



National Association of
Conservation Districts

**URBAN AGRICULTURE CONSERVATION
2016 GRANT INITIATIVE
FINAL REPORT**

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Overview

Purpose

According to the Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems 2014 report on The Local Food Movement: Setting the Stage for Good Food, “the local food movement in the United States has evolved over the past 25 years, including a more recent convergence with movements supporting food access and health, food justice, environment, food sovereignty, and racial equity.”

Part of this evolution is the rapid expansion of urban agriculture, which is defined by the USDA National Agriculture Library as “taking the form of backyard, roof-top and balcony gardening, community gardening in vacant lots and parks, roadside urban fringe agriculture and livestock grazing in open space”. In order for urban agriculture to grow sustainably, conservation practices must be incorporated at all levels. This is a vital and viable role for the nation’s conservation districts.

Process

In the spring of 2016, the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) partnered with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to pilot that much needed service across the country: conservation technical assistance (CTA) for the vastly growing industry of urban agriculture.

The NACD Urban and Community Resource Policy Group (RPG), composed of district officials and partners, embraced the opportunity to help districts enhance their services. The RPG designed a grant program, including the Request for Proposals and selection criteria. The RFP was distributed to members nationwide, and all were encouraged to submit proposals for launching and/or growing their services in food insecure communities.

The two primary goals were to 1) increase technical support to conservation aspects of urban agriculture and 2) address the needs of underserved populations. While the grant was for one year, projects were required to show proof of project sustainability so the services would be sure to continue.

A separate team of district officials and partners was set up to review the 73 proposals and recommend the grant recipients; 42 were selected. All launched into their projects quickly, resulting in a wide array of urban agriculture CTA.

Promotion

Following the initial press release in July 2016 (www.nacdnet.org/newsroom/nacd-nrcs-announce-2-million-urban-ag-conservation/), the UAC Initiative was featured in NACD’s quarterly magazine The Resource (<https://indd.adobe.com/view/50e4faae-6aee-4ee5-ab8e-9abc3f803e16>). Individual projects have been featured each month in NACD’s weekly online newsletter, eResource, since December 2016. Those are available at www.nacdnet.org/news-and-

[events/publications/eresource/](#). Some of the projects were showcased on NACD's monthly Urban and Community Conservation Webinars.

Coordination

Throughout the year, NACD served as a facilitator and promoter of the 42 projects. A listserv and a members-only website were set up for the grant recipients to connect with each other and share materials. Webinars were offered for the grant recipients to share their projects, including successes and challenges.

While the 2016 UAC Initiative is completed, most of the conservation districts have chosen to remain connected via the listserv and other sharing opportunities.

Outcome

The goal of this project was to provide conservation technical assistance in urban agriculture with a strong emphasis on underserved areas, particularly those known as food deserts. All of the grant recipients did so through a variety of services whether community garden development and soils testing in specific neighborhoods, workshops and training, and/or awareness activities.

What was captured, at least in part, were the amount of funds leveraged across the country. NACD and NRCS invested just short of \$2 million in the 42 projects. In return, the grant recipients almost DOUBLED those funds within ONE YEAR through cash contributions and in-kind services. And that's just from what was reported. Many of the districts requested a project deadline extension in order to expend the grant funds due to the substantial contributions of time and resources by partners and participants. And most of the districts are able to continue their urban agriculture service in one form or another, growing that leverage by the day.

Partners made a huge difference in every case. In addition to the valuable engagement of traditional partners NRCS and Extension, these projects opened doors within local governments, food and medical industries, schools and universities, churches and faith-based organizations and more as noted in the project summaries. And across the board, individuals from communities stepped in and shared their leadership.

As a result of the Urban Agriculture Conservation Initiative, the individual districts and their partners, including NRCS, were broadly recognized through press, radio and television newscasts, and especially social media. These exposures clearly show the value of conservation technical assistance.

However, the true results speak for themselves in the individual summaries, which provide a description of each project, its accomplishments and efforts toward sustainability. Yet these stories don't even begin to touch the energy, enthusiasm and effort involved in every grant project. That only comes from personal contact with the respective districts, whether at an NACD or state association event or through one-to-one conversations. Project contact information is provided at the end of this document for that purpose.

Fairbank Soil and Water Conservation District, Alaska

The Fairbanks SWCD worked to address food insecurity issues in the low-income neighborhood of Bjerremark by making urban agriculture accessible to the public. In fall 2016, the District surveyed the neighborhood to determine what barriers residents faced in growing food, and to get a sense of what classes they would like to have available. Results showed many residents lacked the knowledge or experience to grow their own food and didn't know where to start.

Through diverse partnerships across Fairbanks that ranged from UAF Cooperative Extension, Fairbanks Community Food Bank, Natural Resource Conservation Services (NRCS), churches, and others, FSWCD created a 12-class agricultural curriculum. The classes addressed how to garden from start to finish through hands-on activities and workshops. Topics included garden bed preparation, soil nutrition, seed starting, container gardening, growing herbs, weed management, hands-on planting, preservation, garden tours, berries and jam, and cooking classes. Agricultural technical assistance and conservation planning were highlighted throughout classes in partnership with NRCS. To reduce barriers for residents, classes were free of charge and child care was provided.

Many Bjerremark residents live in transient housing and are unable to build garden beds or lack startup funds. FSWCD partnered with landowning organizations in the neighborhood—Fairbanks Neighborhood Housing and the Corinthian Baptist Church—who were interested in hosting community gardens. By soliciting donations, using recycled materials, and partnering with local volunteer groups, two new community gardens with 32 new beds were created at zero cost to the host organizations. Local residents participated in building the beds and grew food for the first time in 2017.

FSWCD supported an existing community garden at JP Jones Community Development Center by partnering with their Summer Food Program for at-risk youth. FSWCD offered free afternoon agricultural lessons to participants using the available garden space, and by pairing agricultural education with food programs, children begin to think about where their food comes from and the value of growing it themselves.

This grant contributed to and advanced the urban agriculture movement within the Bjerremark Neighborhood. FSWCD supported the existing fledgling South Side Farmers Market through mutual promotion of the importance of growing and purchasing local foods. Through hands-on educational workshops with both adults and children, FSWCD spread agricultural knowledge and expertise. And by creating community gardens, there are now easily accessible places for residents to grow their own food in perpetuity.

Sustainability

The two new community gardens in the Bjerremark Neighborhood will continue to thrive from the coordination and partnership that FSWCD created throughout the summer. Both gardens have appointed leadership and garden groups to lead decision making regarding participation, overall maintenance, and problem solving. Pathways were forged with farmers who now know the community gardens accept donations of excess plant starts for upcoming seasons. Many of the participating gardeners attended the gardening workshops on soil health, seed starting, plant

care, and composting, and will be able to apply these tools and knowledge to the community gardens.

As part of the Urban Agriculture grant, FSWCD offered free soil sampling to Bjerremark residents and fertilizer recommendations specific to the soils. These tests enabled gardeners to actively manage their soil nutrients and contribute to the overall soil health.

During the Urban Agriculture Program, FSWCD applied for and was awarded an AmeriCorps VISTA with a three-year contract. One of the VISTA's duties is to compile all materials from the 12 agricultural classes and combine them into 3-4 easy-to-use teaching curricula that can be used by Master Gardeners to teach the public and fulfill their program's volunteer hours.

The gardens are a continuing presence in the Bjerremark Neighborhood and are a testament to the plausibility of successful community gardens in in Fairbanks. They serve as an inspiration to current and future urban gardeners.



FSWCD's VISTA helped the Youth for Habitat build raised garden beds. These boxes were made from recycled garage doors that were otherwise destined for the landfill. Their height was perfect for the older members of the church.

Mid-summer at the Chinook Community Garden...beds were built by the Fairbanks Youth Facility and are used by residents of the Chinook Apartment building and residents in the Bjerremark Neighborhood.



Jefferson County Conservation District, Alabama

The Jefferson County CD's "Revitalizing Hillman" project was designed to enable residents in southwestern Birmingham, Alabama to improve their lives through increased access to fresh foods and expanded economic opportunities for their youth. Through the work of a local project coordinator hired with grant funds, the following accomplishments were realized:

- A seasonal high tunnel used for food production and outreach has been erected in the community. It has produced collard, turnip, and mustard greens, Yukon potatoes, onions, okra, yellow squash, zucchini, kale, cucumbers, sweet and hot peppers, rutabagas, pink-eye peas, and green beans. The produce has been sold to a local restaurant, provided to a non-profit for use in their senior program, and sold at two nearby farmers markets.
- Local youth have been taught how to plant and harvest produce in the high tunnel.
- The high tunnel has become a model and learning lab for other urban food producers.
- Workshops on food production, food preparation, container gardening, community pride, and health have been presented at venues in the community.
- Connections have been established between residents and the culinary departments at a nearby community college and a local high school.

Additionally, there are plans for this neighborhood that have yet to be realized. The project coordinator envisions the development of a summer jobs program with the high tunnel at its center, similar to programs currently operating in Boston and Detroit. She is also promoting the development of a high tunnel installation business that will be composed of young people from the community. And finally, she continues to be an example to all those she encounters as she strives to continue her education and pass it along to a younger audience who is willing to learn. Thanks to the District's guidance and coordinator's persistence, the Hillman High Tunnel has become a staple of the community.



Partners, local representatives, and residents came together for a group shot at the Revitalizing Hillman Celebration in September 2016.

Sustainability

The following steps should ensure continued impact of this project in the Hillman Neighborhood:

1. Throughout the year, the project coordinator has worked to connect key personnel already in or near this community.
2. The District has worked with the coordinator to keep the media and politicians aware of developments in the neighborhood.
3. The Federation of Southern Cooperatives partnered with NRCS on an Urban High Tunnel initiative that will result in several more hoop houses being installed throughout the metropolitan area. The individuals installing these systems have all visited the Revitalizing Hillman High Tunnel and are acquainted with the project coordinator.
4. The hoop house will be administered going forward by the Southwest Birmingham Community Farm. This will ensure its continued production of fresh produce for local sale and distribution.
5. The Farm has acquired the rights to use two adjoining lots and a local landscape architect donated his skills to design a permaculture plan for those lots.
6. When the permaculture design is fully implemented, these three urban lots will be able to provide not only vegetables, but fruits, flowers, and herbs for use and sale in the community.



These are some of the students who volunteered their time to work in the hoop house with the project coordinator.

Perry County Conservation District, Arkansas

When the Perry County CD started this project, they had nothing but a promise of a block owned by the city to start an urban garden for the community. Since the timing of the grant came in the middle of the summer, it started with a pumpkin patch growing all sizes of pumpkins and gourds. A community fall festival was held where the pumpkins were sold. As a result, the District was able to give each of the two elementary schools \$55 for their 'backpack program', which sends food home with kids. It wasn't much but it was a start.

The garden became a real focus point in the community, increasing the District's visibility. A small garden in the downtown square was offered, and a Berry Patch was born. There are three strawberry beds, 20 thorn-less blackberry bushes and 12 blueberry bushes. In the spring, plantings included 120 tomato plants, 45 bell peppers, 15 jalapenos, 12 cucumbers 35 zucchini and squash, eggplant, and radishes. The District set up a market and sold all that produce. During the summer, two more city blocks and an acre field on the outskirts of town were made available. A tractor was donated, and the District bought other much needed equipment. In addition to the public purchases of produce, there are three restaurants in town that also bought. At the end of the summer, the District was able to give each school over \$150.

Three beehives were set up in the garden supporting the District's new Perry County Bee Keepers Chapter with 10 members and the promise of more joining.

A "Perry County Youth Garden Club" was established with 13 kids of different ages, and that turned into a 4-H club.

Sustainability

The small community in Perry County welcomed and supported the garden whole-heartily, which was literally started from scratch. The District now maintains three lots in town. Garden #1 is a vegetable garden and home to the beehives. Garden #2 is the second vegetable garden for corn, okra and squash. Garden #3 is the berry garden with strawberries, blueberries and blackberries. The District has been asked to take an acre on the edge of town for a huge pumpkin patch this year. Work will continue to be done with the donated tractor, and purchases of a tiller, mowers and three different hand tillers. The Farmers Market is set with tables, umbrellas and other gear. The District now has the opportunity to work with two agriculture students from the University of Arkansas in planning and operating the garden this coming season; they get college credits for donating their skills and time. The City of Perryville, which already pays all water bills, will send city workers to help maintain our gardens. The District looks forward to remaining involved with all who made the Garden a reality.

Community Garden Grand Opening



PERRY COUNTY
"A World Away Right Next Door"

Petit Jean Country

FALL BACK
ONE HOUR OF LIGHT

Headlight

VOLUME 129 NUMBER 32
PERRYVILLE, ARKANSAS, WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 3, 2010
SIXTEEN PAGES 75 CENTS

Looking Ahead

Council
The Perry County Council will meet Nov. 3 at 6 p.m. at the Perry County Courthouse, 703 Apple Ave., P.C.

No Rivers
The Two Rivers Senior High School will host a Chili Cook-off on Thursday, Nov. 4, 6 p.m.

Writers Group
Perry County Writers will meet at 10:30 a.m. Saturday, Nov. 6, at the Perry County Courthouse, 703 Apple Ave., P.C.

Outsiders
The Perry County Assembly of God will host their annual "Thanksgiving Dinner" on Nov. 3, 6 p.m. at the Perry County Courthouse, 703 Apple Ave., P.C. Cost is \$10 for adults, \$5 for children 5-12, and free for kids under 5. The church is located at 1070 Highway 80, P.C. 72454. For more information, call (501) 709-8111.

Hill Cook-off
The Houston Park Chapter of the Houston Park Chapter will host their annual Hill Cook-off and potluck on Saturday, Nov. 6, from 12 p.m. to 4 p.m. at the Houston Park Chapter, 108 Houston Park. All proceeds will go to the Houston Park Chapter. Anyone interested in sponsoring the cook-off should contact Susan Montgomery at (501) 709-8111.

Pies & Fried Pies
Holy Smokers will host their annual Pies & Fried Pies event on Saturday, Nov. 6, at 10:30 a.m. at the Houston Park Chapter, 108 Houston Park. All proceeds will go to the Houston Park Chapter. Anyone interested in sponsoring the event should contact Susan Montgomery at (501) 709-8111.

Pumpkins from The Garden and a scattering good wishes.

These attending the ribbon cutting at The Garden are, from left, John Davis, Father Davis, Bruce Beckwith, J. Lee Smith, Judge Judy Gill, Kay West, Karen Russell, Blake Walters, Michael Rowland, Mike Rowland, Kim Thibodeaux, Cary Trone, John Thibodeaux, Donnie Copeland, Jeff Gibson-Shepherd, Donald Thomas, Cardella Wilson, Deb Hackett, Cathy Andrews, Sawyer Wilson, and Jack Wilson.

PCCD opens The Garden

By KIM THIBODEAUX
Perry County Conservation District
The Perry County Area Chapter of Conservation recently held a ribbon cutting and fall garden party for the Perry County Conservation District's "The Garden," located in downtown Perryville and made possible by a \$10,000 National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) grant. The Garden is a beautiful garden, Father Davis, from St. Basil's Catholic Church, opened The Garden.
PCCD would like to thank the Chapter of Conservation and all of you who made our ribbon cutting and fall garden party a success.
PCCD is very pleased to get things started on The Garden. We will offer all kinds of produce and plants. We will also offer all types of garden ideas.

to our office gift shop. The Garden will be a place we can all enjoy in Perry County.
We are hoping to expand with growing space around the county very soon. We will be working with the county schools to make programs for the doors of all ages to educate and teach about gardening and farming and to offer a cutting service.
Again, PCCD would like to thank some folks who have helped us get what we needed to make this all possible. For writing letters of recommendation for the grant we thank Susan Montgomery, Perryville Elementary, Melissa Coker, Perry County senior citizens, Susan Montgomery, Judge Blake House and Mike John Rowland. We also want to thank Mayor John Rowland for the use of land for The Garden. We would like to express our gratitude. **K**

Father Davis, center, shows The Garden.

Resource Conservation District of Greater San Diego, California

The RCD of Greater San Diego expanded the Tijuana River Valley Community Garden through planning and coordination, increased communication with gardeners, a series of conservation-themed trainings, and installation of new garden plots and a native pollinator hedgerow. The grant also leveraged additional funds for the project, including a large grant from the County Board of Supervisors to fund the infrastructure needed for the garden expansion and a mini-grant from the California Association of Resource Conservation Districts to complement training offerings for gardeners.

The community garden expansion includes 72 new garden plots measuring 30'x 30', bringing the total number of plots to 210, as well as seven quarter-acre plots to support urban agriculture on a larger scale. RCD staff visited with gardeners on a one-to-one basis and answered questions about the expansion, were present during all major construction days, and coordinated community work days and workshops. Staff also reached out to the 170+ people on the garden waiting list to fill the new plots.

The grant also helped reach a long-term goal for the community garden – planting a native hedgerow to create habitat for pollinators. The 165 plants were selected for their suitability to thrive in the garden's microclimate and cascading bloom times to provide a year-round nectar source. A partner organization designed the hedgerow layout and irrigation system, and tools were purchased for the community planting day.

Through the NACD grant and CARCD match funding, eleven workshops were held to inform gardeners about practices that conserve natural resources and help them make the best use of their plots and produce. Topics included garden design, irrigation, composting, zero-waste cooking and preserving, nightshade plant family, edible garden weeds, cover cropping, and healthy, organic soil building practices. The workshops were attended by 180 participants.

The garden expansion project led to a new relationship with a neighboring farm that brings composted manure and has shared their time and equipment to clear land for various components of the expansion.

