



GEORGIA
organics

the DIRT

THE QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF GEORGIA ORGANICS

Growing Healthy Foods, Farms, & Families • Summer 2008

ORGANIC FARMING TOOLKIT NOW AVAILABLE

A comprehensive collection of articles, web links, and resources to help farmers and educators is now available. See page 3.

SUSTAINABLE NEWS BRIEFS

Get the scoop on fast-paced developments in organic and sustainable farming in Georgia. See page 8.

A WALK IN THE VINEYARD

September 14, 1-4pm, Clayton
View the vines, taste the wines at Persimmon Creek in this self-guided tour. See page 9.

NEW & EMERGING FARMER NETWORK TO BE DEVELOPED

Announcement of a new initiative in partnership with the USDA's Risk Management Agency *RMA*. See page 11.

IN THIS ISSUE:

A TALE OF TWO CITIES
Page 1

GEORGIA ORGANICS PROGRAM UPDATE
Pages 4-5

BAKING LOCALLY RECIPE
Page 9

GARDEN PLANNING FOR THE FALL
Page 12

MEMBER PROFILE
Page 13

EVENTS CALENDAR
Page 15

A TALE OF TWO CITIES AND TWO COMMUNITY FOOD PROJECTS *By Suzanne Welander*

How do we feed the hungry? Give a fish, or teach how to fish? Traditional images associated with charity work can label participants as victims in need of a rescuer, unconsciously perpetuating and reinforcing dependence. It's time to retire the stereotype of the knight in shining armor that by its very definition *requires* a victim. Enter the new model of community development work: community food projects.

To call this approach "new" is a misnomer. The USDA's funding of community food projects started in 1996 through the CSREES (Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service), with the goal of fighting food insecurity while promoting the self-sufficiency of low-income communities. Nationwide, \$36 million was invested between 1996 and 2007—18 percent of the projects proposed during that time. In Georgia, two significant community food projects have received cost-matching funds from the CSREES between 2003 to 2006: The Federation of Southern Cooperatives received \$175,000 in 2003 to expand and strengthen cooperatives throughout four states in the Southeast; in 2004, the Rolling Hills Resource, Conservation, and Development Council received \$105,000 to develop end-markets for small-scale farmers in west-central Georgia.

Community food projects are now finding resonance with the budding urban agriculture movement within Georgia's cities. Revolutionized by an asset-based approach that empowers citizens as full participants, these projects don't promise food security alone; they also cultivate the economic security that addresses the root causes of hunger, which is only the presenting symptom.

As anyone who's ever planted an impossibly small seed in the soil can attest, growing plants is all about hope and imagination. It's there at ground level that two new community projects are planting the seeds of hope intended to



Daron "Farmer D" Joffe gets in the dirt after groundbreaking at Trustees Garden in Savannah.

Photo by Richard Burkart, Savannah Daily News

involve and transform their communities—communities united by good, pure food.

SAVANNAH: RESURRECTED HISTORIC GARDEN

Standing in a San Francisco prison yard, the warden confronted Daron "Farmer D" Joffe with a choice. Stay, and take the last chance at transforming the floundering prison farm, or leave and let the orchid program take over? Farmer D took the challenge and stayed.

"For me, that's the moment where I first got committed," explains Farmer D. As a recently deployed exchange student with SLUG (San Francisco League of Urban Gardeners), he spent over a year establishing the prison farming program before returning to the East in 1999. "I was intrigued and inspired by the SLUG model," says Farmer D. "I wanted to understand how a social justice-driven farming nonprofit worked, so that it could be replicated."

Back in Georgia, it wasn't until participating in a charrette (a collaborative session commonly used by urban planners) to design usage



solutions for the historical Trustees Garden site in Savannah that the right combination of factors started to fall into place. "I started to see this [Trustees Garden] project as an educational and social justice project," says Farmer D.

