

grow HARTFORD

2009 Program Report

Healthy Food Grown in Hartford's Neighborhoods

Founded in 1978, the Hartford Food System is a nonprofit organization dedicated to fighting hunger and improving nutrition for disadvantaged members of our community through long-term, sustainable solutions. This work is guided by three strategies designed to reinforce one another:

- Increase access among low-income people to normal, non-emergency sources of food.
- Deepen the connection between food consumers and the sources of food production.
- Advance policies to improve the affordability and quality of food in urban areas.

We administer an array of programs, including a parents committee advocating for healthier school meals, the Grow Hartford urban agriculture program that produces food for local families and social service agencies, a food policy council, a coalition of inner-city grocery stores, and extensive outreach and advocacy in Hartford's neighborhoods.

Grow Hartford is an urban farm in its seventh season located on three different sites in Hartford's inner city on Laurel, Broad and Zion Streets. These sites serve as outdoor classrooms to learn hands-on about making healthy food choices, understanding the food system and understanding how agriculture and food choices affect our community.



Members of the Grow Hartford Youth Crew at the Broad Street garden, one of three growing sites in 2009.

The general objectives of Grow Hartford include:

- Promoting sustainable and equitable food system in Hartford by supporting grassroots activism and youth leadership through agriculture.
- Encouraging healthy lifestyles and community action related to food security, sustainable agriculture, and the environment.
- Fostering responsible stewardship of urban land by using organic farming methods and revitalizing vacant lots.
- Restoring the link between people and agriculture by encouraging involvement of low-income urban youth and families in food production.

Staff and Program Areas

Jerica Sandiford serves as the summer Grow Hartford Youth Coordinator, a position she has held for three consecutive seasons. Ms. Sandiford has worked at the project for six seasons since its inception, initially as one of the youth participants herself. Rodger Phillips serves as the Grow Hartford urban farmer. He is a Hartford resident and an experienced urban grower.

Grow Hartford is composed of three main program areas: youth education, community outreach and food production. Through these three activities, Grow Hartford is expanding the supply of fresh produce in Hartford's inner city while transforming three formerly vacant lots into vibrant, productive assets in the surrounding neighborhoods.

Youth Education

The Grow Hartford Youth Crew is the centerpiece of our youth education strategy. This year's group was composed of nine teenagers who took part in a six-week curriculum during the school vacation period that focused on food sources, the importance of healthy eating habits, and how plants grow.

In addition to educational topics, the Youth Crew acquired real life skills by growing food and earning wages for their farm labor. Tasks included planting crops, tending the fields, weeding, harvesting, and distributing the food to people in need. The Youth Crew's efforts were integral to the success of Grow Hartford as a working farm. Through workshops, field trips and under the leadership and encouragement of Jerica Sandiford, the Youth Crew yielded new friendships and helped its participants acquire leadership skills that will be useful as they go forward in life.

"Grow Hartford gave me opportunities that I have enjoyed, like meeting new people, visiting FRESH New London and [seeing] how other youth like us work in a garden and give back to the community. We went on other field trips like the Science Center that taught us about the planet, energy and sound which I thought was very interesting. Each and every field trip brought something else to our learning minds." - Whitney Vitale



More than 90 varieties of vegetables, flowers, and herbs were grown at this busy inner-city location on Laurel Street.

"I really enjoyed the field trips, especially the one to the Science Center. Who knew I would've had as much fun as I did. The field trips, I feel, really made us closer. I took a lot out of this summer. I learned a lot about different vegetables and what-not that I never knew." - Anjali Quiñones

Community Outreach

Along with Grow Hartford's efforts with young people, our community outreach promotes the well-being of Hartford residents of all ages. We have located two of our newest growing sites in residential neighborhoods for that very reason.

Our primary strategy for adult outreach has been through the Grow Hartford Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program, which sponsored its second season in 2009. The CSA is a popular model at many suburban farms that sell produce to the public. CSAs allows families to pay for a "share" of the

harvest at the beginning of the growing season, usually at a cost lower than market rate. However, due to economic restraints and travel distance, inner-city residents seldom have an opportunity to participate as CSA members at suburban farms. The Grow Hartford CSA addresses this gap, giving lower income Hartford families a chance to buy shares of locally grown produce in their own city.

Twenty-one Hartford families from many varied backgrounds partook in our 2009 CSA from July 30 to October 1. CSA families developed a direct relationship with the urban farmer who grew their food as they picked up their share each week, with many members also choosing to volunteer over the course of the season with jobs around the farm. Families shared recipes and made new friendships, strengthening the community and renewing traditional food ways.

For many of the shareholders, Grow Hartford was their first CSA experience and their first try at “eating seasonally.” A diverse mix of vegetables, flowers, and herbs allowed members to experiment with new kinds of food. Many of the members communicated about how much they enjoyed vegetables that they never thought they would. Some of the members also discovered completely new vegetables that they had never heard of before. CSA members were given a survey and a list of vegetable that they were asked to “rate” to guide the crop plan for 2010, which will help us build on these preferences.