In addition, several other meetings, clean-up days, social events, and garden work days were held throughout the grant period, including two orientation meetings for new gardeners, two community fence building days to layout the new plots, and three community clean-up events to pick up trash and debris to prevent it from entering nearby waterways, two of which were followed by gardener potlucks. These events were attended by 338 people.

Sustainability

The additional staff time allowed for more interaction with new and existing gardeners, leading to better communication and helping new gardeners settle into the garden community. The rental income from new plot holders and ¼ acre tenants will enable the RCD to continue coordinating community events and maintain regular communications.

Holding regular events and workshops enhances the sense of community, knowledge, and gardener initiative in contributing to projects such as maintaining the pollinator garden, bringing in mulch to share, building planter boxes for each other, and installing drip irrigation. Plans are in the works to continue events, such as workshops and an annual Soil Shindig. The RCD is developing on-site education and demonstration projects such as a carbon farming project, and is working with local partners to establish a new farmer mentorship program.

Through the garden expansion, the RCD is exploring new and exciting ways to leverage urban agriculture in bringing conservation education to the community. The potential is great, and they are committed to expanding engagement with local students, residents, and partners.



Gardeners working together and putting their compost skills to use to tend the communal compost bin.

Gardener potluck on the new picnic table (built as an Eagle Scout project) following the September 2017 community clean-up event.



Riverside-Corona Resource Conservation District, California

The Riverside-Corona RCD (RCRCD) assisted growers with conservation, raised awareness, and built capacity for an emerging local agricultural movement and network, including the new Riverside Food Systems Alliance (RFSA) and the Riverside Garden Council (RGC).

RCRCD provided technical assistance to local growers. The grant coordinator presented the EQIP program at three Growers' Forums, which yielded some emerging farmers and others interested in applying for conservation assistance. RCRCD's mobile irrigation lab completed nine farm irrigation system evaluations on 124 acres, which has the potential to conserve 9.45 acre feet of water at an annual savings of \$8,979.

Awareness was raised about local foods, sustainable practices, and water conservation. RCRCD connected consumers to local producers, farmers to conservation resources, those in financial need to food pantries, and community to educational and gardening resources, including community gardens. Staff developed the 36-page *Fresh and Local Guide*; 30,000 copies were distributed and it was posted to a variety of websites including <http://rcrcd.com/uploads/FreshandLocalGuide2017.pdf>. Ads, flyers, and links were distributed through a variety of Facebook pages and radio shows. The RCD also developed the newsletter *Local Agriculture is on the Rise!* It highlighted the organizations and activities of the local food system, now at <http://rcrcd.com/uploads/RCRCDnewsletterSummer2017webfinal.pdf>.

A variety of audiences were educated about resource conservation including tours of the LandUse Learning Center (LLC), a 3-acre demonstration garden with sustainable practices for agriculture, native habitats, and urban areas. RCRCD contracted an urban farmer to train emerging farmers and to manage the 1+acre sustainable ag area that demonstrates conservation practices.

RCRCD funded mini-grants for four school gardens along with gardening education and resources to the teachers. Staff distributed about 4,000 copies of free educational materials to local teachers and homeschoolers, including *Healthy Soils Are Full of Life* booklets.

Capacity was built for the sustainable ag and local food movement. RCRCD assisted with and sponsored two GrowRIVERSIDE conferences with approximately 300 attendees each. Staff assisted with a three-county Agritourism Symposium, with "Dinners in the Grove", Growers' Forums, and Community Gatherings.

RCRCD assisted RFSA and RGC with marketing and developed RFSA's "Inland Grown" label that will be used on food/product packaging. Brand use will come as a benefit of RFSA farm membership.

Sustainability

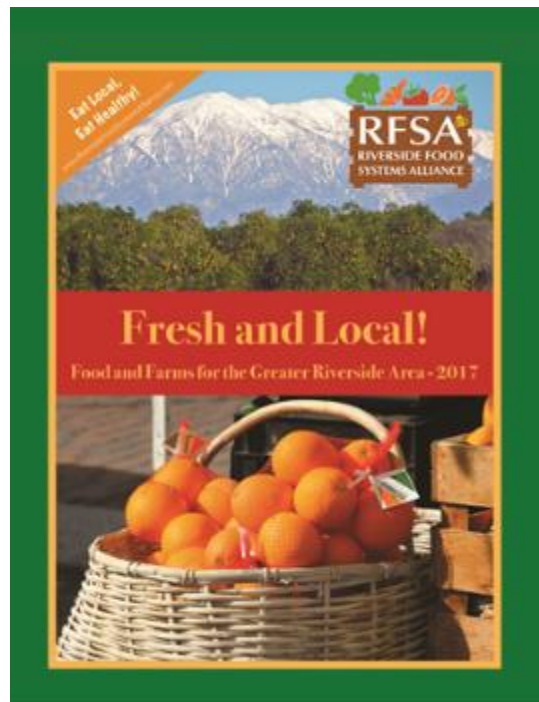
RFSA applied for several grants and RCRCD assisted with grant applications and letters of support. RFSA, with RCRCD assistance, created a membership and sponsorship program. In addition, RFSA has received a \$209,000 CalRecycle Food Rescue and Waste Prevention grant to divert edible food from landfills to feed those in need. RFSA received a \$50,000 Kaiser

Permanente grant to assist with capacity building, fundraising and outreach. The California Department of Ag has funded RCRC \$12,000 for updating the Local Guide for 2018-19. The City of Riverside received a Robert Wood Johnson Invest Health grant for \$60,000 that helped fund RFSA board training and strategic planning.

The project coordinator developed a survey, food system update, and an invitation to participate with RFSA which was sent to 1,200 stakeholders, who were also invited to a capacity-building workshop and strategic planning. An important outcome of the workshop is that RFSA and the Riverside Garden Council (RGC) have become better organized. Both have elected leadership and have defined their goals and board responsibilities. The RGC developed bylaws and took steps to become a nonprofit. The grant funded development of the RGC website.

The Riverside Unified School District (RUSD) received a Ca Department of Food and Agriculture grant to develop a pilot food hub that will expand markets for local and regional growers by aggregating, storing, and distributing fresh produce, meat, eggs, dairy, and other agricultural products. The food hub will service corner stores; the Women, Infants, and Children Supplemental Nutrition Program (WIC) stores; childcare centers; and smaller school districts.

RFSA partners held a two-day workshop to develop partnerships and plans for a Beginning Farmer Training Program (BFTP). RCRC hosted one day of the meetings and a tour of the LLC. A donor has offered \$50,000 toward beginning farmer curriculum development.



The RCRC developed a 36-page Fresh and Local Guide that was recognized with a Capella Award for Creative Communication by the Public Relation Society of America's Inland Empire chapter.

Jefferson Conservation District, Colorado

While Jefferson CD's Urban Agriculture Program began in 2009 with an AmeriCorps VISTA position, this project allowed the District to expand the program and add new features, including the design and launch of an intern program as well as an equipment share program. Three interns began working in the spring. They led on-farm demonstrations for the local urban agriculture community along with workshops, site visits and mentoring on-farm activities with local urban farmers (assisted in harvesting, planting, installation of conservation practices, etc.). The interns also assisted with social media marketing, writing publications, presentation development, and other outreach.



In addition to these services, each intern took on a special project as follows. During the District's End of Summer Soiree (annual meeting dinner), special presentations were given by each of the interns as the community celebrated their program graduation.

The Grazing Management project was conducted at 5 Fridges Farm in cooperation with the NRCS/CSU extension agent. Six plots were designed to simulate grazing. Every two weeks during the summer, the intern cut the plots to different lengths to mimic different grazing management practices on a dryland pasture. The demonstration illustrated that grazing below 4 inches was not productive to the longevity to the pasture. The intern showed this plot during a pasture walk event to demonstrate aspects of grazing and why it is important to rotate grazing animals.

The Food Distribution project was conducted with GoFarm, a local COOP. GoFarm is more than just access to fresh, local food. It's a non-profit with a mission that impacts the health and vitality of the entire community. GoFarm is working with small farmers to create a stronger local market for their products and with other non-profits to develop education programs and increase access to local food for families. The intern worked with local farmers purchasing organic produce that was distributed through a variety of their programs, and has been hired on full time as a GoFarm employee starting in 2018.

The Urban Agriculture Photo Book project involved the development of a photographic guide to conservation practices of Jefferson Conservation District. The intern took photographs of on-farm activities and developed narrative for all conservation practices related to agriculture. The book will be used as a demonstration tool for future conservation projects and sold to landowners in the District. Additionally, the book was presented to participants in NACD's Annual Meeting.

The Equipment Share Program provided access to necessary equipment without having to take on the burdens associated with ownership. It helps the District's farmers and landowners to decrease production costs, while increasing their returns on investment. The program will also allow for increases in equipment utilization.

Sustainability

A number of partners continue to cooperate, including Colorado Agriculture Leadership Program, USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service, Colorado State University (CSU) Extension, GoFarm, and a multitude of local urban agriculture producers such as Five Fridges Farm, Micro Farms, Jefferson Alpaca Farm, Living Land Farm, True Roots, and Everitt Farm.

Due to a lack of funding, the internship opportunity will not continue in 2018. It is possible JCD will employ a volunteer intern position through the summer, and will certainly continue researching funding sources for interns in future years.

However, the program resulted in lasting partnerships and relationships with producers and other urban ag professionals and organizations. Specific accomplishments that demonstrate project longevity include: growing partnerships with CSU Extension, Five Fridges Farm, and Go Farm; a photobook illustrating conservation practices implemented by JCD; updated JCD brochures, website, and educational handouts; new events that will become a part of the JCD education program, including pub talks/film nights and farmer training events. JCD already has plans to partner with GoFarm to host a two-day farmer training in February, as well as a combined outreach event in the fall with Jefferson Alpaca Farm.

Also, the equipment share program has become a permanent part of JCD's program, serving as a revenue source for the district and a valuable resource for landowners and the urban agriculture farming community.



The three JCS interns began working in the spring.

Connecticut River Coastal Conservation District, Connecticut

The Connecticut River Coastal CD led a successful collaboration among the many people and groups that comprise, or have an interest in, Middletown's agricultural community. It has formed the basis for what the District expects will be a long-term effort to put a larger spotlight on agriculture, support implementation of sustainable agricultural practices, build community interest and engagement in farming/backyard gardening, and make fresh local produce more accessible to those at risk of food insecurity.

Project partners were identified and recruited to participate in the effort, and convened for ten planning meetings over the grant period. Primary partners included Long Lane Farm, a cooperative student-run vegetable farm at Wesleyan University; Forest City Farms, an organic vegetable farm on City land; Middletown Regional Agriculture Science & Technology Center, a high school program drawing students from a 17-town area; North End Action Team, a community organization focused on the North End neighborhood, that has two community gardens and runs a farmers market; the Family Resource Center, which serves at-risk families at Macdonough and Farm Hill elementary schools, and runs school gardening programs; the Middletown Food Corps program, connecting kids to real food and promoting health through food/nutrition education, gardening and cooking activities, and access to farm-fresh food; a food and nutrition consultant who works on early childhood health issues; and the City Department of Planning, Conservation & Development, which supports local agriculture by leasing land to farmers, and through its Commission on Conservation and Agriculture. Other collaborators included Middletown's Community Health Center, St. Vincent de Paul (the local soup kitchen), and the restaurant, Café 56.

The District developed conservation plans for Long Lane Farm and Forest City Farms focused on protecting natural resources and enhancing productivity, which make the farms eligible for USDA-NRCS and CT Farmland Restoration Program funding. The plans lay the groundwork for implementation of practices, including conservation cover to improve pollinator habitat; crop rotation for soil health; cover crops to prevent erosion; seasonal high tunnels to extend the growing season; mulching to conserve moisture, prevent compaction, reduce runoff, and control weeds; and nutrient management to ensure optimum levels and prevent nutrient run-off.

On the education and outreach side, the District planned, publicized and held a variety of well-received community activities, including the Meet the Experts Gardening Q&A at the North End Action Team Erin Street Community Garden; Put Local on Your Plate, a very popular three-part cooking series held at the Community Health Center with demonstrations led by local chefs focused on using seasonal local produce, and separate healthy food-related activities for children; spring and fall family-friendly educational farm days at Forest City Farms, with soil health, composting and beekeeping displays and resources, hands-on planting activities, farm and environmental-themed crafts, tastings of foods prepared from farm produce, live music, a farm stand and tours (with additional support from a Rockfall Foundation grant). An educational flyer on lead-safe urban gardening was developed and distributed since no appropriate resources were available for Connecticut.

Sustainability

What started as an NACD funded grant project has taken on a life of its own as those involved have recognized the value of meeting at the table, and working together to strengthen the agricultural community and promote access to, and use of, fresh local produce for at-risk City residents. Collaborating with a diverse group of partners has been energizing and rewarding, and has resulted in many productive, positive connections. At a December 2017 meeting, the program to date was discussed. It was clear that partners are excited about the accomplishments and are committed to keeping this effort going.

Planning for 2018 activities was started, identifying new partners to enhance our efforts, and seeking new sources of funding. The group will work more closely with the City's Commission on Conservation and Agriculture, engage new farming operations, and collaborate with the public library on programming. In addition to continuing the popular cooking series, a spring "Getting Started Gardening" program was discussed along with supporting and enhancing the North End Farmers Market, a source of fresh, locally grown produce that provides seasonal relief from the food desert. Several items planned for the grant period but not completed yet include providing technical assistance to the downtown community gardens, and assisting with soil testing for community and home gardens.



Residents joined local farmers and experienced gardeners at the Erin Street Community Garden in Middletown's North End for an informal Ask the Experts Gardening Q&A. Some of the topics covered included the importance of good soil, safe products for dealing with pests, good mulching materials, and controlling late tomato blight.

Eastern Connecticut Conservation District, Connecticut

Eastern Connecticut CD and its partners designed the project to address needs in food security, conservation, and capacity-building for the region's urban growers and their communities. It utilized three initiatives, interdependent and intentionally varied in their geographic reach and programmatic scope:

1. Support GROW Windham to build a new 0.5-acre model community garden, and to assist with implementing conservation practices and provide funds to support a new Garden Coordinator position.
2. Develop the new garden into a center that demonstrates conservation practices in urban agriculture and teaches community members about the values and implementation of them.
3. Collaborate with growers and urban ag organizations to create a new network, modeled as a community of practice, to build capacity and community among these groups.



GROW Windham's new model community garden – The Thread City Family Garden.

ECCD and GROW Windham designed and developed five Workshop-Workdays held in the new model garden, named The Thread City Family Garden. The half-day events were hands-on programs on soil health, water quality, water conservation, composting, and integrated pest management. ECCD and GROW staff blended instruction with the construction and demonstration of practices and principles. Attendees, Windham Youth CORE members, and volunteers participated in the following: evaluated soils and investigated soil health (mulch, cover crops, reducing till/disturbance, species diversity); excavated and amended urbanized soils for fruit trees planted; constructed a woodchip trench and soil berm between the garden and adjacent river, to protect water quality by managing runoff (the soil berm was planted with small-fruit crops); constructed individual soil berms for fruit trees on a slope, to reduce runoff and conserve water; constructed a variety of compost bins to demonstrate and trial each type; planted annual flowers and perennial herbs to increase food for pollinators. In addition to what was completed by attendees through the workshops, ECCD provided regular technical assistance to GROW Windham, including: soil tests for nutrient analysis and screening for metals; arranged visits to farms and urban-agriculture programs; and non-chemical control of gypsy moth caterpillars.

In partnership with GROW Windham, ECCD connected with other urban growers throughout the District – an area of 1,150 square miles with several urban communities and higher-than

average food insecurity. Representatives from community gardens, urban-ag organizations, and ag-education programs joined meetings to share ideas for a new network focused on supporting community growers in eastern Connecticut. Through a series of meetings, discussions about the region's challenges and needs led to a statement of purpose and work plan. The network, calling itself the Eastern Connecticut Community Growers Network, shares resources (e.g. garden materials, seeds, harvest documentation methods), is actively recruiting new members, and has led to new and strengthened relationships among its members. For ECCD, the network expanded the reach of technical assistance and collaborations. For example, we aided NRCS-CT in collecting soils from eight urban farms and community gardens to screen for trace/heavy metals (pXRF analyzer), and this technical assistance was provided at no cost to the growers.

Sustainability

The new community of practice, the Eastern CT Community Growers Network, has steadily grown in size and become a self-sustaining group. In addition to establishing their own email group and shared-document drive, members are looking for grant opportunities on which to collaborate. Specific to ECCGN goals are grants that will enable members to develop programs on growing nutritious food and linking conservation in urban areas to public health. Members have agreed to meet quarterly and are considering presenting as ECCGN at future events in the region.

ECCD will continue to participate in the network and work with other partners, such as NRCSCT and the State of Connecticut, to connect ECCGN members to resources, technical assistance, and new partners to promote their success and growth. ECCD continues to participate in the Windham County Community Food Network as a member of its sub-group focusing on “growing spaces.”

Educational materials developed and resources compiled in this project are permanent and will be available from ECCD, GROW Windham, and other partners for years to come. GROW Windham has a Resources webpage, which includes all educational materials from this project (ECCD's new webpage is under construction and will have a page on conservation in urban agriculture). When the ground thaws, permanent educational signs about conservation practices and structures in the new model community garden will be installed.



Workshop on how to evaluate soil health and recognize indicators of healthy/unhealthy conditions.

Hillsborough Soil and Water Conservation District, Florida

The Hillsborough SWCD focused on proactive volunteerism for inner-city, urban, suburban and rural communities. The overall effort, named the “Hillsborough 100 Conservation Challenge”, brought together youth, adults and seniors to participate in programs, projects and activities culminating April 22 (Earth Day) through April 30 (Arbor Day Weekend) in 2017.