The oldest agricultural experimental garden in America, the 9-acre Trustees Garden was founded by General James Edward Oglethorpe in 1734. Long since abandoned, the garden site became industrial, then dormant as the surrounding neighborhoods languished. Local businessman Charles H. Morris who had recently purchased the property gave the gardening project a green light with the intent to make the site a showcase for sustainability education for children and adults.

Strong community partners were enlisted. Union Mission (UM), a nonprofit focused on ending and preventing homelessness in the Savannah and Chatham County area, signed on. The proposed project leveraged their community connections and programs, including the Starfish Café—a working gourmet kitchen where clients learn culinary technical skills in both a classroom and café setting. Bringing in organic farmers from rural areas surrounding Savannah was the final piece to fall into place; they came in through the Southeastern African American Farmers, Organic Network and the Coastal Organic Growers' caucus.

Together, the group drafted a proposal for a project that would fund a minimum of fifteen low-income or homeless participants in an intensive program designed to improve food access, nutrition, culinary, and professional skills—all components nesting together to address the root causes of food insecurity. Participants would receive a plot and gardening supplies at the Trustees Garden site, and farmers would teach organic growing. They'd receive culinary training from local chefs and learn how to prepare fresh foods while building vocational skills that they could use to land a job. And they'd receive vouchers for purchasing fresh produce from area farmers at a new farmers' market at the Trustees Garden location. Supplies for container gardening at home were also included, with home visits and instruction, if needed.

Union Mission's Community Arts and Wellness Educator Teri Schell acknowledges the synergistic benefits, "It's a food security project, really, that teaches low income and homeless community

members how to grow their own food, and benefits the organic farmers in our area that are trying to make a living growing food by providing a fair market price for what they sell."

The program met the USDA's CSREES community development objectives too, and they provided an 18-month planning grant of \$25,000 (in 2007) for the partners to implement and evaluate the program. Says UM's Schell, "Will it work, and how will it work? If it goes well, we'll identify best practices and apply for a project grant from the USDA [CSREES]."

In the face of rising food prices, the key goals of the project couldn't be better timed. When Trustees Garden's farmers' market opened on June 4, hundreds of people attended. Four farmers did a brisk business selling their organic produce—items that until now had been out of reach both physically and financially to area residents.



Volunteers at Georgia Organics' raised bed building workshop developed infrastructure for the Church of the Holy Comforter's ministry garden.

ATLANTA: HISTORIC WEST END

In a 2007 study on food access in two neighborhoods, DeKalb County quantified the food desert effect. In the neighborhood with less money, and consequently with less mobility, fresh fruits and vegetables could be found at only 14 percent of the neighborhood's stores that sold food.

Where you live has a very real impact on your life span and quality. In April this year, a study in California found that people living in low-income neighborhoods where food sources were predominately fast food and convenience stores had obesity and diabetes rates 40 percent higher than neighborhoods with better access to healthy foods.

A belief that good quality, healthy foods should be equally accessible to all citizens is central to the social justice heart of the urban agriculture movement. In Atlanta, that movement is finding strength with churches and other faith-

based organizations. With their social ministry motivations, these groups are collaborating in a variety of ways.

Take Georgia Organics' Faith and Foods Initiative, for example. This partnership with Heifer International, a prospective funder, and St. Philips Cathedral, who is providing administrative support, aims to help churches establish ministry gardens on-site. Georgia Organics will bring in farmers to provide technical advice.



Judith Winfrey leads a tour of urban organic farms for Fulton County Extension Coordinator James Reaves (left), pictured with Rashid Nuri (right) at Truly Living Well Natural Urban Farm.



Farmer and former Georgia Organics employee Judith Winfrey explains: "The Faith and Foods project is really about people creating their own food—not just food to eat, but food to sell so that we're creating economies." Each site would have three different gardens: a ministry garden maintained by the congregation with harvests going to food pantry programs; a community garden where people from the congregation and surrounding neighborhood have space; and a for-profit farm operated by the on-site farm manager who receives access to land, and ownership of the farm's harvest, as payment. The solution opens an in-town farming opportunity for young farmers who can't afford to purchase land in or around the city. An experienced organic grower would serve as managing farmer, providing technical support and advice to the on-site farmers.



