic Charities of Northeast Kansas, combining a working farm with intensive one-on-one technical assistance--both key elements of its existing Gibbs Road Community Farm and Urban Farmer Development Programs. Operating on land owned by the Kansas City, KS, Housing Authority in the Juniper Gardens housing complex, the program provides farmers with a quarter acre of land, tools, seeds, and water as well as one-on-one technical assistance, training, and support to start their own urban farms.

"My family did not support my work my first year," explains Lay Htoo, "but every day they saw what happened and tasted the food and liked it. Then I tell my husband we are going to buy a house with money from the garden. It is good for [me] and good for my family. Now they are happy and we don't have stress."

After two years in the program, Lay Htoo was able to save enough money selling her produce at market to capitalize her own farm. Most farmers are in the program between two and five years depending on their initial level of agricultural ability.

"Four years may sound like a long time to be subsidized," explains Katherine Kelly, Executive Director of Cultivate Kansas City, "but the challenges these farmers face are often steep." These challenges include acquiring a new language and financial literacy as well as adjusting to a new climate, new growing conditions and a very different culture around growing and selling vegetables.



Lay Htoo plans to turn her yard into an urban farm.

This year the training farm produces its first graduating class consisting of four Burmese women. The program required them to save 20 percent of their sales revenue each growing season. In addition, working with the Family Conservancy, the four farmers enrolled in a federally funded Individualized Development Account (IDA) program, helping them build capital to start their own farms by providing matching funds of \$3 for every \$1 saved.

"I am excited and happy to see these women find land and a home where they can begin a life," said Rachel Pollock, Program Coordinator for New Roots for Refugees. "This program not only gives these women the business skills they need to succeed, but it gives them back some dignity and hope," according to Pollock. Catholic Charities has resettled nearly 1,500 refugees since 2008.

The support and assistance won't end with graduation. "We are looking at how we can continue to provide less intense support," explained Cathy Bylinowski, Farm Business Development Program Manager. Bylinowski added that "farming is a hard business and we are committed to helping these new community leaders succeed."

When asked about the next few years, Lay Htoo explains that "it will be step by step. My first year may not have good sales because I have lots of work to get the soil ready."

But she isn't worried about running her own business, considering her new training and the 24 years of personal farming experience she brings from her homeland. She worries more about pests than how to manage her business.

"Without the good people at Cultivate Kansas City I could not find this," she explains, listing the names of the staff that she worked closely with these past two years. "Working in a farm is a good job and now we have land and hope and I can build."

She feels sad to be away from Juniper where she often provided support to the other farmers, but is optimistic about her future and confides that she hopes her children will enjoy the business so she can pass it on to them some day.

"People like me have a chance to start and now I can stand on my own," she says looking me straight in the eye while our interpreter translates her words.

Thanks to all who have helped make this possible. Since 2005, outstanding support and contributions to Cultivate Kansas City have enabled us to teach and inspire urban farmers and help start 39 farms like Lay Htoo's.

Would you like to learn more about farmers enrolled in New Roots for Refugees? Visit their blog at www.newrootsforrefugees.org.

Reach Jill at jill@cultivatekc.org.

Making Every Day "Food Day"

National campaign to raise food systems awareness draws 100 volunteers to KC farms.



Volunteers are mulching no-till beds using straw at Gibbs Road Community Farm on Food Day, 2011.

By Ami Freeberg, CKC Program Assistant

Many of us *Urban Grown* readers think of every day as "Food Day." You may grow your own food, run your own small farm business, educate others on how to eat healthy food, or only shop from local growers at a farmers market. Unfortunately, much of America has lost touch with its food. In response to a growing need for education about and access to healthy, sustainable food, the Center for Science in the Public Interest sponsored the first national Food Day on October 24, 2011.

Modeled after Earth Day, Food Day seeks to bring together Americans from all walks of life—parents, teachers, and students; health professionals, community organizers, and local officials; chefs, school lunch providers, farmers and eaters—to push for healthy, affordable food produced in a sustainable, humane way.

Kansas City joined the Food Day festivities, contributing to over 2,300 events in all 50 states. Our local Food Day events were spearheaded by the Greater Kansas City Food Policy Coalition, in collaboration with at least a dozen local organizations from the KC Food Circle to the Kansas City, MO, Health Department.

At Cultivate Kansas City, our focus on food starts with the urban farmer. The best way to really understand where your food is coming from is to meet the people that grow it and get some dirt under your fingernails alongside them. A deeper understanding of where, how and by whom your food is grown, leads to more informed choices when doing your grocery shopping. We organized the Food Day Crop Mob to give people the opportunity to see and to work first-hand on a local farm. About 100 people spent the morning of October 22nd volunteering on one of ten farms across the metro area. Groups from BNIM, EQUAL Youth Center, the Community Outreach Program at KU Medical School, the Rotary Club in Wyandotte County, architecture students at KU, Highlands Elementary, Phi Theta Kappa from Johnson County Community College, Midland Loan Services and many individuals came out to lend a hand and learn about urban farming.

Hattie, who volunteered at Gibbs Road Farm, said, “Spinach in October - who knew? I knew you could grow cold-weather crops but that’s about all I knew, so that was neat to see. I really enjoyed meeting everyone; the chatter made the weeding fun and not work.”