Behind the Challenge was the goal to increase the public’s awareness of critical conservation concerns and issues and to educate individuals on the need for everyone to be a responsible conservationist. The diversity of projects, and the groups executing them, was virtually endless. They included cleanup campaigns for rivers and roads, recycling efforts, flower and tree plantings, gardens for communities and schools, educational programs and more. Two unique projects were the NAUI Green Divers Initiative and Lipman Family Farms Garden Challenge. The NAUI Project, named “Gasp, Our Beads of Tampa Bay” included a dive into Tampa Bay to remove debris left from the Gasparilla Celebration and other events, as well as underwater mapping research. This project was featured both on television and in a national publication. Lipman Family Farms project featured sponsorship of a garden program for twelve middle and high schools within the county. Each school was provided two 84” by 48” planter boxes, \$100. gift certificate for soil and other materials, as well as transplants of tomatoes, peppers, cantaloupes and watermelons.

Gardens were judged during Challenge Week with winning schools receiving cash awards and class parties. The first-place high school was a facility for incarcerated teenage boys who are now involved in the District’s “Bee A Honey, Buy A Hive” program to build and place hives for greater pollination within Hillsborough County. Both the NAUI and Lipman programs have been renewed for 2018 and are even larger in scope and size.

Throughout the year, the District presented educational exhibits and programs in events including the Florida State Fair, Florida Strawberry Festival, Hillsborough County Fair, “Go Green” Festival, Florida Ag Expo, Clean Air Fair, Earth Day Celebrations, Girl Scout Fest, and “Unity in the Community” Day. These events drew hundreds of thousands of people and illustrate the critical importance of diversity the District seeks to accomplish in its activities.



The exhibit used for fairs, festivals and in the County Center.

Promoting the message through the media has been equally important. The 2017 Challenge featured a 16-page color tabloid produced and distributed through the Tampa Bay Times. The tabloid continues to grow and will be 24 pages in 2018. Coverage in print, social media, radio and television are also critical to the program's overall success as is a weekly publication, "Monday Matters".

The District tells its story through dozens of programs before civic clubs, church groups, schools and governmental institutions, including the Hillsborough County Commission and Hillsborough Legislative Delegation. This increased awareness resulted in eight candidates for two Supervisor seats in the last election.

The Hillsborough SWCD always shows gratitude to all for their support and sponsorships. It's summed up in tag line on all its materials: "Thanks for your commitment to conservation and our Hillsborough Soil and Water Conservation District.....Leading for Tomorrow".

Sustainability

Sustainability has been a primary goal of the District since inception of the "Hillsborough 100 Conservation Challenge". Considerable planning went into the development of the program ensuring support of both private and public sectors. The District sought assistance from the Hillsborough County Commission, Hillsborough School Board, FDACS (Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services), Extension Service, and organizations, businesses and corporations of all sizes. Areas of support included: Cooperating Partners, Participating Projects, and Corporate Sponsors.....each an important element for success.

Because this program consists of dozens of separate projects, the SWCD worked to engage support utilizing many resources. For many projects the groups (clubs, associations and organizations) provided their own funding and other resources. In other instances, adult groups provided support for youth projects completed by 4-H members, FFA chapters, Scouts and other groups. Corporate sponsorship was equally an important element. Sources of support included not only cash donations, but also in-kind materials. An example was M&B Products that supplied assorted milk and other dairy products for all youth activities throughout the year.

The first Challenge, held April 22 through April 30, 2017, was highly successful because the District made sure there was plenty of visibility, recognition and "buy in"(both financial and personal) by participants. Due to the SWCD's efforts to reinforce support for its partners, there is virtually 100% renewal of projects for 2018, additional new projects and a longer Challenge from April 21 – May 6, 2018.



Supervisors, public officials and winners from the 2017 Hillsborough 100 Conservation Challenge luncheon.

Leon Soil and Water Conservation District, Florida

The Leon SWCD enabled the launching of the Leon Fruit and Nut “Exchange”. Since its inception in January 2017, the Exchange has helped to reduce food waste in Tallahassee/Leon County, Florida by helping move 5,886 lbs. of fresh fruit and vegetables forward to those in need. A total of 48 property owners signed up for the Exchange program, enabling 26 individual deliveries to four local food banks.

Every pound of food moved the Exchange is a pound of food that was going to waste on trees or vines in Leon County. Instead, that harvest has been incorporated into our local food system.

The program is 100% volunteer driven. No one is financially compensated for the time they donate to moving food forward with the Leon Fruit and Nut Exchange. Volunteers are the bedrock of the Exchange. Thankfully, efforts to involve others have been successful. The Exchange engaged in extensive efforts to spread the word about the plan to move food forward. Media outreach included radio ads, participation in local talk radio, and public appearances at more than a dozen community events. Word of mouth began to spread even more once the gleaning began. As a result, The Exchange had 25 individuals register themselves or their group to volunteer for the program.

The Exchange volunteer program was designed to make it easy for individuals or groups to earn and track service hours. Groups like the Boys and Girls Scouts are always looking for opportunities to provide verifiable, volunteer hours. The experience, from gleaning to measuring and distributing food, is both fun and educational.

Donation deliveries are targeted to low-income individuals who traditionally do not have easy access to fresh food. Food deliveries are concentrated to the Frenchtown Springfield neighborhood and South City neighborhoods of Tallahassee. These neighborhoods are in a federally designated food desert and contain populations with the largest concentrations of diabetes and childhood obesity in the County. The project intent is to positively impact those statistics. To further support its mission, the Exchange is in the Frenchtown Heritage HUB, located in the heart of downtown Tallahassee. The HUB provides food-based business development services, a commercial kitchen rental program, and an all-local farmers market. The Exchange works in community partnership with the HUB to support the elimination of health and economic disparity among communities of color.

For example, it is helping launch the first youth entrepreneurial incentive created through the HUB by the creation of the Sweet Girls Lemonade stand. A group of young women from the Springfield Public housing complex learned how to process lemons, through volunteers with the Exchange, to create a sellable product - lemonade. Sweet Girls Lemonade has become a summer staple at the Frenchtown Farmers market and has been featured at various community events.



Sustainability

1) *Food Sales*: Through this process, members learned almost by accident that some products may be easier to process in-house, for market sales, to support the Exchange. To that affect up to 5% of the total annual yield is kept as a sellable product to help sustain the current and future cost of running the Exchange. The processed products under consideration for sale are lemon juice to be used for lemonade; figs, fig jelly and jam; and citrus-filled gift baskets for sale during the holidays.

2) *Grants*: The Exchange is considering two additional grants to help sustain the program: Community Food Projects Federal Grant and funding for a volunteer coordinator position.

3) *Fundraising/Cooking Classes through the HUB*: Through this program, several homeowners have share their favorite recipes that use product usually gleaned. Several have offered to teach a class at the HUB kitchen as fundraising initiative for the Exchange. Topics under consideration are: How to make lemoncello from Meyer lemons; tart marmalade from Seville Oranges, which makes a great topping for grouper; ginger fig preserves with locally sourced goat cheese; and candied and baked grapefruit.



Leon SWCD volunteers helping glean Blood oranges and giving out oranges at a local Tuesday food bank distribution.

Flint River Soil and Water Conservation District, Georgia

The Flint River SWCD assisted with the installation of 15 teaching gardens at 14 elementary schools and one middle school including planting strawberries, spinach, collards, kale, romaine lettuce, onions, and broccoli. An outdoor classroom featuring a butterfly garden, vermi-composting system, rain barrel catchment system, and raised garden beds was created in Flint Riverquarium for education programs.

A garden-to-cafeteria program was developed to make a connection between the fresh produce that the students grew in the school garden to the salad bars in the lunch cafeteria. Romaine lettuce, swiss chard, kale, spinach, and salad mix were harvested at two elementary schools and one middle school.

Four community gardens were installed in partnership with Georgia Department of Health's Southwest District and Albany, Georgia's Parks & Recreation Department as a part of their "Pick It, Try It, and Like It" program. It introduces different varieties of fruits and vegetables for monthly nutrition classes.

The District hosted "Grow Your Groceries" workshops at local business such as yoga studios, garden centers, churches, and community centers. The workshop is an introduction to organic, raised bed food gardening. It involved picking a site, garden bed types, the value of good soil, seasonal varieties, watering, pests, harvesting, and all the basics for growing food.

Local farms (Hopkins Farms–Cairo, GA; Southern Valley–Norman Park, GA; Evergreen Produce–Adel, GA; Lewis Taylor Farm–Ty Ty, GA) cooperated in the creation of weekly Farm-to-Table box programs featuring locally-grown fruits and veggies from family farms located less than 100 miles from Albany, Georgia in the distribution of over 1500 weekly boxes to local businesses, schools, health centers, churches, and individuals.



Locally-grown produce is delivered to a Farm-To-Table pick up location.

District staff were interviewed multiple times by WALB, the local ABC and NBC affiliate, and the program was featured on the front cover of the Albany Chamber of Commerce magazine.

Sustainability

The District formed Flint River Fresh, a 501(c)(3) organization in the city of Albany that aims to make fresh, locally-grown produce accessible and affordable for people throughout the Flint River Region. The vision is to transform the way people see their neighborhoods by becoming stewards of the land and improving the quality of life by having access to fresh food. The goal is to develop simple, accessible, and effective methods that can be duplicated in other neighborhoods in the South, engaging youth and adults to become agents of change through agriculture.

Transformation methods focus on the installation or revitalization of community gardens and creating opportunities for local family farms to get their produce directly to consumer via mobile farmer's market, farm-to-table, farm-to-work, and farm-to-school programs.

This mission will be accomplished by providing hands-on training, on-the-ground active demonstrations, outreach and technical assistance with the goal of developing Mini-Community Food Hubs throughout the Flint River Region in Southwest Georgia.



Students and UGA Master Gardeners planting strawberries at one of teaching garden.

Oconee River Soil and Water Conservation District, Georgia

The Oconee River SWCD provided funds to the Athens Land Trust (ALT) to support the Young Urban Farmers (YUF) program. The program goal is to help Clarke County youth develop valuable, transferable skills that will enhance confidence and competence as they prepare to enter the competitive workforce through a full year's experience at ALT's two urban farms.

Throughout the program year, the YUF participants provided support at the West Broad Farmers Market, assisting with set-up and break-down, running the welcome table, token booth and YUF Cafe, helping in large community events, giving farm tours, leading and assisting with food demonstrations, selling their local food products, and shadowing and assisting individual vendors. The YUF program participants provided support at ALT's urban farms...West Broad Market Garden, a half-acre Certified Naturally Grown farm located in the Hancock Corridor, one of Athens' poorest neighborhoods and Williams Farm, a five-acre Certified Naturally Grown farm.



YUF learning marketing skills selling produce at the West Broad Farmers Market.

During the semester, the students participated in a series of lessons on entrepreneurship, and wrote business plans for earth-friendly products that could be sold at our farmer's market. Topics included food-justice, sustainable agriculture practices, culinary skills, the history of southern food, nutrition, professional development and entrepreneurship. They participated in a 10-day course over the span of 10 weeks with the Center for Non-Violent Communication to learn about positive communication techniques as well as an 8-week Professional Development series, where they learned about leadership, stress management finances/money management and cooperation.

Students worked alongside Culinary Arts Director Emmanuel Stone and FoodCorps service members in The Athens Career Academy certified kitchen to learn about food safety, nutrition, affordable grocery shopping and cooking, culinary techniques, southern food traditions, and food product development and marketing.

The students participated in an initiative led by the Clarke County Department of Nutrition to bring more local, healthy foods into school cafeterias. Two groups of students created a recipe using farm ingredients under school nutrition guidelines, and competed during the 3rd annual School Lunch Challenge for a chance for their recipe to be featured in a school lunch meal. The winners had the opportunity to have lunch with restaurant owner and local food supporter Peter Dale at his restaurant The National.

At the end of the summer, students presented what they learned in an end-of-program event, where they served food products they had created and gave speeches about their accomplishments in the YUF program to over 40 community members.

Sustainability

Athens Land Trust is committed to the continuance of the Young Urban Farmer Program, which is still running, and hopefully will continue to for many years. ALT is currently exploring multiple ways to restructure the YUF program into an income-producing, self-sustaining program. The most promising avenue to achieve this goal is through partnering with local businesses to build a fee-for-service model into the YUF program. ALT currently implements this structure on a smaller scale through the YUF Food Project, where YUF develop and prepare value-added products to sell to local restaurants and at the YUF Cafe Stand each Saturday during the WBFM season. In addition, the program currently receives support from Athens Clarke County CDBG funds, as well as other various grants and foundations.



All of the 2017 Summer YUF at the end of year celebration.

Hamilton County Soil and Water Conservation District, Indiana

The Hamilton County SWCD launched an urban agriculture program with three main initiatives: create programs to help alleviate food insecurity in the county; provide free technical assistance to any county resident who would like to start a garden or who needs help with an existing garden; and create the Hamilton County Garden Network to connect managers of community gardens across the county.

For the first initiative, staff surveyed and toured 33 food pantries in the county to determine existing needs staff might meet. As a result, staff created several programs and partnerships, including a Where to Donate directory; a Farmers Bank Summer Produce Donation Program; and an Adopt a Food Pantry program. Details are at www.HamiltonSWCD.org/foodpantries.



Produce donations obtained through the Hamilton County SWCD BLASTMedia initiative.

On the second initiative, 51 site visits and 29 phone/email consultations were completed to develop formal plans for farmers/gardeners, suggest conservation practices, direct toward material and intellectual resources, research and create educational literature specific to local needs. Educational opportunities involved creating container gardens with several summer camps as well as speaking about free technical assistance and conservation practices at many clubs and organizations within the county.

For the third initiative, the goal to create the Hamilton County Garden Network (HCGN) came about because there was no program in place to connect managers of the county's community gardens to allow them to exchange information, share best practices with each other, etc. In fact, there was not even a master list anywhere of the community gardens in the county. Through research and surveys of the managers, the community gardens and common issues were identified as well as topics of interest. The District hosted three meetings for the HCGN and will continue to host the quarterly meetings.

In addition to the three projects, the District received media coverage and exposure for the programs, including 56 different exposures from 23 sources (this varied from local coverage in county newspapers to statewide coverage via NPR and the Indianapolis Star newspaper).

Sustainability

The District secured a grant of \$15,000 in spring 2017 from a community foundation, which will allow the urban agriculture conservationist to continue working until March 2018. In early January 2018, a \$38,000 grant from the Clean Water Indiana program was awarded securing the position through September 2019.

An urban ag page was set up at www.HamiltonSWCD.org/UrbanAgriculture as was the Hamilton County Garden Network (www.HamCoGardenNetwork.org). Information will remain on both websites long-term that will require little or no updating, including

- ✓ Tip sheets and other information created by the Conservationist
- ✓ The Where to Donate directory, which lists all food pantries in the county who would like to receive produce donations (this includes the names and addresses of the pantries along with the days/times they receive donations)
- ✓ Educational information about produce including the vegetable recipes from the food pantry recipe program

If the produce donation program at The Farmers Bank branches is successful this summer, the bank will continue the program in the future. It is hoped the businesses and service clubs that participate in the Adopt a Food Pantry program will continue on their own. The Hamilton County Garden Network will be sustained long-term by the District and Network members.



Youth at the Hamilton County SWCD tomato container garden workshop.

Marion County Soil and Water Conservation District, Indiana

The Marion County SWCD has been a catalyst for conservation on Indianapolis's urban farms and gardens. The backbone of success has been an unwavering focus on the principles of soil health and agricultural conservation practices, including no-till and reduced till, cover crops, mulching, conservation crop rotation, and native and targeted plantings for beneficial insects and pollinators.



Hands-on workshops providing conservation practice training for local growers.

A soil health team executed thirteen workshops and five hands-on open houses targeted at local growers and their communities with themes ranging from an introduction to soil health to advanced conservation practices. They formed partnerships with key small farmers and community leaders and then developed workshops around them to promote and teach soil health to a broad audience. The team also gave three urban soil health conference presentations to the Indiana Conservation Partnership, including the NRCS, Purdue University, and the Indiana State Department of Agriculture.

The team provided technical assistance to 59 growers and conducted 47 site visits, resulting in over 20 acres of cover crops planted through community gardens, backyards, churches, community centers, corporate gardens, and market farms. Outcomes include increased soil health through adaptation and implementation of conservation practices and increased public awareness and education of soil health through key cultural organizations and gardens.

Communities throughout the City of Indianapolis are looking for answers to empty lots and blighted areas. To encourage a more productive land use for soil and water resources, the District contracted with Williams Creek Consulting and conducted permaculture charrettes with two community groups and produced permaculture design templates for their locations. The report can be accessed through the SWCD blog at <http://marionswcd.org/nacd-permaculture-template/>.



Marion County SWCD Urban Soil Health Specialist providing technical assistance on mulching at a local school's urban farm.

The Marion County SWCD soil health team and its collaborating growers have advanced soil health and its practices through a continuous sharing of ideas and successes. To best capture and share the results, a web developer was contracted to integrate soil health into the Marion County SWCD website and then developed online profiles for seven growers. With input from expert small farmers, the team created visual conservation practice guides such as cover crops and mulching for urban growers and gardeners (www.marionswcd.org).

Sustainability

To increase the technical capacity of Indianapolis growers, the soil health team targeted conservation assistance to key small farmers and farming organizations that provide apprentices and trainings to others. The train-the-train efforts are important for long-term success.

The District was awarded Clean Water Indiana grants to support funding of the urban soil specialist position and outreach coordinator positions in 2018 and 2019. The positions will continue to provide technical assistance and resource material to urban growers and the public. They will utilize the website as an outreach and educational tool, and continue providing soil health workshops throughout the seasons.

In addition, the District has upgraded its website to contain soil health resources. The site will serve as a resource library to assist conservation professionals and growers with practice implementation in small-scale agriculture. Integrating the guide will make the information available indefinitely.

