

grow HARTFORD

A HARTFORD FOOD SYSTEM PROJECT

2012 Program Report

Grow Hartford, a program of Hartford Food System completed its ninth year of urban agriculture and youth leadership development in 2012. This program provides youth leadership education and a working urban farm that produces thousands of pounds of fresh produce for residents of Hartford. Youth input to Grow Hartford's program structure and development has been a key element since the program's inception in 2004.

Grow Hartford aims to:

1. *Promote a sustainable and equitable food system in Hartford by supporting grassroots activism and youth leadership through agriculture.*
2. *Encourage active lifestyles and to foster community action related to food security, sustainable agriculture, and the environment.*
3. *Foster responsible stewardship of urban land with organic farming methods and the revitalization of formerly vacant lots.*
4. *Restore the link between people and agriculture by encouraging the involvement of low-income urban youth and families in food production.*
5. *Use the platform of urban agriculture and informed youth leaders to build a healthy food system in Hartford that is responsive to the health and cultural needs of all residents, regardless of income.*



Youth Education

During 2012, we engaged more than 60 youth in summer and school-year programming, including the inauguration of youth leadership and skills development related to community food issues.

Beginning in winter 2012, we developed our school year food justice club called To Be Honestly Healthy (TBH2). Our youth defined TBH2 as a youth-developed and youth-led intervention that strives to promote awareness of food injustices, caused by social inequalities in Hartford. Our TBH2 youth focused on encouraging and practicing healthy eating habits while educating our community on the importance of healthy food. TBH2 created a food system workshop that they presented to 23 youth and 7 Hartford adult community members at Clark Elementary School in Hartford. With our support, youth developed a school garden club for sixth grade students at Capital Prep, a Hartford middle and high magnet school.

Grow Hartford supported a 5 week summer intensive youth employment program for 16 low-income Hartford youth. Our approach to youth programming provided youth with an understanding of urban agriculture techniques and where their food comes from, as well as how they are part of Hartford's food system. Our methods included hands-on field activities, and a variety of workshops with topics such as composting, plant identification, managing pests, organic vs. conventional farming, honey bees, sustainable fertilization, food-borne illness, healthy food access in corner stores, food justice, farming and environmental health, community mapping, resource distribution, personal life maps, and public speaking.

Collaborating with Our Piece of the Pie, TBH2 youth created a colorful 90 foot mural at our Main Street farm location in summer 2012. The mural is a visible demonstration of the perspective of our youth on the components of a healthy food system. This mural is viewable by literally hundreds of people who pass that busy corner every day. Another exciting 2012 partnership was the youth program exchange between FRESH New London, Hartford Food System, the Institute for Community Research, and



New Haven's Common Ground, in a "farm swap" where the youth visited FRESH New London's farm and Grow Hartford's farm. The youth enjoyed sharing their space and meeting people who were also doing the same kind of work. It reinforced the importance of the work, and provided new ideas for curriculum.

One of our core youth from TBH2, Cheyenne, was with Hartford Food System as a staff youth intern in fall 2012, who worked with Kat Vollono, our Youth Coordinator, and the new core youth group to develop and deliver community workshops. These youth met 25 hours a month to learn about food justice topics, created workshops that addressed food related topics, and continued to exercise the agricultural skills they gained during their time spent in the summer program.

Community Outreach

Our family CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) program offered shares of produce for twelve weeks to 35 families and for 14 weeks to two community based organizations. Half of the shares were offered to low income families who met income guidelines. Families received weekly shares of produce, and were able to access pick your own crops such as fresh herbs and cherry tomatoes. Many of the CSA families lived or worked in the vicinity of the farm, and many picked up their shares on foot or by bike. One CSA pick up had to be postponed due to severe weather but a week was added to the end of the season. Feedback from members was overwhelmingly positive and interest was expressed by members for a lengthened season or winter CSA.

Food Production

The total acreage under Grow Hartford's care comes to approximately 3.5 acres of which about 2.25 acres is under cultivation. This land is on five separate plots. Our total yield in pounds for 2012 was more than 24,000 lbs. plus cut flowers. Produce is distributed on one of the sites via a family CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) program and delivered to area restaurants. A bulk of the produce is offered at low/no cost to non-profit agencies.