The farmers and gardeners benefited as well. Kelly Sturgeon of Unity Garden wrote, “I want to extend my gratitude for sending out an amazing, FUN bunch of kids (from JCCC’s Phi Theta Kappa) to work with us. They were extremely helpful, worked very hard, and stayed after to enjoy our homemade soup picnic. They are really interested in how our project is going to develop and said they would love to come back in the spring and help us further our work!” Like Hattie and the Phi Theta Kappa group, many of the volunteers who set foot on a local farm for the first time that weekend said they will be back. Change begins with individuals making choices in their day-to-day lives. Spending a few hours on a local farm, particularly a farm in your neighborhood, inspires conscious choices on your table for a lifetime. These choices, when multiplied and over time, create systemic change.

Wrap-up reports from Center for Science in the Public Interest indicate that the Food Day message reached millions of people. “Food Day captured the imagination of so many Americans—inspiring them to improve their diets and push for a food system that is just, fair, sustainable, and nourishing,” said Michael F. Jacobson, Food Day’s founder and the executive director of the Center for Science in the Public Interest. “As an annual event, Food Day will make the food movement more formidable, more united, and better positioned to fix the problems that plague our food system,” Jacobson said (quoted at www.foodday.org).

In this work, we often feel like we are preaching to the choir. Food Day helped to broaden that choir, but there is a lot of work left to do. We cannot sit back and watch the food system become what we want it to be. We have to *make* it what we want it to be. There is a seat for everyone at the table—so bring your passion, your voice, your hands and your friends to help make every day Food Day for our country.

Reach Ami at ami@cultivatekc.org.

Field Notes from the Gibbs Road Community Farm



Picking spinach in a high tunnel at Gibbs Road Community Farm

By Alicia Ellingsworth, Gibbs Road Community Farm Manager

The weather this autumn has been the gentlest I can remember. For growing, it's been the best ever. Now, in late November, we have greens, roots, spinach and lettuces out in the field and just last week, we harvested a bed of potatoes that were planted on August 31 in a high tunnel. With proper care and management, we should have vegetables consistently available to the folks of Kansas City through the winter and into spring from the field and from the high tunnels. Winter production has become a hot topic on this farm and in the city. High tunnels are popping up all over the city and throughout the countryside.

Many of the high tunnels have been funded in part by a cost share grant program through the USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service. The NRCS began a 3-year pilot program in 2010 that made investing in high tunnel technology more affordable to more people. A high tunnel is a semi-permanent unheated greenhouse which enables a grower to start warm-season crops sooner and keep them alive longer and to grow cool weather crops all winter long. We have the tunnels, now to figure out the growing.

Full-scale winter production has been a yearly experiment on this farm since the winter of 2008-9. When I first arrived in January 2009, I was amazed at the greenness inside the tunnels when everything outside was gray and frozen. That year, four high tunnels were being used to conduct the experiment and to grow food. Precise daily records of temperature and light were recorded. There were a few crops in the field without protection, but none were harvestable. The first harvest that year was in late March for the Kansas City Food Circle's Farmers Expo in Shawnee, Kansas.

As we planned for the 2009 winter production year, we incorporated what had worked well in the past including low tunnels inside the high tunnels as well as in the field to stand alone. Low tunnels are low-tech knee-high hoops with plastic stretching from side to side and end to end of the bed. Each additional layer of plastic adds a few degrees of warmth thus a bit more protection on the coldest winter days. During that season, I was surprised by something I saw outside the high tunnels. Spinach lived and grew and was delicious all winter long. I encourage folks who cannot afford the time, space or cost of a high tunnel to plant spinach outside; with some straw or a low tunnel it will live.

With success tasting so good, we expanded winter production in 2010 and have again expanded production and expectations this season. This winter season we are and hope to continue to fill and sell winter veggie bags, sell to restaurants and attend a winter market (Badseed Friday Night Winter Farmers Market, 1909 McGee, KCMO). Having survived what felt like the two hottest summers on record, we feel the need to explore and learn more about winter production. This year we hope to learn the temperature limits on outside production and to learn more about early season inside growing. I know I would like to have a continuous supply of potatoes through the winter and intend to figure out how to do that.

Reach Alicia at alicia@cultivatekc.org.

Calendar Of Events

Ten Thousand Villages Community Shopping Event. Thursday, December 15, 4pm - 8pm. Ten Thousand Villages, 7947 Santa Fe Drive, Overland Park, KS. When you shop on this special day, **15% of your purchase will be donated to Cultivate Kansas City!** Ten Thousand Villages is a fair trade retailer of artisan-crafted home decor, personal accessories and gift items from more than 130 artisan groups in some 38 countries. They are a founding member of the World Fair Trade Organization (WFTO). For more information on this event, store hours and details about the store, visit <http://kansascity.tenthousandvillages.com/calenderevents/view/detail/id/71> or call 913-642-8368.

Great Plains Growers Conference, January 5 - 7, Missouri Western State University, Fulkerson Conference Center, St. Joseph, MO. For program and registration information visit <http://www.greatplainsgrowers.org>.

Cultivate KC Annual Urban Growers Meeting, Saturday, January 28, 9am - 12pm (check-in at 8:30am). Rainbow Mennonite Church, 1444 Southwest Blvd., Kansas City, KS. Mark your calendars now and plan to attend. More details about this meeting to be announced (watch for an email). Meet other growers and supporters, participate in discussion and make new friends.

"Seed to Plate...The Organic Connection" Missouri Organic Association Annual Conference, February 2 - 4, Union Station Marriot, St. Louis, MO. The Missouri Organic Association has set the stage for an agricultural conference that will blow the peas right out of the pod! More info at <http://www.missouriorganic.org/Events/MOAAAnnualConference.aspx>.

H A P P Y H O L I D A Y S

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