Jefferson County Soil and Water Conservation District, Kentucky

The goal of the Jefferson County SWCD program is to connect more individuals to urban agriculture and local food production through helping people better understand their soil resources and to manage those resources for sustainable production. Launching the UAC program in Louisville provided a much needed avenue for the District to connect with the large urban population living in houses with small yards and apartment buildings.

The District hired its first urban agriculture conservationist whose role was to manage the UAC program and implement the District's strategies. Fifty-nine residents in food insecure neighborhoods of Louisville were engaged through a 5-week beginning gardening course put on in partnership with Jefferson County Extension. An additional 131 residents were educated through workshops on topics including square-foot gardening, cover cropping, season extension and rain barrel construction.

In the spring of 2017, work began with the Community Schools program of Jefferson County Public Schools to create after-school garden programs for students in food insecure neighborhoods. Throughout the summer, garden-based learning experiences were provided to 45 students at four different schools.

Students at the Nativity Academy learn to plan strawberries.



Staff met with Louisville Metro Council members representing 13 districts in the city to educate them about the work of the District and the new UAC program. Prior to the fall of 2016, it had been six years since the District had any staff working out in the community. Within the past year, knowledge of the District's programs increased through outreach efforts at various events throughout town as well as through distribution of an online newsletter going out to 1,020 residents.

The District organized an Urban Agriculture Coalition to bring together other like-minded organizations in Louisville to work towards a shared vision. The Coalition's mission is to create an equitable and resilient food system in Louisville, KY by supporting and expanding home and community based food production and distribution; providing agriculture education and

resources; restoring relationships among the gardens, their communities and ecosystems; and work toward a shared vision. Members of the coalition include the local parks department, extension agents, urban farmers, refugee agriculture program staff and more.



In the work with community gardens, two edible buffers were designed and installed with the help of community volunteers.

This new program provided an opportunity for the District to reach many more residents and expand programming to urban areas of Jefferson County where the majority of the population resides.

Sustainability

After meeting with many city government council members and other government officials, the District received a funding increase to keep the Urban Agriculture Conservationist employed. The District also received a grant from a local nonprofit to support the Urban High Tunnel Initiative, which also provides funding for this program.

The District continues to work to raise funds to support the programmatic work of the Urban Agriculture Conservation Initiative.

Cumberland County Soil and Water Conservation District, Maine

The Cumberland County SWCD's new urban agriculture program has been branded as the "Cumberland County Urban Conservation Agriculture Network" or CC-UCAN. CC-UCAN is a "network" in the sense that the conservation district works to build partnerships and harmonize the goals of otherwise disconnected people and organizations. While building the program, the District gained significant capacity to design and build food forests, leverage partners to improve community garden sites, communicate best practices to low or non-English-speaking New American Groups, and use a new curriculum to reach underserved youth.

The District commissioned a survey to assess the urban agriculture needs in the county. The results indicated interest in adding food forests and community garden space throughout the county. Perhaps the most significant finding is that, among people who currently garden either at home or at a community bed, few have done any kind of soil test for nutrients or lead. And a significant number of respondents, more than 70%, said they have no knowledge of which plants are best to grow in soil that might contain lead. A GIS data table with locations of community garden spaces and community agriculture "knowledge hubs" was created and juxtaposed with a data layer showing median income from the US Census.



Mulching workshop in progress at Boyd St. Community Garden in Portland.

The District provided technical assistance to recommend erosion and sedimentation control improvements at six community agriculture sites in Portland, and supported food forest improvements and new installations at four sites in Portland by contributing technical assistance, supplies, organizational leadership, and labor.

Curricula was produced that includes four lessons designed for the New American community and market gardeners growing in the region. Three workshops were held using the lesson plans to support New American growers in the region.

A 4-part curriculum with supporting materials was developed to provide agriculture and food system education to incarcerated youth. Each lesson is approximately 90 minutes, or could be broken up to sub-sections with breaks. The total classroom time is 6 hours. The District taught a total of 10 classes at the Long Creek Youth Development Center, a secure Maine State Department of Corrections facility in South Portland, reaching 18 female and 24 male residents. A local videographer produced a video highlighting vocational opportunities in local agriculture that was designed to appeal to underserved youth. The video has been shared on social media and by partners at https://vimeo.com/220844204?utm_source=email&utm_medium=vimeo-cliptranscode-201504&utm_campaign=29220

Sustainability

The District developed quality CC-UCAN-branded lesson plans that are easily delivered within the community through contacts and connections made during this project. The focus areas for future CC-UCAN project work have been broken down into three areas:

- Vocational programming at the Long Creek Youth Development Center. There is an urgent need for this kind of programming, and no other organization is currently able or planning to offer the service. The SWCD will leverage the security clearance/contacts gained to continue.
- Youth service-learning work in the community. This youth-centered programming will be “rolled into” the District’s existing CONNECT Program, which focuses on delivering healthy soil and clean water messages to school-aged children within the region. Field work portions of service-learning will include installation of edible plantings and BMPs. This will be accomplished through existing partnerships with schools, municipalities, landowners, and private organizations.
- Additional CC-UCAN offerings. New resources were developed that can be replicated in the future including:
 - o “A food forest for every neighborhood” that uses food forest plantings to build community organizations as a positive place-making catalyst for urban neighborhoods which do not have food forests and may not currently have active neighborhood associations.
 - o “Edible Maine Streets” that focuses on place-making and community-involvement principles around conservation education in rural villages and suburban communities. Edible installations, featuring rare species such as stone fruit cultivars with historical connections to regions or towns and in need of living preservation can be installed in town commons areas.



Work day at Mt. Joy Orchard in Portland; additional seedlings/mulch were added at the site.

Kent Conservation District, Michigan

The Kent CD provided funds to Urban Roots, a community farm, market and education center located in southeast Grand Rapids, which focused on building farm infrastructure, developing future programs, improving collaborative partnerships, developing their staff and board, and preparing for a successful growing season.

Urban Roots developed a two day a week market - a new program in response to constant requests from neighbors who wanted to purchase food from the farm nearly every day. To address food insecurity in the Madison neighborhood, Urban Roots worked to create a daily market to grow and sell 100% of the produce grown within approximately .75 miles of the farm.

A “Last Fridays” volunteer days was hosted, which offered opportunities for community ownership of the farm, shared volunteer/educational experiences, and a farm-to-table meal together. A drop-in volunteer day held each quarter brought out a variety of community members, volunteers, and staff participants together to improve the farm.



YOUR Compost, a bicycle-powered weekly compost collection service, was established. It diverted over 3500+ pounds of organic waste from Michigan landfills to build soil fertility for the farm.

Urban Roots developed numerous educational partnerships, seven internship opportunities, and grew multiple relationships with area institutes of higher education. In partnership with a local university, a group of environmental studies capstone students investigated ways to improve the social/ ecological outcomes of the community farm and education center. These investigations helped overhaul the composting logistics, increased the farm’s food distribution apparatus, outfitted the mobile classroom, and increased capacity for engaging neighbors.

On the farm, Urban Roots planted over 10,000 square feet of bio-intensively managed beds, a healthy soil ecosystem that uses less water and promotes long-term soil fertility. In addition, the program started a bee colony to promote bee health and better pollination, saved seeds for the city of Grand Rapids, installed a simple greywater system in the wash/pack area, and launched the public learning garden and a self-harvest “sidewalk snack” learning garden.

Urban Roots Community Farm, Market and Education Center ended the grant with a of educational accomplishments: 16 collaborative and educational partnerships were launched with entities throughout the city through the mobile classroom; a 10-part free workshop series was hosted; new day camps were run with the local public museum; a new collaborative partnership with faith communities - teaching a series on Grow/Eat/Learn with World Renew – was started; 4 refugee and immigrant teens were taught in partnership with a local non-profit teaching life-

skills, employment training, and work experience; and 3 open houses held during 2017, which engaged Madison neighbors and the greater Grand Rapids community.

Sustainability

Urban Roots continues to apply for grants, seek out new partners and gather feedback from its community. It has created feedback loops for neighbors and other supporters to have their voice heard when it comes to future offerings. The farm is expanding their market presence and completed a USDA grant that would potentially allow the farm to source from other area growers increasing the amount and diversity of food access for their neighbors.

They are looking forward to continuing the bike powered community compost collection, expanding the mobile classroom experience and adding nutritional programming and further developing the hands-on educational gardens. Urban Roots will continue to offer multiple “Group-service Learning” opportunities where local organizations, nonprofits, and schools can visit the farm for a tour, a work-service project, and a meal together, cooked with ingredients from the farm. Urban Roots has a diversity of partnerships from loyal volunteers to large organizational support that will fuel it into the future.



Cultivating true community is the best part of working with the mobile classroom. Benefits are way less work, way more food, multi-generational interactions.

Ramsey Conservation District, Minnesota

The Ramsey CD funded a demonstration project in partnership with local non-profit Urban Roots. The Urban Roots Demonstration Project (URDP) showcases cover crops, composting, storm water management, a pollinator planting and honeybee hive as an opportunity to educate community about urban agriculture. Urban Roots coordinated use of the site through their youth leadership program, which targets teens from East St. Paul for paid internships where they learn about how to grow, harvest, and prepare produce. The program helps young people create a more sustainable and independent food system in their neighborhood, and the demonstration garden provides more space for this effort.



Urban Roots Demonstration Project construction begins.

The URDP site also provides pollinator-friendly plants conservation effort for threatened pollinator species. The pollinator gardens have the added bonus of attracting pollinators to the food crops grown in the demonstration site, resulting in more successful crop yields.

In addition to the successful establishment of the demonstration site at Urban Roots, the District built a network among many of the major urban farms and community gardens within Ramsey County. The managers of these farms and gardens met with District staff to discuss their needs, accomplishments, and share information for future collaboration. And staff has assisted these farm and garden managers in seeking certifications that make them eligible for future funding through the NRCS and U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The District provided grant funds to selected farmers and gardeners as follows:

- Frogtown Farms focused on intensive soil building through cover crops and planted many perennial crops from asparagus to pears; the focus of all efforts was reducing soil erosion and stormwater runoff.
- Great River School Urban Farm utilized extended season plots and created a high efficiency composting program.
- Eleanor Graham Garden made significant gains in the amount of pollinator plants and elimination of invasive species.
- Merriam Station Garden increased pollinator habitat and updated irrigation for sound water use.
- Seeds of Hope leveraged their talents to haul excess compost to other community gardens in the interest of a local and sustainable soil inputs.

- Frogtown Green Garden created farming space for elderly Asian elders to grow produce for their families in St. Paul's most diverse and low-income neighborhood.
- Gardens of Feed'em provided pollinator friendly areas.
- Green Pride Garden increased participation and partnerships to expand knowledge of urban soil and water health.

Finally, a successful Soils Forum was held in August featuring a Soil Scientist from NRCS as the main speaker along with a tour of the URDP. Elected officials, landowners and college students attended the event.

Sustainability

Long term sustainability has been a key feature of the demonstration garden construction at Urban Roots. Maintenance and care of the site will continue to be managed by Urban Roots as a part of their community engagement efforts; it is as important as planting and harvesting. Future generations will be shown how to maintain and pass on care for the site.

Urban Roots and the District have further development plans for the site, including a ten-year maintenance agreement. District staff will assist in the design and implementation of water management systems to ensure proper drainage. The Natural Resources Conservation Service will help with the construction of a high tunnel so the growing season can be extended late into fall and early in spring. A pollinator solar farm and a bike path are also planned.

The connections built with urban farmers and community gardeners in Ramsey County, and the exchange of information and resources, have opened doors for future collaborations on similar projects.



Right Track Interns participate in Urban Roots' Youth Leadership Program caring for the new honeybee hive on the demonstration site. The honey will be harvested for use in Urban Roots' demonstration kitchen, donated to local food shelves, and sold to local organic groceries and restaurants.

Boone County Soil and Water Conservation District, Missouri

The Boone County SWCD's project focused on the creation of an agriculture park in central Columbia in partnership with the Columbia Center for Urban Agriculture, Columbia Farmers Market, Sustainable Farms and Communities and City of Columbia Parks and Recreation Department. The goal is a park destination for all the city's residents and visitors to learn about sustainable food production, see agriculture in action, and buy local farm products.

Elements of the site may include an educational urban farm, demonstration gardens, an outdoor classroom, and a facility for community events and farmers markets. Design features such as rainwater catchment systems will demonstrate water conservation, composting food waste will demonstrate soil health and parts of the park will remain "naturalized", growing native plants, to teach lessons on storm water and pollinator habitat and ecology.



Meeting with "Nature Explore" to design an Outdoor Classroom.

To date, over \$2.5 million has been raised with another \$1 million from private and public sources pending. When the initial application for funding was submitted, only \$400,000 was available from the Columbia City Park Sales Tax. Grant funds were used to produce marketing materials, create the designs for the park and outdoor classroom, publish a website, and provide staff assistance which have proven invaluable to the success of the fundraising and marketing campaigns.

Meetings and informational sessions have been held with stakeholders and the public obtain feedback on the plans and direction of the project. Architects and engineers, with public input, provided visualizations the future Ag Park allowing for a clear picture of the end goal during the donation campaign.

The "Design Development" component of the site plan is completed. Architects and engineers are now working on the biddable construction documents with breaking ground anticipated this winter. An editor updated the "Growing Guide" used to teach backyard gardeners, and will be a large part of outreach efforts moving forward.

Sustainability

The project has received overwhelming support and the donations from private and public sources reflect that. As of mid-July, the project received totals \$1,336,189 cash and \$1,189,297 pledges. Over \$1 million more in other proposals are pending. All cash is being held either by the Community Foundation of Central Missouri or the City of Columbia. The funds contributed to this project will help leverage future donations that support this project's long-term success.

Several stakeholders are involved with the project, and more will be pursued; they will be a big part in ensuring the continuation of the Ag Park into the future. The Ag Park will be open as an educational resource to many different organizations, and their use of the park will create an interest in the long-term continuation and success of the project.



Attendees sit at the "mocked up" agriculture park during the campaign launch ceremony. Organizers setup temporary benches and planters and used small flags to mark the locations of buildings, sidewalks, and gardens.

Greene County Soil and Water Conservation District, Missouri

The Greene County SWCD provided funds to the Springfield Community Gardens (SCG), which leveraged them to create a working urban market garden in Springfield's under-resourced Zone 1 District. The garden acts as a center of educational opportunities, technical assistance, and sustainable production located at a former elementary school turned community center named The Fairbanks.

SCG hosted 10 free educational workshops focusing on topics such as soil health, water catchment, seed saving and seed diversity, safe food handling, permaculture, irrigation installation and more. The workshops engaged approximately 270 community members, some driving in from neighboring towns. Eight of the 10 workshops were hosted at the Market Garden, giving folks an opportunity to learn about the Market Garden Program and the related resources available at The Fairbanks.

The Market Garden has developed into a productive space serving the community. Using help from over 286 volunteers giving over 830 hours of service, the space now has 34 in-ground beds in production totaling approximately 3,725 square feet of bed space.

Produce grown at the SCG Market Garden has several outlets including the weekly C-Street City Market, also located in Zone 1. This market has been working to recruit more vendors selling fresh, local produce and the SCG Market Garden helping fill that need. The weekly contact with market patrons allows connection with even more people about ways to get involved with SCG through gardens, education, or events.

Produce is also sold to area restaurants, neighbors, the on-site preschool, and the on-site non-profit hosting free weekly community dinners. It is donated to community dinners, local food distributions, and given to our volunteers. In a 4-month period, the garden produced over 1,000 pounds of fruits and vegetables.

The SCG Market Garden has provided technical assistance and resources to a network of 23 community gardens as well as school gardens and neighbors. Technical assistance has ranged from cover crop education and seeds, season extension, crop rotation and crop planning, to IPM strategies. Community and school gardens were also offered plant starts throughout the spring in order to jump start their gardens.

The SCG Market Garden has been a success and valuable addition to a neighborhood being revitalized through a number of grassroots efforts focusing on food, wellness, access to resources, and community building.

Sustainability

In September, Springfield Community Gardens (SCG) received a \$375,000 USDA Community Food Project Grant for the next three years to continue building SCG's Market Garden Program focused on practicing and teaching sustainable food production. Through the grant, SCG will pay neighbors from the community to serve as garden apprentices in order to train even more urban

farmers. It also facilitates the development of value-added products to sell to the on-site preschool and to several after-school children's meal sites.

The continued sale of produce and value-added products will ensure a long-term, unrestricted funding stream to help support the network of gardens throughout the city and the Market Garden program itself. SCG established an annual fundraiser to celebrate local food and to help sponsor the organization's operational costs. Additional grant funding will ensure SCG can provide educational workshops with the help of community partners.

SCG hired a full-time farmer to continue running the Market Garden as well as an Executive Director to continue developing the organization and its outreach.



Within six months, community members, students, and partners helped create a green, food-filled oasis in the middle of the Grant Beach Neighborhood.



Durham County Soil and Water Conservation District, North Carolina

The Durham County SWCD goal to bolster urban agricultural efforts within Durham County was accomplished by providing eight training events; hiring contractors to survey and educate producers regarding available technical services; and supporting two existing entities – the Bull City Cool Food Hub (BCCFH) and the DPS Hub Farm - already serving Durham’s urban agricultural community.