In 2012, the Grow Hartford farm adjusted to growth experienced in 2011 with the addition of a new field to maintain on Main Street. In addition, we scaled up our family CSA program and began selling at a farmers' market every week. We vended at the Coventry Regional Farmers' Market each Sunday during the season from 11-2. We also participated in special event markets at Elizabeth Park, the Burgdorf Health Center and Knox Parks. Restaurant sales were made to Max Downtown, Max's Oysterbar, Firebox, the Kitchen at Billings Forge, Yellowhouse and Cavey's. Specialty crops popular with the restaurants included purple tomatillos, ficoide glaciale, sunflower shoots and garden huckleberries.

Crop Fields

Main Street: Our newest field on Main Street is owned and leased to us by the City of Hartford. It is made up of lawn areas and long four foot raised beds that are 12” high. In these beds we concentrate on growing fruiting crops. The warm, sunny, sheltered location and the raised bed system make it perfect for growing peppers, tomatoes and eggplant. In 2012, we grew several varieties of peppers, 6 varieties of heirloom slicing tomatoes, two varieties of cherries and tomatillos. The location is exceptionally well suited for growing and plenty of more space is available for construction of more raised beds or other growing structures.

Broad Street: Our Broad Street crop field is an L shaped lot between Jefferson and Madison. It has a low lying fence and a limited amount of street frontage. It borders five neighbors. There is currently no access to water there. As part of our crop rotation and soil management plan, we left most of Broad Street fallow this year. An area dedicated to perennial herbs was cultivated. There we grew sage, oregano, sorrel, garlic chives and strawberries.

Zion Street: Our Zion Street crop field is one of our most productive growing sites: sunny, sloped, well drained with soil that has been improved on for the past several years. The site is a large rectangular lot on the corner of Catherine Street. We border two properties, a private home and an abandoned apartment building. There is a large amount of street frontage and lawn. There is no water at the site. At Zion Street this year we grew a large assortment of crops, many unusual. They included amaranth, several varieties of Asian eggplant, chicory, red sorrel, cardoon, garden huckleberries, okra, chard, kale, fennel as well as flowers including broomcorn, sweet annie, and zinnias.

Laurel Street: Our Laurel Street crop field is our oldest and most used space. It is the location of our storage container and the distribution site for our CSA as well as the base for the Grow Hartford youth crew in the summer. At Laurel Street we grew tomatoes, lettuce, salad greens, tomatillos, cabbage, kale, chard, beets, radishes, mustards, collards, carrots, summer squash, cut flowers, cucumbers and herbs.

Grow Hartford starts all its own transplants in Laurel Street greenhouses owned by Knox Parks and at Holcomb Farm in Granby. This past year we began construction of a propagation house of our own. A permit was issued and the skeleton of the structure has been completed. Final work on the house should be completed in spring of 2013. This new greenhouse will allow us a lot of breathing room and much needed extra space for transplant production.



Other Program Highlights

- On-site donations to neighbors through pantries and soup kitchens
- Partnered with Northeast Neighborhood Partners for agriculture services at the former Swift factory site
- Summer volunteers and visitors from Community farm of Simsbury, Watkinson School, Trinity College, FRESH New London, Institute for Community Research, and local neighbors.
- Community relationships strengthened with organizations such as Hartford Public Schools, Our Piece of the Pie, Institute for Community Research, the Hartford Childhood Wellness Alliance, Capital Region Education Council, Capital Workforce Partners, and Holcomb Farm CSA.
- Celebration and “unveiling” of the mural at the Park Street and Main Street Farm
- A “Food Justice in Hartford 101” workshop created by youth fall interns for delivery to community members



About Hartford Food System

Since 1978, Hartford Food System has addressed problems of food security, meaning access by all persons at all times to enough nutritious, culturally acceptable food in their community for an active, healthy life. Our mission is to fight hunger and improve nutrition for disadvantaged members of our community through sustainable, non-emergency strategies. Our programs increase understanding of food security problems, improve access to nutritious and affordable food, help consumers make informed food choices, and inform and advance responsible food policies locally and statewide. For 35 years, HFS has been a leader in grassroots efforts to fight hunger and improve nutrition in low-income neighborhoods. As an early advocate of what has become a national movement to link the well-being of urban communities with sustainable agriculture and a more equitable food economy, our work is based on several strategies:

- 1.) Increase access for low-income people to normal food outlets, such as grocery stores and farmers markets.*
- 2.) Deepen the connection between food consumers and agricultural production.*
- 3.) Increase community capacity for advocacy for a healthier food system.*
- 4.) Advance public policies to improve the affordability and quality of food.*

The concepts of food justice and sovereignty also provide a basis for our program development. Food sovereignty principles that declare food as a basic human right and that promote democratic control of the food system are particularly applicable to our work with community members, especially the efforts to promote organizing and self-advocacy.