In addition to 21 family shares, the Grow Hartford CSA also provided organizational shares to two Hartford non-profits. Each week a share of roughly 150 pounds of fresh produce was delivered to the Living Well Health Ministry at Faith Congregational Church in Hartford’s North End, which in turn distributed the food to area seniors at no cost. A second share was provided to Billings Forge Community Works, which used the fresh produce in culinary training classes for residents at The Kitchen @ Billings Forge. Both of these new partnerships offered us use of their commercial kitchens and meeting space, and we look forward to building on these partnerships in 2010.

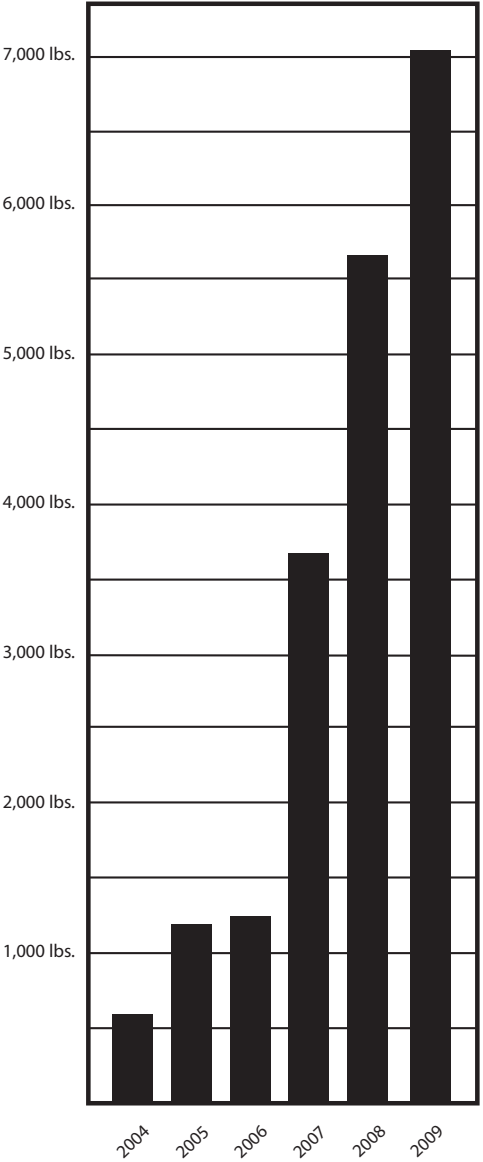
Food Production

Grow Hartford's food production program area is focused on creating an environmentally and socially sustainable farm. We believe sustainable agriculture is central to creating an equitable food system with access to healthy food for all people.

The 2009 growing season was a challenging year for most farms in the Northeast. Heavy rains and colder weather began in May and continued until the end of July, with rainfall in the state two to three times the average.

The rain and cold weather meant slow maturation, poor pollination, rot and smaller yields, culminating in the spread of weather-born diseases such as “late blight,” a strain of plant disease that caused the infamous Irish Potato Famine. The Federal Government declared most regions in Connecticut, New York and New Jersey agricultural disaster areas for 2009.

Grow Hartford's Produce Harvests



Late blight killed 80 percent of Grow Hartford's tomato crop, although good amount of cherry tomatoes and green tomatoes managed to survive. Our tomato losses exceeded more than 2,000 pounds.

In 2009 we grew vegetables, herbs and flowers on 1.25 acres owned by the City of Hartford and the Southside Institutions Neighborhood Alliance. Our total harvest was 7,067 pounds. The approximate retail value of one share's produce in 2009 was \$367. The approximate retail value of one organizational share's produce was \$3,375.

The 2009 crop list included 98 varieties of vegetables, herbs and flowers including many specialty, ethnic and heirloom varieties. An effort was made to grow crops with the most food value per square foot, such as potatoes. Investments were also made in 2009 that will yield benefits next year, such as the installation of two perennial gardens for culinary herbs gardens and a November garlic planting that should produce 240 pounds of garlic in 2010.

Program Highlights

- Documenting the youth education activities through a blog at www.growhartford.blogspot.com.
- Traveling to Holcomb Farm CSA in Granby, FRESH New London, and Tufts University's New Entry Sustainable Farm in Dracut, Massachusetts on field trips with the Youth Crew.
- Participating in a health fair at Barnaby Park where the Youth Crew spoke to members of the community about healthy eating.
- Attending a screening of Food, Inc. at Real Art Ways.
- Obtaining local compost this year through an initiative of the Department of Public Works.
- Making hunger relief donations on-site to neighbors and through pantries and soup kitchens.
- Establishing farm partnerships with Holcomb Farm CSA in Granby, Urban Oaks Organic Farm in New Britain, and High Hill Orchard in Meriden.
- Hosting summer volunteers from Trinity College and local neighborhoods.
- Building many community relationships with other organizations, including Hartford Public Schools, Knox Parks Foundation, Billings Forge Community Works, Firebox Restaurant, Capitol Region Education Council, Faith Congregational Church, Connecticut Science Center, St. George Greek Orthodox Cathedral, Working Lands Alliance and the St. Joseph Cathedral Food Pantry.

HARTFORD FOOD SYSTEM

The mission of the Hartford Food System is to fight hunger and improve nutrition for disadvantaged members of our community through sustainable, non-emergency strategies.
86 Park Street, Second Floor • Hartford, CT 06106 • (860) 296-9325 • www.hartfordfood.org