Workshop Topic	Date	Host	Attendees
1. GAP Certification	9/22/16	BCCFH	22
2. Rain Water Harvesting & Conservation Irrigation	10/20/16	BCCFH	13
3. Nutrient Management, Buffers & Filter Strips	11/10/16	Hub Farm	12
4. Beginning a Produce Operation	1/19/17	Hub Farm	29
5. Local Buyer Discussion Panel & Mixer	2/9/17	BCCFH	63
6. Pollinators & Native Species	3/16/17	Hub Farm	31
7. Backyard Rain Gardens & Wetlands	6/29/17	Hub Farm	38
8. Expanding Opportunities for Minorities in the Local Food System	9/25/17	DSWCD	58

The workshops were attended by a mix of farmers, gardeners, homeowners and conservation professionals interested in managing their land more sustainably and making more connections within Durham’s local food system. As the hosts of almost all the events, both the BCCFH and the Hub Farm had several opportunities to share their work and mission with attendees.

The District hired the Piedmont Conservation Council, Inc. as a contractor to identify and survey existing agricultural operations, including community gardens. Over 257 farms and 24 community gardens were visited within Durham County. Owners or employees at these sites received information and brochures regarding technical services available to them through the Durham SWCD and NRCS to best manage stormwater, nutrient runoff, soil fertility and water usage. Site visits also gave the contractor the opportunity to advertise the BCCFH and the series of training events.

District staff developed the BETC Summer Green Team, made up of Durham Public School teachers and high school students participating in the Durham YouthWorks Internship Program. Teachers and students worked together for six weeks to establish and maintain several urban storm water management projects (rain gardens, critical area plantings, riparian buffers, structural stormwater conveyances, and cisterns) at local schools and community sites. The Team visited nine schools and community sites to maintain nine existing storm water management projects, maintain and replant six vegetable gardens, and install six new storm water management projects.

While best management practice (BMP) installation and maintenance was the focus of most of the summer work, student interns and teachers also spent considerable time in the classroom. There District staff and teachers taught the skills, knowledge, and theory behind the BMPs, which was then implemented in the field. Field trips were included in the summer program to introduce students to potential career opportunities in horticulture, agriculture, and storm water

management. The team visited a large-scale nursery, an organic farm that grows hydroponic produce, and traditional agricultural farms with produce and animals.

Rain Garden installed during the summer program.



Sustainability

The Durham County Farmland Protection Advisory Board will continue to conduct training events for the agricultural community by organizing 3-4 events during the winter months covering topics of interest to local farmers.

The SWCD Board is interested in taking a more active role in outreach to minorities in the local food system through hosting an annual event that helps create more connections between minority farmers, restaurant owners, buyers, gardeners, local government and nonprofit agencies.

Durham's BETC program was created in 2010 and has had a proven track record in its ability to leverage public and private funds for conservation, earned income for schools, and sustainability improvements for local homeowners. BETC has developed a strong partnership with Durham Public Schools and is a scalable model that has a strong foundation and well-conceived incremental building blocks to continue to expand the program. Its solid foundation includes teacher trainings that enables program materials and curriculum to reach more students; solid partnerships with public organizations, government, and additional schools; and successful implementation in both high-achieving and lower-resourced schools. BETC benefits institutions, homeowners, and students: schools earn revenue and students gain workforce and public speaking skills. Meanwhile, homeowners increase their knowledge of stormwater runoff and increase their sustainability. BETC inspires youth to participate in local environmental challenges in real-world service and solutions for homeowners.

Wake Soil and Water Conservation District, North Carolina

The Wake SWCD provided urban agriculture outreach and awareness opportunities to Wake County residents. The District's urban agriculture specialists built and expanded conservation-based partnerships with local land trusts and other organizations through events like Triangle Land Conservancy's Wild Ideas for Clean Water program. Outreach included participating in events that served youth, underserved residents, new and beginning farmers, women, established farmers, and landowners. In addition, these populations were engaged in workshops concerning soil health, beneficial insects, urban wildlife management, and urban and larger scaled mushroom production.

Support was provided to Good Hope Farm, an urban farm that provides access to farmland and connects residents to local, healthy food. Partners included Piedmont Conservation Council, Conservation Trust for North Carolina, North Carolina Community Development Initiative, and The Conservation Fund. Another partnership was formed with Habitat for Humanity of Wake County to assist homeowners with conservation practices at home and garden sites through programs such as the North Carolina Community Conservation Assistance Program.

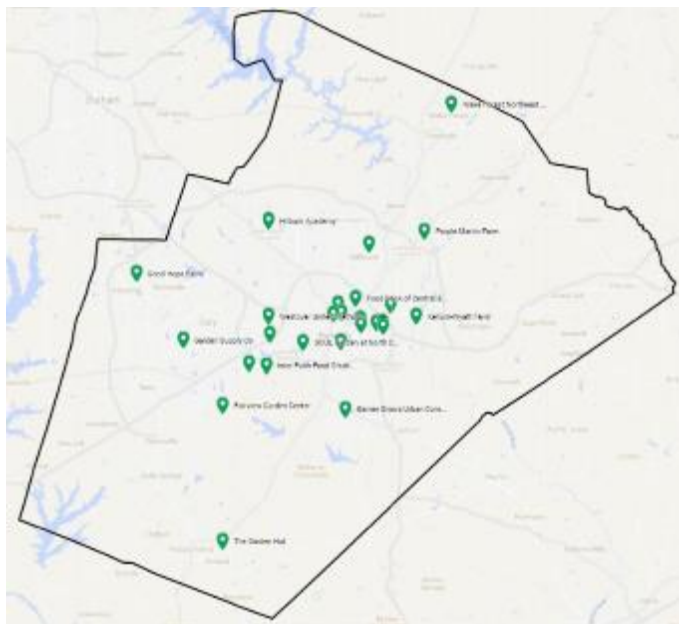
Other endeavors included contributing to the ongoing work of the Capital Area Food Network (CAFN) to improve the local food system as Wake County continues to grow. The District's work with the Wake County Urban Agriculture Collective (UAC) resulted in a community forum for the local urban agriculture community to share resources, successes, and challenges. By establishing a communication system to share information, knowledge, and resources, the UAC can work toward long-term solutions to problems faced by Wake County's urban agriculture community.



Seventeen Wake County community members gathered to discuss next steps for communication and mapping and to review a presentation for Raleigh city councilors on the importance of supporting urban agriculture projects with examples from other cities around the country.

The District piloted and established another service avenue by offering opportunities for agricultural growers, regardless of their urban, rural, or county location, to learn about and adhere to established and upcoming Good Agricultural Practice protocols. This program, in partnership with the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association's Local Produce Safety Initiative and The Inter-Faith Food Shuttle (a local hunger relief organization), is critical to offer training on the increasing impacts and importance of food safety protocols that ultimately influence the best management practices for soil health and water quality of farmland.

Site visits connected small-scale urban farmers to the local Farm Service Agency (FSA) office to impart the importance of obtaining a farm and tract number. Several urban growers providing produce to underserved communities were not aware of cost-share opportunities available through FSA, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and Wake SWCD until speaking with an urban agriculture specialist.



Urban Agriculture Specialists visited 26 urban farms, community gardens, school gardens, and nurseries across Wake County. Assistance was offered to each community along with information about soil and water conservation. If an individual could not be found during each visit, materials were left so contact could be made at their earliest convenience.

The District's work with schools and programs targeting youth and underserved populations provided hand tools to students affiliated with the Center for Human Earth Restoration's garden programs. In addition, the special needs community at Small Miracles received a seed bomb program and Hilburn Academy, a public elementary school serving over 800 students, an in-depth plan for addressing water issues on site.

Sustainability

All workshop contacts, marketing files, and records have been uploaded to the internal server for Wake Soil and Water Conservation District employees to access. Partners and community members have been given staff contacts for follow-up if they have questions, especially for CCAP programming. Wake Soil and Water Conservation District staff is available for site visits and making recommendations for urban agriculture work in the future.

Hillsborough Soil and Water Conservation District, New Hampshire

The purpose of the Hillsborough SWCD's project was to work at serving the refugee/immigrant farmers and underserved populations in the predominantly developed areas of Hillsborough and Merrimack counties. Two urban agriculture technical assistants were hired to identify and offer opportunities and solutions to the farms and groups in need. In Hillsborough County, the focus was working with Common Earth Farms, which employs refugee farmers who practice familiar farming methods growing ethnic crops. Much of the staff time was spent assisting the farmers in all aspects of their operation. This included offering advice and direction on how to build up their soils through crop rotation, manure management, pest management and irrigation along with helping a hydroponic growing trial. Common Earth Farms has been able to solve many of their issues and improve the quality of land to maintain farm sustainability.



The District also helped a new and developing non-profit organization, Grow Nashua, which was formed to improve food access and nutrition in Nashua. The District staff assisted their urban farming program that, in its first season, brought together 20 low income families to grow their own vegetables.

A series of training classes were planned and offered to these families to teach farming skills that both promote a healthy active lifestyle and provide an economic benefit. Over 2,000 pounds of their fresh vegetables were harvested, strengthening their community relationships.



As at Common Earth Farms, staff helped the group build their soils through crop rotation, manure and pest management, irrigation and weed management. Plans are in place to continue to assist Grow Nashua in the development of a second Learning Garden and the creation of a production farm in the coming year.

*Above: Grow Nashua families celebrate a successful year growing in the Learning Garden at their Harvest Party.
Below: Noel Sagna (gray hat) offers garden assistance to refugee farmers at Grow Nashua's Learning Garden.*

In Merrimack County, focus areas have been in partnering with the Organization for Refugee Success (ORIS) and offering technical assistance to urban farm projects in Concord, Dunbarton and Franklin. At a new refugee farm for women created in Concord, technical assistance was provided in building up and improving their soils, irrigation, solar irrigation, crop guidance, and finding potential sites to sell their products. Assistance was offered at a small community garden space in Concord, a new potential site in New Boston and Fresh Start Farms. It addressed irrigation, soil fertility, soil and plant health, compost and manure, cover crops and crop rotation, pest and disease management, buffers, and tool and equipment opportunities.

Sustainability

The District is able to continue working with Grow Nashua. Staff of both collaborated in applying for a New Hampshire Moose Plate grant to expand and create a production farm for interested refugee families who participated in the Learning Garden, including technical assistance. If successful, the Spring Pond Farm in Greenfield has offered a portion of land free of charge to assist Grow Nashua with their expansion. Additionally, the District secured funding through the New Hampshire Association of Conservation Districts contribution agreement. It will allow Grow Nashua's development of a second Learning Garden in a different area of downtown Nashua.

Common Earth Farms is currently for sale. The hope is the buyer will want to continue to farm and work with the established refugee group as it is the only farm in New Hampshire that specializes in growing ethnic crops.

Fresh Start Farms, a part of Organization for Refugee Success (ORIS), is an active participant with USDA NRCS. Improvement plans will continue in 2018 and beyond with assistance provided by NRCS Field office staff and the National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT), which has offered to remain a resource.



Farmer production space between high tunnels utilizing drip irrigation & floating row cover at Fresh Start Farms.

Hudson-Essex-Passaic Soil Conservation District, New Jersey

The Hudson-Essex-Passaic SCD provided funds to the Rutgers Veterans Environmental Technology and Solutions (VETS) programs. VETS mission is to improve the lives of unemployed veterans in Newark, New Jersey, and to work with them to protect the Lower Passaic River watershed. Run by Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Essex County, the program provides local, unemployed veterans with urban agriculture training and new green job skills. It promotes trainees' civic engagement and leadership by working with a broad cross-section of the Newark community to revitalize distressed neighborhoods through green infrastructure projects. It increases healthy eating lifestyles for families and children in Newark through an active greenhouse and community garden.

This vocational training program is designed to provide veterans with the skills and resources needed to obtain employment within the green economy (i.e. horticulture, landscaping, agriculture, stormwater management, environmental restoration). Participants can interact with experts from Rutgers University and industry professionals. This program was a combination of both instructional academic lectures and hands-on vocational training in the field.

In partnership with the District, the Rutgers VETS program provided education and outreach in urban agriculture to military veterans and local residents in a variety of ways. The program coordinator was a military veteran hired through the grant. He provided local leadership by hosting workshops, teaching both in and out of the classroom, and planning and implementing urban agriculture at the lot, school, and neighborhood levels. He taught 22 workshops in Newark, Jersey City, Clifton, Paterson, and East Orange, reaching more than 280 people (35% were military veterans.) The workshops were open to all local residents, but veterans were targeted in recruiting and given preference when class sizes were limited.



Rutgers VETS Program Coordinator, a military veteran, teaches container garden at a community meeting in Newark, NJ.

The coordinator and a dedicated crew of veterans planned and maintained a community garden in the heart of Newark and provided informal outreach to local residents. A high tunnel was also purchased, which will be located in Passaic County for greenhouse management and plant propagation experience to area residents while expanding the growing season.



One of the veteran participants was a beekeeper who volunteered time to teach beekeeping to residents of East Orange through hands-on workshops. Supplies and bees were purchased for the bee yard expansion at the East Orange teaching site. The beekeeper is also working with Rutgers VETS on the East Orange Sustainable Food Alliance.

Military veteran and beekeeper inspects a hive during a honeybee workshop at the teaching site in East Orange, NJ.

Sustainability

Rutgers VETS will continue through several partnerships. It is currently recruiting veteran trainees for a basic urban horticulture program in partnership with the City of East Orange, and the East Orange Veterans Affairs hospital as part of the East Orange Sustainable Food Alliance. VETS is working with a local non-profit, La Casa de Don Pedro, to provide job placement for veterans and others who have gone through urban horticulture training in Newark. The program will continue to support all trainees by providing supplies, access to tools, and expertise when issues arise.

Plans are underway for horticultural training for veterans in a more traditional agriculture setting at the Rutgers Snyder Research Farm in rural Pittstown. Trainees will have hands-on training in orchard management, small fruit growing, and field crop planning. Finally, Rutgers VETS will sustain its partnership with the SCD to educate program attendees about healthy soils and sustainable practices.

Valencia Soil and Water Conservation District, New Mexico

The Valencia SWCD's East Valencia Urban Gardens Program, serving the East Mesa of the county, encourages greater access to healthy foods, thriving economies, resilience to climate change and conservation of water and soil resources. It aims to increase knowledge and increase local food production through providing workshops in demonstration gardens, youth learning opportunities and incentives for starting or increasing production of home gardens and farms.

The East Mesa is an underserved food desert located south of Albuquerque, New Mexico of roughly 10,000 residents, where over 30% of children live in poverty and where many expressed difficulty in finding funds to pay for gas to drive to the closest grocery store. Some 31% of youth ages 12-17 years old expressed feeling sad or hopeless. According to the 2015 Census 58% of the population is Latino or Hispanic, 6% Native American and 2% African American. The EVUGP is designed to holistically support this underserved community through the garden program.

The EVUGP started two community demonstration gardens with 150 hands-on activities, led eight different workshops and community events and facilitated three consensus-style community meetings. Over 80 people participated in the community meetings. There were multiple kids and youth groups working and visiting the gardens including a weekly kids' class, a youth service work group four times per week, a church youth group once a week and visitors



from groups like the Cub Scouts. All activities were bilingual English and Spanish in order to reach the whole community.

At the Meadow Lake Community Garden, the local youth group plants garlic for the 2018 harvest before harvesting the rest of the white corn in the background.

A variety of sustainable gardening methods were explored at the demonstration gardens to increase soil organic matter, conserve water and grow produce effectively in an arid and dry climate. These practices included heavy mulching, deep watering in ditches, adding composted manure and leaves to soil, composting, creating a native plant wind block, and harvesting water from the community center to use in one demonstration garden.

Installing a water harvesting tank.



Many people believe the area is too hot and dry with poor soils to grow food, but in the demonstration gardens community members successfully grew corn, squashes, beans, watermelons, cantaloupe, spinach, kale, broccoli, bell peppers, green and red chiles, carrots, potatoes, onions, strawberries and more. Many crop varieties are native or naturalized to the Southwest climate and culturally important to the community. These include multiple native or naturalized varieties of each of watermelons, cantaloupe, corn (elote), chiles, squash, beans and herbs. These crops all grew successfully and reaffirmed that growing food sustainably in an arid, hot climate requires growing varieties adapted to high heats, low water and the native soils in this area.

Sustainability

EVUGP was awarded \$17,500 through the Conservation Fund to expand the program in 2018 to hire two part-time Garden Keepers to help maintain the gardens. It will also help start a six-month internship program for 10 youth on producing food, including growing crops from seed, maintaining, harvesting and even selling produce. All positions will be hired from the local community to create opportunities for increasing job skills, something the community expressed as very important.

Existing and developing partnerships with county government, Youth Development Inc, NMSU County Extension Agency, and Valencia Community Action Network help to leverage funds with in-kind support.

The program coordinator is working with a contract through the Conservation Fund award to develop a stronger monitoring and evaluation plan. This will be used to ensure program goals and activities are not only developed in collaboration with the community served but that these activities are successful and meeting the goals of the program. Information from the monitoring and evaluation will also help in creating the ‘farmlette’ component of the original proposal, where home gardens and farms are developed throughout the East Mesa.

The District will focus on meaningful community engagement, including bilingual meetings, to develop a business plan for the program. This will include working with partners to identify whether the program should develop into a separate non-profit or become affiliated with an existing partner.

Conservation District of Southern Nevada, Nevada

The CD of Southern Nevada created the Zion Garden Park Agriculture Assistance Program to address natural resource conservation at the community level and enabled community members to successfully grow produce in Las Vegas' desert climate. Located in a low income, low access region and surrounded by the highest food insecurity rates in the Las Vegas Valley, the program addressed issues such as healthy soils, backyard conservation, planting, irrigation, and pest management as well as nutrition and how to prepare healthy meals. The program featured three distinct components.