Kwabena Nkrom's son Kwesi does his part to move some dirt as the beds take shape in the background at the CVC Urban Farm in Atlanta's West End.

It's already happening at CVC Urban Farm in Southwest Atlanta's historic West End neighborhood. "Do you think I can get twelve rows out of this?" Kwabena Nkrom asks, faced with medium-sized mountains of composted "zoo doo," top soil, and mulch. Nkrom's farming mentor is Rashid Nuri of Truly Living Well Natural Urban Farm. Nuri's business model provided inspiration for CVC Urban Farm: the business plan forecasts a diversified income stream from CSA shares, market sales, and restaurants.

The CVC Urban Farm occupies two acres of a parcel of land donated by the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church. Tires, carpeting, concrete, and other debris dissuaded them from digging down; instead, they're building up. The first bed's already planted with okra.

The asset-based community development model in use here mobilizes the positive attributes of the surrounding community while encouraging community ownership. Nkrom ticks off local assets: "The land, it's here. The people, they're here." Next was the funding. The neighborhood fund of the Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta provided an \$8,000 community investment grant to Creating Vibrant Communities (CVC), the nonprofit organization working in collaboration with Neighborhood Planning Unit-T (NPU-T) on the project. The site includes demonstration raised beds and designated spaces for vermicomposting, and plans for a farmers' market.

The vision goes beyond feeding the immediate community, though that's the first priority. Noting that "the irony of underdevelopment is that we have all the land," Nkrom forecasts that the wider area could serve as the city's future "food basket," exporting locally grown, sustainable produce to other parts of the city. As chair of NPU-T, he's in a unique position to shepherd this change. The organization's Community Food Project calls for developing a network of farms throughout the greater West End. Ideally, available land will be catalogued and chunks of greenspace protected from competition with developers through the creation of a land trust. The vision, realized, would catapult Atlanta into the same sustainability class with Vancouver and Portland.

In support of this effort, NPU-T is one of over thirty organizations that have endorsed the Atlanta Local Food Initiative's sustainable food plan for Atlanta. Fruit tree plantings, improved food access, conversion of warehouses to greenhouses, urban farms and edible landscaping alongside the route of the proposed Beltline: the plan outlines eight initiatives for integrating food into the city's sustainability initiatives.

Meanwhile, for Nkrom, there's a sense of urgency. "A lot of people aren't eating well," he notes. Farming, and eating well, is a means to a much more meaningful end: to facilitate a community-wide paradigm shift in the consciousness surrounding food security that inspires people to think differently about their housing, their lives, and their communities.

Hauling one more wheelbarrow load of zoo doo to the new row, Nkrom adds, "It's the only silver bullet I know of that solves all the problems. Potent."

Suzanne Welander is the communications and outreach director for Georgia Organics, and editor of The Dirt. She lives in downtown Atlanta with her canoeist husband Tom, three chickens, two beehives, and one very large fig tree.

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR COMMUNITY FOOD PROJECTS

The Community Food Projects Competitive Grants Program, administered through the CSREES unit of the USDA received mandatory funding of \$5 million per year in the most recent Farm Bill. Letters of intent are due mid-January with full proposals due in early July (for accepted letters of intent only). More info at http://www.csrees.usda.gov/funding/rfas/community_food.html

Sustainable Community Innovation Grants Program, administered by the Southern Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program (SARE) and the Southern Rural Development Center. Provides up to \$10,000 to fund projects that work to strengthen both agriculture and Southern communities by building explicit linkages between sustainable agriculture and rural community development. Call for proposals posted in August, with due date likely to be October 1. More info at http://www.southernare.uga.edu/scig_page.htm

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation offers grants for addressing childhood obesity, helping all children and families eat well—especially those at the highest risk for obesity. Calls for proposals made at various times, with specific purposes. See the current list at <http://www.rwjf.org/applications/solicited/cfplist.jsp>