

## Urban Agriculture



Photo courtesy of D-Town

**T**oday's urban agriculture is rooted in southeast Michigan's rich history. The Kickapoo, Sauk and Fox people of southeastern Michigan, historically the first well-known cultures to live here, were mainly farmers who grew corn, beans, squash and tobacco.

During the late 1800s and early 1900s, mission pear trees were known as a striking feature of the local landscape as the French had planted them on their "ribbon farms" lining the Detroit River. Farmland dwindled as industry grew in Southeast Michigan, but it seems that every tough economic time hailed a return to growing food. During the depression of 1893, Mayor Hazen S. Pingree encouraged poor residents to grow food on 430 acres of public land — including the city hall lawn, parks and other vacant areas.

The Depression Gardens of the 1930s represented another effort by people to feed themselves during tough economic times — work-relief gardens supplied work for the unemployed, and food for hospitals and charities. There were also War Gardens during WWI and WWII as part of an effort to get households to grow more of their own food so that produce from farms could be sent overseas. In 1944 victory gardens supplied 42 percent of the nation's vegetable supply. However gardening slacked off during the postwar economic boom.

In the 1970s Mayor Coleman Young started the Farm-A-Lot program as an answer to the many vacant lots in the city. Some citizens took up the challenge and in the 1980s the Gardening Angels was formed. It was steered by Gerald Hairston and other elders with southern roots. In 1992, Detroit Summer, a project initiated at Detroit's Boggs Center, involved young people with the Gardening Angels in planting community gardens. Farm-A-Lot ended in the early 2000s.

What eventually became the Garden Resource Program Collabo-



Photo: Brightmoor Community Garden

Photo courtesy of D-Town

Left to right: Preparing garden beds at D-Town Farm; Brightmoor Youth Garden; working with bees at D-Town Farm.

orative replaced it with gardening development and support programs, garden resources, adult and youth education, market programs and soil testing services underpinning the development of a new, organic Detroit food system. It now involves more than 1,350 community gardens tended by an ever-more sophisticated group of growers using better techniques and practices for developing this home-grown industry.

Detroit agriculture is flourishing, from family, community and school gardens, to market plots and mini-farms — thousands of sites that together report tons of fruits and vegetables produced each year. There is also a thriving beekeeping community, and some agriculturalists have gone so far as to raise chickens, rabbits and even goats.

The capacity for large-scale production is here with 20 square miles (12,800 acres) of vacant space in Detroit. Researchers at MSU have reported that Detroit land has the capacity to fulfill most of the produce needs of Detroit's population — finding that nearly 76 percent of vegetables and 42 percent of fruits consumed in the city could be supplied from as little as 2,086 acres of land.

The food production capacity is here. However, in order for this to become a fully functioning food system, it needs to be legal to farm in Detroit. That requires state legislation to amend the Right to Farm Act of 1981, and city land use policy to equitably regulate the results of a movement that has grown organically throughout our neighborhoods.

In late 2012, the City Planning Commission voted to recommend the adoption of Urban Agriculture ordinances to the Detroit City Council, which is expected to vote on them in early 2013.

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The cover is a photo of living art created by Barbara Barefield, primarily from food grown in Detroit and found at Wayne SEED Farmers' Market at Wayne State University.



# DETROIT

## food policy council

## Detroit Food System Executive Summary 2011-2012

### School Food and Urban Agriculture





Photo courtesy of Earthworks Urban Farm | Inset photo: Barbara Barefield



Photo courtesy of Brother Nature Farm

Above: Earthworks Urban Garden grew some 14,000 pounds of produce in 2011. Most of it went to the Capuchin Soup Kitchen. Left: A young girl enjoys the Wayne SEED Farmer's Market at Wayne State University, where produce from Earthworks is sold. Above right: Greg Willerer's Brother Nature Farm is able to grow produce nine months out of the year with the help of their hoop house.

## Everybody eats, and in order to thrive, everybody needs fresh, nutritious food.

Acquiring and distributing food is one of the basic functions of community, and it is our view that each community should have the power to control and maintain their food systems. Food systems fuel a community and make it function — from taking care of the earth, feeding people and connecting them, to creating jobs, wealth and power.

These principles drive the Detroit Food Policy Council, established in 2008 by the Detroit City Council, which recognizes the issues and potential of food activism. We want to eat well, be healthy, connect to one another, generate meaningful work and influence the food systems of Detroit.

The goal of the DFPC is to empower individuals and community organizations to be partners in the food systems as growers, processors, sellers, preparers, consumers and planners. In order to achieve these goals DFPC focuses on the following subjects: Current access to quality food in Detroit; Hunger and Malnutrition; Impacts/Effects of an Inadequate Diet; Citizen Education; Economic Injustice in the Food System; Urban Agriculture; the Role of Schools and other Public Institutions, and Emergency Response.

This 2011-2012 annual report focuses on Urban Agriculture and School Food. Future annual reports will focus on other aspects of food policy and the local food system.

Urban agriculture is a worldwide movement and Detroit is one of its leaders. We stand on the cusp of realizing the dream of a self-sufficient, just and sustainable food system.



Creating a food system to feed hundreds of thousands of children has to have spinoff possibilities. ... The effort is not just about the public schools, it's about a larger community coming together around food and education to create a just and equitable food system that serves citizens well.



## School Food

There are two basic issues to address with school food. The first is the actual food served in schools. The other is agriculture, which involves learning about growing food, nutrition, food processing and career possibilities in the food system.

Food that is served and consumed at school involves factors from federal guidelines and vendors to health, culture and issues of supply and demand. USDA guidelines and the Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010 (also known as the Child Nutrition Act) set the ground rules for everything from meals and snacks to vending machine items — all foods served or sold on campus. Those guidelines include:

- Ensuring students are offered both fruits and vegetables every day of the week.
- Substantially increasing offerings of whole grain-rich foods.
- Offering only fat-free or low-fat milk varieties.
- Limiting calories based on the age of children being served to ensure proper portion size.
- Increasing the focus on reducing the amounts of saturated fat, trans fats and sodium.

The recent name change from the Office of Food Service to Office of School Nutrition at Detroit Public Schools (DPS) reflects adherence to USDA guidelines. DPS is the largest individual provider of school foods in the city, which serves more than 100,000 meals each day to about 68,000 students. It also reflects a vision to make nutrition central to its mission.

The DPS endeavors to go beyond just feeding children to helping them become informed agricultural participants. As part of this effort, on April 23, 2012, the Detroit School Garden Collaborative held a press conference at William J. Beckham Academy to announce its inaugural effort: Developing a food-based education system at 45 of Detroit's public schools. To begin, each school will have a garden that features at least three raised beds utilizing recycled materials, compost bins, gravel walkways and a training center staffed by teachers who have been educated in agricultural skills. It's an ambitious beginning for even more ambitious goals to help develop an agricultural economic structure in the city — not just food now, but jobs for the next generation.



Photo courtesy of DTE Energy Garden



Photo: Clarence Johnson Productions

Top: Evergreen Academy of Design and Technology students at the Osborn High School greenhouse tend plants they will soon eat.

Above: Students at the Gompers Elementary School enjoy fresh fruit, vegetables and milk everyday.

Institutional buyers such as the DPS, charter schools or food vendors who service schools can help drive this industry. In fact, their combined buying power could be a key part of making it happen. Creating a food system to feed hundreds of thousands of children has to have spinoff possibilities. Betti Wiggins, Executive Director, DPS Office of School Nutrition and others are clear that the effort is not just about the public schools, it's about a larger community coming together around food and education to create a just and equitable food system that serves citizens well.