Zion Garden Park demonstration garden at Zion United Methodist Church

*Community outreach specialists
(Community Garden Liaison and Web
Information Technician)*



*Educational classes featuring
gardening and nutrition workshops
accompanied by live chef
demonstrations provided by the
University of Nevada Cooperative
Extension and Create a Change
Now*

An abundance of community support and donations contributed to the success and growth of the Zion Garden Park Program. Dozens of organizations donated products and services to bring many elements of the program to completion. One unique contribution to the program was the virtual 3D model of the demonstration garden donated by State Renewable Energy. This model allowed the garden to be designed and referenced from a PC, smart phone, or tablet and also provided flexibility and mobility for accessing the garden when obtaining additional consultations and special expertise.

Another key element to the program's success included a partnership with West Career and Technical Academy (West CTA), a local CTE high school with a licensed nursery. West CTA donated over 1,000 locally grown seedlings to the program as well as provided technical support. The students worked with a group of disabled young adults to plant the seedlings as part of one of their mentoring programs.

In addition to community partnerships, the program is located in the City of North Las Vegas Choice Neighborhood Revitalization Area and received numerous donations from the City of North Las Vegas including a wrought-iron fence and permeable pathway surrounding the one-acre garden as well as a large covered patio.

The Zion Garden Park Program has won three awards over the last year. It received the 2016 "Conservation Excellence in Agriculture" award from the Nevada Association of Conservation Districts last November, which was the first time the award had been given to an urban agriculture project. The project also received the 2017 "Sustainable Community" award from Green Chips in March, and the 2017 "Transformers" award from the U.S. Green Building Council and Green Alliance in April for being a maker of change in the community.

The program has been highlighted in numerous online and printed publications over the last year, including the USDA-NRCS website, the Nevada Division of Forestry's Livestock and Agriculture Journal, and both the NACD's eResource and The Resource publications.

Sustainability

Community partners want to continue to move forward with the development of Phase II for the Zion Garden Park Program. Initial plans to develop an entire urban agriculture center around the Zion Garden Park are being discussed. Also, community members want to continue with the gardening and nutrition education classes that were provided through Cooperative Extension.

The program has continued to be promoted even after the close of the grant cycle. NACD highlighted the Zion Garden Park Program in their summer 2017 edition of The Resource and, in August, USDA-NRCS published a national story on the Zion Garden Park Program as part of their Friday's on the Farm series.

In addition to the continued publicity, the project director has given presentations on the program at the "Partners for a Healthier Nevada" quarterly meeting and a local sustainability conference, Desert Green. The program was also highlighted at the 2017 Southern Nevada Urban Agriculture and Food Sustainability Forum.

New York City Soil and Water Conservation District, New York

The goal of the New York City SWCD project was to create a cadre of urban farmers knowledgeable in working with urban soils for growing food in low-income communities of color in New York City. The project consisted of four components: 1) outreach, 2) workshops, 3) technical and educational resources and 4) field visits.

The Project Team consisted of NYC Soil and Water Conservation District (the District), NYC Urban Soils Institute (USI), The Horticultural Society of NY (the Hort), GrowNYC, and Greenthumb. The Team developed the outreach and workshop series on urban soils and growing food in the city. GrowNYC and Greenthumb led the outreach efforts because of their existing relationships with gardeners in low income communities of color; targeted email and website were the main means of outreach. The Hort and the USI developed the content for workshops.

The first workshop was an all-day event on Soil Health Basics and Soil Interpretation in McCarren Park, Brooklyn. The workshop covered fundamentals of soil fertility, pH, macro- and micronutrients, soil organisms, organic amendments, soil texture and structure, soil fertility testing, characteristics and functions of urban soils, sources and risks of contamination, screening for contaminants, interpretation of test results, remediation strategies and suggestions for mitigation of exposure and contamination.

Setting up the hands-on station for the Soil Health Basics and Soil Interpretation workshop in McCarren Park, Brooklyn.



The Hort then hosted a half-day workshop focused on Growing Food in the City. This workshop covered crop selection, crop rotation, increasing production, harvesting and preserving. Participants also took home seasonal veggie starters. Each participant was able to perform tests on their soil samples for macronutrients (NPK), pH and texture as part of the workshop. They were extremely enthusiastic and participated eagerly with more questions and discussions generated than there was time to answer.

Workshops were free to attend. Those 10 gardeners from Brooklyn and the Bronx who came to both workshops were eligible for free on-site garden assistance and soil testing.

On-site technical assistance took place in August and September. Four gardens in Brooklyn and the Bronx received one-on-one assistance with soil testing, interpreting soil tests, deciding on and applying best management practices and soil health building techniques, and assistance on

selecting and growing edibles as well as harvesting. The garden plots were screened by the XRF analyzer for heavy metals.

The USI together with the Hort created Soil FAQs on various topics (sustainability and food security, pollution and contamination, physical properties: formation and processes, health and fertility, best management practices, organic amendments, compost and fertilizers, gardening: problems and best practices) and a Forum, a platform for anyone and everyone interested in soil, urban agriculture and urban ecology, available through the USI website.

Another outcome of the project is the development of a soil health assessment kit that gardeners can use to learn about and test their soils. A few videos were created to demonstrate how to perform certain tests to accompany the kit.

Sustainability

The work was highlighted in social media, conferences, and presentations. The project was presented as a model for supporting urban agriculture at Soil Science Society of America, at the Greenpoint Lead in Garden Soil Outreach Project workshops, MegaCities 2050, and the Annual Just Food conference. USI staff also participated in events with partners such as GrowNYC, the Hort, GreenThumb, Neighbors Allied for Good Growth, City Growers, and NYC Compost Project. Through students at Brooklyn College, New York Botanical Garden and Brooklyn Botanic Garden have become familiar with the project as well. The USI Symposium held in November 2017 provided an opportunity not only to share the work but also to recruit more participants.

USI website includes links to technical services, research and direct communication with soil scientists. Online services also include a Soils FAQ and Forum in which soil scientists and practitioners can exchange ideas, information and answer questions. Because of the extensive network of urban gardeners cultivated by the USI, online Forum is a cost-effective way to the existing knowledge to be shared.



Field visits are by far the most powerful tool for connecting with communities and individuals on a one to one basis. They are also the most labor intensive. The District is cultivating interns from Brooklyn College for assistance with field visits. USI staff will train interns, who will gain valuable knowledge from the field visits. Interns will also be tasked with outreach via social media, websites and other digital means.

Assisting community gardeners who attended the workshops.

Cuyahoga Soil and Water Conservation District, Ohio

The Cuyahoga SWCD's primary deliverable was the Blueprint to Urban Agriculture. As such, the Horticulture Specialist spent time interviewing 53 urban agriculture constituents in Cleveland, Ohio and a few in the west suburbs. Often, these interviews were conducted on farm or garden sites. Most of the constituents consisted of urban farmers, but also included landlords, community garden managers, colleagues from Ohio State University Extension, and other peripheral community agriculture members.

Initially, the Blueprint was conceptualized as a book or pamphlet. However, it was apparent things can change quickly. A book or pamphlet would be outdated as soon as it was published. Therefore, it was decided the Blueprint would be a website so content could be continually updated and added.



Time was spent learning how to build a website, creating content for the Blueprint, and subsequently building the website at www.blueprinttourbanagriculture.com. For the sake of having a physical product, staff designed the “Resources” section as a one-page fact sheet and is the most important page on the site.

Examples of technical assistance provided include: interpreted soil tests and made recommendations for Oxbow Orchard; taught individual how to install drip irrigation; showed Eat to Live Farm how to Florida Weave tomato trellises; walked Addison Farm through fire hydrant permitting process and supplied with permit application and contact person at the water department; advised Bay Branch Farm of Gardening for Greenbacks grant program (who applied and were awarded grant to install 1,500 gallon rain water collection system); created a Garden

Plan for existing, overgrown and litter strewn garden at Cleveland's Martin Luther King High School on behalf of the Alliance for Great Lakes; and created a Kinsman Farm Management and Volunteer Plan for the West Creek Conservancy.

Other highlights of the project were:

- Received an Ohio Department of Agriculture Healthy Soils Grant to create two cover crops demonstration sites and subsequent workshop.
- Partnered with Dr. Basta's soil lab from OSU for pawpaw orchard installation and experiment. The process was turned into a time-lapse video that was posted on the District's Facebook page, on You Tube at www.youtube.com/watch?v=GZAv9VxUWVA&t=2s as well as in the Blueprint at www.blueprinttourbanagriculture.com/farm-tricks.
- Developed and presented a Soils Workshop for the OSU Extension Master Gardeners class.
- Invited to participate in the Great Lakes Urban Agriculture Integrated Pest Management Working Group.
- Submitted a proposal to NRCS's Regional Conservation Partnership Program for the Greater Cleveland Reforestation Project, which was approved.
- Submitted a proposal to SARE to demonstrate the potential of compost tea to restore soil biology in highly degraded urban soils.
- Invited to be a member of Refugee Response (an urban farm) Advisory Board.

The project provided an opportunity to address stakeholder concerns identified at the 2016 Local Work Group Meeting (with USDA NRCS). At the same time, it raised the profile of the Cuyahoga SWCD in the County.

Sustainability

The Cuyahoga SWCD Board committed funding to support the Urban Agriculture Program through 2018, and the Horticulture Specialist has taken on additional responsibilities. In the meantime, the staff is seeking grants for projects that link urban agriculture, urban forestry, soil health and education for further program support and for retaining the Horticulture Specialist position. The District was asked to submit a full proposal to NRCS's Regional Conservation Partnership Program for a project entitled the "Greater Cleveland Reforestation Project", which was approved. In the fall, a SARE grant proposal was submitted for restoring soil biology to degraded urban soils via compost tea. Going forward, the District will continue to look for funding sources, which may include teaming up with nongovernmental agencies to develop proposals for farm management in Cleveland's Urban Agriculture Zone.

Since the *Blueprint* is a web document, it will be updated as needed, regardless of funding for the specialist position. This was part of the reasoning behind making the Blueprint a website.

The Horticulture Specialist has been attending advisory group meetings and conducting outreach such as the keynote at the District's 68th Annual Meeting. The District held a Conservation Farm Tour targeting local officials. In addition to one mayor and one Cuyahoga Council person, attendees included the County's Sustainability Director and staff from Congressional Representatives Marcia Fudge and Marcy Kaptur's office, as well as a staff person from Senator Sherrod Brown's office.

Lucas Soil and Water Conservation District, Ohio

The Lucas SWCD's Safer Soils project completed case studies analyzing the risk of lead in the soils at five Toledo community gardens, taking the participants through historic site research, aerial imagery, sampling plans, test results, and recommendations to address both lead risk and soil nutrient deficiencies. The process and generalized results were shared with additional community gardeners in the city of Toledo through local talks and field days; in the Northwest Ohio region through county meetings and a regional Seed Swap; and across the state of Ohio at the 2017 We Dig! Community Gardeners Conference in Columbus. In total, the program activities reached approximately 175 people interested in soil health and safety in community gardens.

Gardeners and interested Toledo residents who came to the workshops have been recruited for additional lead and heavy metals testing, which will be provided free through a partnership with Bowling Green State University. The District partnered with the University to offer additional testing because a professor participated in the Safer Soils program and thought it would be a good fit for community service for his science education students.

The Safer Soils program purchased pre-paid, DIY soil testing kits from the University of Massachusetts, which have been offered free of charge to workshop participants. Two science education students from BGSU have attended the workshops and worked directly with community gardeners to explain their test results and possible sources of contamination, and the partnership is a great opportunity to sustain the program beyond the grant period.



A science education student from BGSU presents their sampling results at a quarterly business meeting of local community gardening organization Toledo GROWS.

Sustainability

The success of the Safer Soils program resulted in the Lucas SWCD Board committing, in their 2017 strategic planning, to maintain the urban agriculture component of the Natural Resources Specialist position. They also renewed their commitment to increasing services to Lucas County residents of urban and urbanizing areas. This allows the project to be staffed at current capacity.

Additionally, the Lucas SWCD and Toledo GROWS secured a commitment from BGSU soils laboratory to continue offering free heavy metals testing to local community gardens as part of their science education curriculum. This allows the program to continue without the significant financial burden of commercial testing fees, which was the second greatest expense after staff costs.

Finally, the program's outreach work over 2017 has led to increased interest from Toledo residents about getting their soil tested; by the final Toledo GROWS quarterly meeting, nearly 40 gardeners signed up to participate in soil testing, which is twice the number that had signed up at the beginning of the grant period.

Between covering staff hours, laboratory costs, and community interest, the Safer Soils program has established a foundation to not only sustain itself, but to grow alongside community gardening in the Toledo area.



Historic research helps locate old house driplines over the vacant field of a potential garden site, helping to isolate lead risk areas. This community group chose to bring in new soil and raised beds after going through the Safer Soils program.

Muskingum Soil and Water Conservation District, Ohio

The Muskingum SWCD's mission is to provide leadership and assistance for the conservation and enhancement of our natural resources and environment. To extend this mission to inner-city residents of Muskingum County, a program called Urban Greens was developed. Its goal is to create community food garden spaces offering access to fresh produce and educational opportunities for local residents. Over the course of the project, five new gardens were developed in the county, two were expanded, and one was revitalized.

The program is currently focused on the Putnam neighborhood, which has been identified as a "food desert" where residents do not have nearby access to fresh, healthy food. In addition to the goal of teaching residents to grow their own fresh food, community gardens provide a unique opportunity for building community, growing neighborhood pride, combating hunger issues, providing family recreation opportunities, and engaging residents in local history and art.

A total of 48 raised beds and one in-ground garden were established. New gardens established were The Community Gardens at Restoration Park (32 raised beds), ten handicapped accessible beds at Putnam First United Methodist Church, and a school garden at Zanesville Community High School. The Bethel Community Center expanded their garden from four to ten raised beds. Assistance was provided to garden establishments in New Concord, Eastside Community Gardens, and Avondale Youth Center.



Volunteers build raised garden plots at Restoration Park.



Urban Green Interns

Urban Greens developed 3,350 square feet of new growing space in Muskingum County; engaged 870 individuals at events, garden work days, and programs; delivered 75 pounds of fresh produce to Zane Grey Intermediate School for the summer lunch program; and delivered over 450 jars of applesauce to local food pantries. The apples were locally grown and processed in a local commercial kitchen by volunteers.

Through a grant from Muskingum County Jobs and Family Service, two youth and one college student were employed for eight weeks to work within the program. Additional resources included \$11,347 in grants, \$11,025 in cash and in-kind donations, and other entities' grant funds used for the Urban Greens program.

Sustainability

Urban Greens staff have been working in the community to ensure each garden has the proper leadership in place to move forward regardless whether additional funding is secured by the District. Additionally, partner agencies and organizations have been included in the project so programs such as community events and educational opportunities continue to be offered.

Below is a summary of grants received and grants recently submitted by program staff for the purpose of project continuation and enhancement.

- Urban Greens received the proceeds of a Muskingum County Farm Bureau Dinner on the Farm event in the amount of \$10,000.
- The Muskingum SWCD Board of Supervisors voted to provide \$10,000 from the District fund to help sustain the Urban Greens program past 2017.
- Urban Greens received a grant from Ohio Farm Bureau Foundation in the amount of \$3,000 to expand the Zanesville City Schools Farm to School garden and to develop a program to introduce children to fresh, locally grown foods at the school's summer lunch sites.
- A \$3,500 grant was given by the Ohio 4-H Foundation to develop "Kids Dig It," a garden expansion and education program that will serve low-income and at-risk youth at the Zanesville City Schools garden in the summer of 2018.
- A USDA Farm to School Grant has been submitted on behalf of Zanesville City Schools to develop more farm-to-school learning opportunities by expanding its school gardens, implementing horticulture education, and procuring more local foods for school meals.



2017 Community Garden Leadership Training

Allegheny County Conservation District, Pennsylvania

The Allegheny County CD expanded its Urban Agriculture Program by offering free soil testing and site analysis for community gardens, non-profit farms, and greenspace projects in urban areas. Over \$120k worth of free heavy metal and nutrition soil testing (in lab costs alone) were conducted for over 30 distinct community projects. Additionally, the District held approximately 20 outreach events where more than 300 people brought soil samples from home to have them screened instantly for heavy metals. The estimated lab cost delivered from this free outreach service is \$14,000.



Staff test resident soil for lead and other heavy metals at the first public outreach event, held in partnership with Grow Pittsburgh.

Separately, the District worked with the Institute of Politics and other partners (Penn State, Grow Pittsburgh, PA DCED, and urban farmers) to develop a Municipal Model Ordinance Guide. This guide will address the growing uncertainty in many communities as to the legality of urban ag activities as they become more commonplace. The guide will be distributed to every municipality in the region in partnership with outreach and education events targeting supervisors, zoning boards, code enforcement officials, and local advocates and practitioners.



The District provided additional agricultural and other technical assistance to over 12 urban farming projects, which included education sessions on cover crops, soil health, remediation, cultivation strategies, funding, regulatory requirements, and pollinator habitat.

Students learn about diversity in the garden and soil health at a District and YMCA "Soil Health and Testing Workshop" at the (YMCA) Homewood-Brushton Garden.

As part of the project, District staff took a group of summer urban garden students to Detroit to meet with activists and urban farmers from D-Town and Ohana Gardens.



Malik Yaniki of D-Town Farms and a founder of the Detroit Food Policy Council talks about hoop houses with students from Pittsburgh's Sankofa Village Community Garden on a ACCD sponsored Urban Ag Trip.

Sustainability

The Allegheny County CD Board committed to funding a full-time Urban Agriculture position and at least one part-time intern or graduate fellow in the years to come. Additionally, the District has received some support in the form of grants from state and federal agencies, non-profits and corporate entities. Continued partnerships with local governments and non-profit partners keeps costs down and ensures collaboration and efficiency. Currently the District has, in addition to its full-time staff member, two part-time graduate interns.

Blair Conservation District, Pennsylvania

The Blair CD started planning its Urban Ag Program by working with established partners in the community. The goal was to convene different stakeholders in the community, further build capacity, and help develop a long-term urban ag program for the District. Staff met with the Healthy Blair County Coalition and municipalities in Blair, which requires stormwater permits for state and federally regulated Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (MS4), to request assistance reaching people who may be interested in learning about urban agriculture practices.

The program needed to be built from the ground up, involving grassroots partners. Through this outreach, the Healthy Blair County Coalition partnership proved to be effective. A new “Urban Ag Network” was developed through the Coalition’s network of hospitals, schools, churches, and human service organizations.

The goal for the Urban Ag Program is to enlist new/beginning urban farmers, excite citizens about eating wholesome food, increase stormwater infiltration through municipal-owned gardens, and help urban farmers find market outlets.

The District hosted a variety of “urban farming” workshops. Collaborating with a group of direct market farmers in the region who are vetted as qualified educators and mentors, the District organized workshops to teach basic urban farming practices. They were designed to provide “how-to” tools and connect farmers/mentors to new/beginner urban farmers.



Blair County Urban Ag Network visited many urban ag sites in neighboring City of Pittsburgh.

To engage local government, District staff met with municipalities who hold MS4 permits to explore how to use urban ag sites for harvesting rainwater and improving soil infiltration to help meet the requirements. It was also a goal to create opportunity for citizens in food deserts to grow, sell, and consume locally grown products by eliminating barriers and address potential zoning issues.

Two bus tours, an urban ag symposium and a Farm2Fork event were held to engage elected officials, city planners, and economic developers. Those involved demonstrations of community gardens, roof-top gardens, and development of green space for urban development and potential economic opportunities.



Over 30 Blair County residents/municipal staff/teachers/church groups and garden clubs attended the District bus tour—the start of the Blair County Urban Ag Network.

Sustainability

Current efforts have been about building capacity, educating staff and the community about urban agriculture, and finding key partners who will help continue the urban ag work. The first step was finding like-minded people in our community who wanted to learn about urban farming or become urban farmers. An email distribution list (Blair County Urban Ag Network) was created and a Facebook page started. Through these channels, information is distributed about upcoming events and educational material are posted.

The partners gained are essential to the program's sustainability. Those include: statewide urban ag group lead by Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture; Urban Ag person within USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service; Altoona City Council and Altoona Planning Commission. Communications is maintained with teams of economic development organizations: Southern Alleghenies Planning and Development Commission, Altoona-Blair County Development Corporation, and the Republic Food Enterprise Center. Staff members of all the organizations listed are part of the 200-member Urban Ag Network to ensure continued communication and planning (www.facebook.com/www.blairurbanag.org/).

Under District guidance, there are now 5 urban gardens planned for installation in the next few years, and two gardens have already been installed by organization who were awarded private mini-grants.

Lycoming County Conservation District, Pennsylvania

The Lycoming County CD's FreshFoodLyco initiative is done in partnership with Penn State Extension. It promotes urban agriculture and fresh food access for all within Lycoming County. The approach has been three-pronged. One, create partnerships and relationships with food access and agriculture groups already established throughout downtowns and city centers. Two, establish the gaps within ag/food programs that can be filled by existing programs. Three, connect and engage for growth.

In order to empower and educate the community on urban agriculture as a solution to food insecurity, the first step is bringing people together. The most notable event was the FreshFoodLyco Bus Tour. During tour, stakeholders visited local urban gardens utilizing their space to teach people about fresh food and alleviating fresh food deserts in their own way. Through this event, people connected with projects in need of financial assistance, technical support, and skills such as those from the nonprofit, healthcare, and agricultural communities. The goal is for these stakeholders to invest in each other's successful programs to fill the gaps within the Lycoming County food system.



*Urban Ag Bus
Tour at
Montgomery
Community
Garden and
Outdoor Kitchen*

Each stakeholder expressed via survey that they would be interested in forming Lycoming County Food Policy Initiative to sustain the connections.

Another tour was held at the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank's new facility, test kitchen and cold storage. Participants learned about the expanded programs, including Fresh Express and Back Pack, offered in Lycoming County.

A number of community gardens were assisted, including a new one at Second Street Housing Authority complex in downtown Williamsport; Red Shield, where volunteer work days were facilitated and a new hoop house installed; Lose with a new demonstration gardens trellis,

strawbale garden, and educational spaces; and Montgomery Summer Alive, a free summer camp that is food based, where an outdoor kitchen was added and a small orchard planted.

Freshfoodlyco nutritionist did weekly cooking classes with the Montgomery Summer Alive students.



A monthly educational display was set up at the Williamsport Growers Market. Penn State Master Gardner's Sensory and Community Gardens helped develop lesson plans to assist community gardens volunteers on their outreach efforts and the FreshFoodLyco toolkit development (available at www.FreshFoodLyco.org). In addition to outreach and education, the District provided materials and tools to community gardens furthering their efforts and lengthening their growing and learning seasons.



Urban Ag for Healthier Families and Homes Display at the Lycoming County Fair August 2017

Sustainability

A group of stakeholders is interested and focused. Community gardens, including Montgomery Summer Alive and Red Shield, now have the knowledge, space, tools, and even shade to continue providing education and outreach events. The FreshFoodLyco website has been started, which will house the toolkit, local food news and information, and an Urban Ag Resource Library.

Interest is being expressed by other entities such as the Firetree Place, a popular community center in Williamsport; two small public libraries (one in Muncy, the other in Hughesville); and the Jersey Shore Garden Club.

Montgomery County Conservation District, Pennsylvania

The Montgomery County CD goal is to increase support for urban gardens in the county through on-going information dissemination, creation and maintenance of lasting partnerships and distribution of the educational guide. The District launched its first outreach and technical assistance program to farms and gardens in urban communities. Long lasting partnerships were established among community organizations, yielding meaningful outcomes at two target

locations - Norristown and Pottstown.

These locations represent two of the most urban areas in the county in terms of density and population, and were selected based on their classification as low income and low access to the nearest supermarket and local fresh food.



Urban garden in Pottstown, PA

A highlight was distribution of composting bins and rain barrels to urban gardens, including several school gardens. These two conservation measures also served as educational tools to teach the garden users about soil and water conservation and stormwater management.

After school club learning set up a composting bin at the OIC (Opportunities Industrialization Center) in Norristown, PA.



In addition to these on-the-ground conservation efforts, the partnership with GreenTreks Network created an electronic Urban Ag Conservation Resource Guide. The digital guide includes interactive garden models and resources, as well as video documentary filmed in Pottstown's gardens. It is intended for use by any community organization, municipality, etc. interested in starting an urban garden. The guide steps through every aspect from site selection to finding funding to gathering community support to styles of gardens and technical information on planting and managing a garden.

Find it at www.montgomeryconservation.org/docs/UrbanAgResourceGuide_LinkedVideos.pdf.



After school club learning to plant a garden at CCATE (Center for Culture, Art, Training and Education) in Norristown, PA.

Sustainability

The Urban Ag Conservation Resource guide was created to promote urban agriculture as well as provide step-by-step instructions for setting up an urban garden from start to finish. The guide includes video documentary, photos, and planting guides as well as an interactive garden model chart. This guide will continue to be distributed both locally, regionally, and nationally to promote urban agriculture. MCCD will continue to update the Urban Ag Conservation section of the District website to promote conservation on farms and urban agriculture.

In addition to the guide, many connections were made throughout the county which will assist in continuing to promote and increase the number of urban gardens. Connecting the right people with the urban gardens will ensure that technical resources remain available to those who need them to increase the productivity and success of gardens.

An additional push is for increased number of gardens at schools. Distribution of rain barrels and composting bins promoted this effort. The District will continue to seek grant funding to provide rain barrels and compost bins to urban and school gardens to promote conservation.

Greenville County Soil and Water Conservation District, South Carolina

The Greenville County SWCD sought to address food desert areas. The city of Greenville was built primarily from mill communities for the textile industry. As the textile industry slowly pulled out of Greenville, dozens of mill communities were left without work. Legacy Charter School, devoted to ensuring every student gets good food, exercises and graduates, is changing the landscape in the Woodside Mill community. The District partnered with Legacy to build a farm on an empty lot owned by the County. The farm was designed to grow food for the school while educating students about food sources and new urban farmers about conservation practices.



Woodside City Farm was designed to work with nature using south facing slopes, existing forest, roads on ridges and native perennial food plantings.

A portion of the 6-acre lot was converted from an overgrown kudzu forest to a productive farm selling produce to restaurants and local markets. The tagline for Woodside City Farm became “From Kudzu to Crops”. When the program was started, the manager endeavored to find the pitfalls involved in starting an urban farm. There was not much information on the internet, so project leaders decided a primary legacy of the farm would be a blog outlining all the barriers to urban farming. These included starting a business, obtaining a water source, site contamination, zoning issues, floodplain



It's kudzu crazy at the farm site.

regulations, obtaining Good Agricultural Practices certification, harvesting and storage concerns. The blog, which can be found on Woodside City Farm's website, will be maintained online indefinitely by the Greenville County SWCD.

The farm worked with science teachers in the school to design semester-long projects, which included experiments with biochar and led to students volunteering on the farm. The farm also designed an engaging three-week workshop on composting for the students.

A project for seniors was designed to determine if biochar was an effective soil amendment. The students learned about soil health during the semester-long project.



Because of the farm manager's dedication, the local Woodside Mill community also became involved in the farm. Volunteers, donations and other grants were heaped onto the project. Unfortunately, the project was fraught with a major unforeseeable issue. A brownfields grant paid for a Phase I Environmental Assessment and a Ground Penetrating Radar investigation towards the end of the year. These reports found there was possible contamination on the site in an area far away from the farmed plot. The school was unwilling to put their students at risk, and asked for the project to close.

Sustainability

There were several steps taken during the project that will ensure knowledge from the project continues. Students learned in-depth about soil health, which they can use for the rest of their lives. Some students are now interested in careers in farming.

The Woodside City Farm website, outlining considerations for beginning an urban farm, will continue indefinitely.

Knowledge gained by the farm manager, field hands and District personnel will be used to give technical advice to other farms in Greenville County. The farm manager is enthusiastic about the experience, and is currently helping other farmers in the area.

Henricopolis Soil and Water Conservation District, Virginia

The Henricopolis SWCD partnered with the nonprofit Community Food Collaborative (CFC) to launch the Cornerstone Community Farm.

The CFC had already spent years promoting food access and nutrition literacy in the Richmond region, including maintaining a half-acre garden at Fairfield Middle School. Located just over the Henrico County line, in the midst of the city's many food deserts, this facility provided students and members of the broader community with the opportunity to experience planting, harvesting, and selling produce at the CFC's mobile market.

Beside the garden sat four vacant acres, an overgrown powerline easement. Working together, with support from Henrico County Public Schools and Virginia Commonwealth University's Service Learning program, the Henricopolis SWCD and CFC converted that long-neglected land into fertile fields, and turned a schoolyard garden into a full-fledge urban farm.

From the onset, Cornerstone's success has been rooted in cultivating alliances and the resources they bring. A VCU Service Learning grant helped Cornerstone purchase a greenhouse that was installed with help from undergraduate students. A neighbor provided machinery and labor to help mow the land and prepare it for planting. The Shenandoah Permaculture Institute drafted a map of Cornerstone's planned build-out (an invaluable tool for guiding and inspiring the farm's development). Other allies include the USDA, Henrico County School Nutrition Services, and Enrichmond Foundation.

All work on the farm was guided by conservation best practices with specific attention to the health of Stoney Run Creek, which runs below the property, feeding into Almond Creek, the James River, and eventually the Chesapeake Bay. Over decades, Stoney Run had suffered the indignities common to urban waterways, ranging from a poured-concrete bed, to pollution and pervasive litter. Still, the water hosts aquatic life; it flows through a canopy of native species; and the shade, bird song, and light on the water are charming. Envisioning a day when Fairfield teachers can lead their students to their creek for lessons in science and more, Henricopolis SWCD adopted Stoney Run as the pilot site for the new Creek Restoration and Environmental Education program. VCU service learning students conducted baseline water testing. Clean Virginia Waterways joined to collect and tally trash, and volunteers conduct ongoing cleanups and monthly testing.

Henricopolis SWCD Conservation Technician trains VCU Service Learning student in microinvertebrate sampling of Stoney Run creek.



Sustainability

The Cornerstone Community Farm has continued to identify allies and resources, both financial and in-kind. Henrico County has donated generously. The Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay has partnered to lead on-site conservation education. When the Western Henrico Rotary reached out to Henricopolis SWCD for technical assistance on an all-member tree planting project, the event – with \$10,000 in donated trees - became phase I of Cornerstone’s planned food forest.

The Cornerstone Community Farm project, and the opportunities it represents – for the school, the region, and as a model for future ventures – has proven a catalyst for developing creative community-based urban agriculture in the Richmond region.

In hopes that Cornerstone Community Farm will inspire imitations and innovation, the Henricopolis SWCD has presented the project at numerous conferences, including both the 2017 and 2018 NACD Annual meetings, The Chesapeake Watershed Forum 2017, and Environment Virginia 2018. Press coverage has included stories in the Richmond Times Dispatch and Henrico Citizen.



With help from a growing collection of allies, this beautifully rendered vision is becoming a reality. Earth Day 2018 marks the planting of phase one of the food forest.

New River Soil and Water Conservation District, Virginia

The New River SWCD held 17 field days at the New River Hill Farm showcasing its ‘Learn as We Grow Garden’ and hoop-houses. Field days were held for local students of all ages. During field days, high school students planted, pruned, harvested, weeded, transplanted, composted, created irrigation systems, planned future crop rotations, and much more. Younger students were able to get hands-on experience as well by planting vegetable seeds they later took home, ready for transplanting into their own gardens.



Left: Area High School students had a hands-on experience in the hoophouse. For most, this was their first experience with gardening. Some of the comments were, “this is actually kind of cool”, “I could grow this at home”, “I’m going to show my mom how to do this”, and “I can’t wait to tell grandma that I like to garden”.

Right: Area elementary students were also involved with the planting and harvesting on the farm. They were very open to trying the produce. Most had never tried radishes, turnips, cabbage and snap peas.

At New River Hill Farms, several field days were also held for local civic groups and land owners. During these field days, the District focused on the importance of locally grown produce within the community to mitigate the effects of food deserts. Hoop-houses were showcased and the ‘Learn as We Grow Garden’ promoted family gardens at home and selling produce at local farmers markets.

During the school year, District staff made 7 school visits to local elementary schools focusing on plant anatomy, soil health, and general horticulture through hands-on activities that were fun for students. The goal during these visits was to encourage healthier eating habits and general knowledge of how to grow food at home.

Sustainability

The New River SWCD has included support of the New River Hill Farm Education Farm in its strategic plan. By doing so, the District set its current and future goals to continue educational efforts throughout the community. This will be accomplished by continuing 1) development of the relationships made through the Learn as We Grow grant, 2) field days for local students and land owners, 3) school visits, and 4) visiting local farmers markets promoting New River Hill Farms purpose.

Clark Conservation District, Washington

The Clark CD's Clark Food and Farm Network (CFFN) project provides technical assistance and support for urban agriculture and community engagement with farmers, organizations, and citizens interested in conservation, agriculture, and access to local food. This is accomplished through networking and media to connect interests and provide technical expertise. CFFN creates multiple avenues for citizens to access and acquire information, network, and make connections.

Clark Food and Farm Network has additional benefits to the natural resources through technical assistance for agroecological issues like soil and water conservation practices, biodiversity, crop health, etc. Most urban agriculturalists with small acreage farms, community garden plots or backyard gardens focus solely on their vegetables and don't consider things like cover crops or rotation. Urban agriculture can have significant cumulative natural resource impacts.

CFFN also provides improved access to food to the underserved through information and assistance as well as the knowledge and community contacts to successfully grow their own. It has the additional benefit of increasing awareness of the connection of urban agriculture and a healthy environment.

This project included input from multiple agricultural and food industry representatives, natural resource and community partners, farmers, and other individuals to gather their needs and ideas, and for information-sharing across organizations. Open houses and community meetings were held to invite the public and encourage involvement. Outreach was done with electronic and printed flyers sent to partners' mail lists and handed out at many community events. Outreach also included unique stand-up displays and table-top displays at partner offices, community events, and meetings.



Left: CFFN banner display at the Clark County Fair



Right: CFFN tri-fold display at a Clark County Food Systems Council meeting

CFFN is a website (www.clarkfoodandfarm.org) full of agricultural related information, forums, and assistance. Citizens can easily navigate interactive maps, discussion forums, event calendars, contacts, community stories and more through the website and interactive social media (Facebook group). Citizens can also use the contacts to request more site-specific technical assistance and guidance or pick up a postage-paid postcard to send request by mail.

The District is still working on developing a phone line with a 1-800 number for requests and questions for those who do not have internet access. The voicemail associated with the phone line will give the caller the option of using other languages (Spanish and Russian) to provide improved access to information.

Sustainability

The District is committed to continuing this project and furthering efforts in farmland conservation and local food production. The Long Range Plan includes protecting and providing assistance to farm landowners as a priority for District work, including working with partners to gather data and identify possible opportunities or actions for farmland preservation that meets the needs of local land owners and partners; developing outreach materials and educational tools and participating in community events; and researching funding sources and program options.

The community and partners are also committed. They have shown a need for this assistance and are committed to keeping Clark Food and Farm Network a place and forum that is up-to-date and useful. Partners have had numerous discussions about local food systems and farming in Clark County. They are planning for more possibilities in the future, including a food hub, an online food ordering system that draws from local farms, a volunteer delivery service, and mobile food service truck program (like an ice cream truck but with local fruit and veggies) to increase access to food. CFFN is just the first step to an urban farming and food system in Clark County.

King Conservation District, Washington

In response to King CD's continuing commitment to meet the needs of urban constituents, the District developed a community agriculture mapping tool through a responsive, mobile-friendly website. The website's goals are threefold: 1) compile and maintain a list of community gardens; 2) share soil testing case studies; and 3) offer opportunities for involvement to gardeners, volunteers and funders.

Understanding that many urban dwellers do not have access to either land or fresh produce (much of South King County is labeled a USDA food desert), engaging the urban audience through fresh food production and gardening allows the District to provide education on natural resource topics like stormwater runoff, water quality, soil fertility, water catchment, urban habitat, and cover cropping.

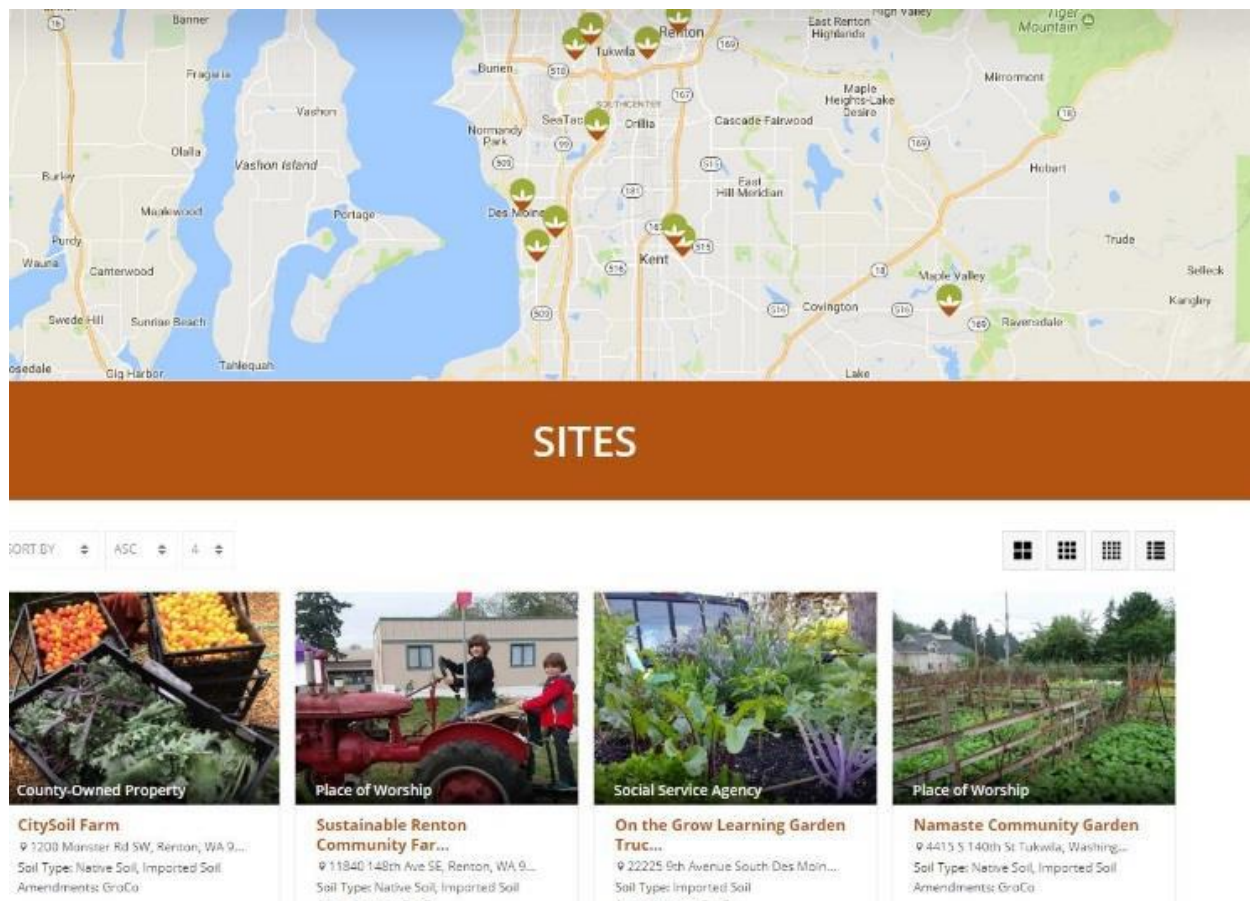


Leveraged funding for KCD-supported community garden partnership with World Relief & Hillside Church

Building a Hugelkultur bed at CitySoil Farm, a community agriculture partnership between King County Wastewater Treatment and King Conservation District. A healthy community garden starts with healthy soil!



The website was soft-launched on December 20 for feedback from the 18 gardens involved, and then went fully live on January 2. To date, there have been requests from nine additional gardens across King County to be added to the site.



KCDCCommunityag.org

Additional engagement plans include pushing it out at the NW Flower and Garden Show, reaching at least 1,200 people; reaching out to the District's 35-member jurisdictions (34 cities and King County); announcing and highlighting in KCD monthly electronic newsletter with a readership of 5,000 including many area elected officials; highlighting at the District's annual Native Plant Sale, engaging with roughly 800 people; and sharing with the Puget Sound Conservation District Caucus, twelve CDs surrounding Puget Sound

Sustainability

Creating the website in a way that drives interested people out to the individual gardens and organizations was an important decision in ensuring the tool's sustainability. While KCD's Community Agriculture Coordinator will curate information, keep a regular blog, field questions, and make introductions as part of the position's role, most of the on-the-ground information gathering and volunteer coordination will be managed by the broader urban agriculture community.

Lincoln County Conservation District, Washington

The Lincoln County CD chose the Davenport Community Garden as its location to demonstrate water conservation practices, xeriscaping and educational programming. Water conservation is an issue in Lincoln County and, even though Davenport is in an agricultural area, there is very little locally sourced food available.

With the addition of several other local grants and community fund-raising, the garden was excavated and rebuilt from the ground up. It now provides an inviting space for the public to gather and learn about water conservation practices, xeriscaping, and native plants through *educatOriional* programs. The gazebo created an area for educational programs, 4-H demonstrations, agriculture classwork and demonstrations on “Farm to Table” sustainability. A paver pathway and ADA compliant garden boxes has made the garden accessible.

All the labor and machinery for excavation of the site was donated along with the electrical and plumbing needs from start to finish. The soil and compost for the raised garden beds were donated. The District worked side-by-side with the contractors and the City of Davenport crew to install weed barrier, gravel, landscape rocks and soil. The gazebo was built and installed by volunteers. Over \$7,000 in donations were raised, including a couple small grants and the selling of engraved bricks for the walkways. The latter is an ongoing fund raiser.

The District had a tremendous amount of support during the entire project.



The Community Garden is currently growing with vegetables and flowers harvested for the Lincoln County Fair, where the garden was promoted.

Educational programs are being planned for the upcoming year. The District is working with the local school district in creating curriculum for the spring. Part of the planning includes hands-on demonstrations, renovating the high school greenhouse, 4-H and FFA demonstrations. A junior “Farm to Table” program for kindergarten through second grade will offer hands-on activities; seed starts to planting to harvesting at the start of school for a locally sourced lunch prepared by

the school chefs. The District is working with SNAP ED and Washington Green Schools as well as with the Davenport School District to bring “Zombie Guacamole” composting program this year.

Sustainability

The District Communications Coordinator will continue the Garden coordination as the volunteer group is established and will coordinate events held in the garden this upcoming season.

As a member of the Washington Fire Adaptive Communities, the District is finalizing a grant request for fire-resistant plantings in the Community Garden as a countywide demonstration.

The District has also been invited to participate in the newly formed Washington State “Farm to Table Network”.



Pierce Conservation District, Washington

The Pierce CD designed programming to better reach urban agriculture in communities with Low English Proficiency (LEP). With 15% of the county being LEP, the District increased Harvest Pierce County's participants to 15% of total program participants, a direct reflection of the county's demographics. Ambassadors now serve on the HPC Steering Committee.



The Salishan Community Garden has gardeners who speak Russian, Khmer, Vietnamese, and Korean.

The District moved beyond simply translating documents and signage. Lasting bi-directional relationships were built with stakeholders in Vietnamese, Russian, Cambodian, Korean, and Spanish-speaking communities. This positions the District to move not only beyond linguistic barriers, but cultural barriers as well. Each LEP community has its own way of stewarding the environment through organic urban agriculture, and all have a lot to learn from one another.

Most of the LEP urban gardeners are seniors who came here on refugee status, and while learning English as an older adult is difficult, learning to steward plants in the Pacific Northwest is something they have done exceedingly well.

To this end, the District went from supporting 5 multilingual gardens to 11, grew its network of multilingual contractors from 2 to 10, distributed 800 multilingual brochures, and hosted 30 events with LEP participants. Four new Vietnamese gardeners joined McCarver Community Garden for the first time as a result of the District's Vietnamese brochure. Activities included:

- Parallel event: Salishan Seed Swap
 - (Salishan Garden, Viet Huong, Swan Creek Garden - Vietnamese, Khmer, Russian, Korean)
- Community Garden Tour
 - (Vietnamese, Khmer, Russian, Ukrainian, Korean, Spanish -Viet Huong, TCC, Salishan Garden)
- Community Garden Leadership Training
 - Ambassadors: Korean, Russian, Khmer, Vietnamese

- Film Screening: Babushkas of Chernobyl
 - (*Ukrainian -TCC Garden*)
- Informal Plant/Knowledge Exchange between two Eastside gardens
 - (Spanish and Khmer)

The District applied Conflict Mediation Techniques to the Salishan Garden to help resolve issues among Korean, Vietnamese, Khmer, Russian members. And the Pierce CD Annual Meeting featured a language other than English for the first time.

Sustainability

The District has institutionalized a program called the Cultural Ambassadors. It is comprised of a growing network of bilingual community connectors who co-design and implement multilingual programming with Harvest Pierce County. After hosting parallel events designed to introduce multilingual participants to District services, multilingual best practices are being incorporated into the annual events. Harvest Pierce County's next step is to begin institutionalizing these best practices into the Pierce CD at large. The goal is to also bring these learnings to the Puyallup Watershed Initiative's Just & Healthy Food System Community of Interest, growing into a permanent position.



Members of the Pierce CD's Cultural Ambassadors program.

Spokane Conservation District, Washington

The Spokane CD's first objective connected people and organizations in the Spokane area active in urban food production and created ways for them to communicate their activities, projects and advocate for urban food production. The second objective encouraged residents to learn about and apply principles of water and soil conservation.

The Spokane Urban Agriculture Network (SUAN) is a networking group that will allow community members to communicate with each other on their projects and activities, resource needs and eventually advocacy work to support urban food production. Groups involved in the effort include Project Hope/River City Youth Ops, The Edible Tree Project, Spokane Urban Goat Keepers, Catholic Charities Food for All Farm, Polly Judd Park Food Forest Project, Spokane Community Gardens and Bruce Rule Design.

The Spokane Community Gardens Association was formed to help gardens with finding resources, building successful garden communities, providing education classes on gardening and community development and advocate for broader community support. With the help of community garden advocates and the WSU Spokane County Extension, the Spokane Associated Garden Club, the Spokane CD and the Upper Columbia RC&D, over 40 existing community gardens were pulled together into a unified network and are starting several new ones. The group has been awarded a Vista volunteer to develop the group's community efforts over the next year.



The Chief Garry Community Garden was one of the gardens that joined the new Spokane community Gardens Association.

The District supported scholarships to the Spokane Farm and Food Expo to help people learn about food production and preservation, farming and homesteading and foodie related topics. Keynote speakers included urban market gardeners Curtis Stone from Kelowna B.C. and JM Fortier of Quebec. They spoke and taught extended classes on their methods of growing produce in urban areas.

To assist veterans interested in agriculture, the project supported the District's Vets on the Farm and its development of an urban learning farm to train people in market gardening and farm skills.

In addition, the District provided funding and technical support to River City Youth Ops to help pay the youth involved in the Riverfront Farm market garden and to test soil in their garden plots for nutrients. Technical support was given to help develop, plant and harvest gardens at Longfellow and Stevens Elementary Schools. The cities of Spokane and Spokane Valley were assisted with revision and development of small livestock ordinances. Classes were given on animal management to ensure their health and to protect water and soil health.

In general, the project pulled together several groups and individuals that are now aware of each other and are actively talking about future projects. The District will maintain communication networks to continue to facilitate the efforts.

The Vets on the Farm project now has solid on-farm leadership and much of the infrastructure (hoop houses, irrigation, equipment) so they can expand their outreach to more veterans. Their plan is to offer plots on the farm this spring to veterans wanting to grow their own market gardens with mentorship.

River City Youth Ops has plans to develop the lot the project helped clear of trees. The soil tests conducted through the project are providing the farm with a planning tool to improve production and soil conservation awareness.

Key Lessons Learned

Valerie Vissia, Lincoln County CD, WA

Don't just reach out to the usual groups and volunteers in your community. We had a lot of closed doors early on until we stepped out of the box and started to connect with others who were already doing the work we needed. Made all the difference. People generally want to help out - don't get discouraged and just keep asking.

Re-doing an already established Community Garden in the middle of a residential area gets a lot of attention; most of it good. We did have some resistance at first but it provided us with an opportunity to educate people not only about the Conservation District but also about Community Gardens and water conservation.

Glen Van Olden, Hudson-Essex-Passaic SCD, NJ

One key component is for the locally led urban agriculture associations to obtain dedicated or semi-dedicated land to perform their work. Too many parcels in our cities are owned by the municipality only soon to be sold off or utilized for other means. Written declaration, covenant, pledge or contract is always a good idea before investing much time and dollars to the urban agriculture cause.

Jessica Buck, Montgomery County CD, PA

Through our Urban Ag project, I was very interested to learn of the numerous existing urban ag initiatives and community/school gardens already happening in our County! It was a great opportunity to network with the existing organizations and initiatives. Instead of reinventing the wheel, we were able to connect with engaged community members, provide additional resources and enhance projects throughout the community.

Lindsay Cameron, Fairbanks SWCD, AK

Outreach. This can look like so many different--social media (creating every class as an event on Facebook, this allowed others to share classes with their friends and on other Facebook pages), free newspaper events, flyers are community events, inviting reports (both paper and TV) to events and to new community gardens--these are just a few ways to start spreading the word. Once community members started associating Fairbanks SWCD with gardening, they would come to us with new ideas or connections that helped continue the project.

Partnerships. Often times these began with just a simple conversation about what we're up to and would evolve into how we could help each other. Partners would then share their own partners and soon we became part of a new Urban Agriculture network in the community.

Nicole Anderson Ellis, Henricopolis SWCD, VA

One of my thoughts - drawn from personal experience and from stories I heard at this year's conference - is a reminder that we can't let perfect be the enemy of good. Collaboration can be tricky. Real change occurs in fits and starts. Sometimes projects take twice as long as expected.

Sometimes partners bail. Sometimes we get halfway to our vision and hit a barrier we can't overcome. That does not negate the value of our work, nor does it mean we failed.

Environmental work - healing ecosystems and educating committees and forming partnerships - is a long game. While it's important to have explicit goals and hold ourselves to high standards, we also need to remember that every seed we plant - literal and figurative - has its own timetable. Sometimes we get to see the shoots emerge, and the leaves unfurl. Sometimes we don't. But the latter might mean that seed is waiting for a frost, or a fire, or its unique germination need. Just because we don't see the fruits of our labor doesn't mean they won't come.

Dan Mullins, Eastern Connecticut CD, CT

The communities that are food deserts within the Eastern Connecticut Conservation District are somewhat spread out. That distance made it challenging for some volunteers and garden coordinators to participate in workshops and planning meetings, as well as to deliver materials and services. It is important that your budget accommodate for travel expenses so program members can participate in workshops and conferences. Providing stipends to youth workers may also serve to motivate them and encourage an interest in community gardening, while providing valuable service hours to your gardening efforts.

Justin Husher, Cuyahoga SWCD, OH

Get it in writing, and be specific who does what. If there are assets at the end of project, be clear who gets those assets. Memorandum of Understanding is an excellent tool for this process.

Shino Tanikawa, New York City SWCD, NY

We always knew hands-on activities and learning in the environment (i.e., outside with soil on the ground) are the best way to learn but the workshops reiterated the importance of learning by doing. Participants were engaged, curious, and energized and had more questions than we had time to ponder together. The use of technology (e.g., webinars, listserves, etc.) is important in efficient use of limited resources but there is no substitute for real interactions in the real garden environment!

Lindsey Diaz, Valencia SWCD, NM

It is good to do community engagement practices right off the bat to make sure the project is genuinely led by the community.

Jane L. Brawerman, Connecticut River Coastal CD, CT

Engaging a diverse group of partners--farmers, community organizers, educators, municipal staff--has been key to the success of our urban agriculture project. Everyone brought their own issues and perspectives to the table resulting in a multi-faceted program, grounded in the community. The first time we met was an exciting, eye-opening experience! It was great to have everyone in the same room, realizing how much we could learn from each other and enhance each others efforts.

A partners group has also helped to ensure program sustainability--our group continues to meet and work together to plan for future activities, building on what we've already accomplished, and branching out into new territory to further cultivate interest and engagement in agriculture and food sources in the City.

Damon Yakovleff, Cumberland SWCD, ME

We didn't do enough to focus on program sustainability, or get started on it early enough. One year of funding is not a lot of time to bring new ideas online, however we had less time than this because our ideas for the next phases of our program came out of our work during the one-year NACD grant. If we had this to do over, maybe we would have allocated more time to leverage the NACD funding into follow up implementation work.

Working in a secured, State Department of Corrections environment is very challenging. It's important work, but anybody attempting it should anticipate extensive time commitments for administrative tasks.

It's important not to duplicate work. In general, it is very important to be aware of what the other stakeholders supporting community agriculture are and what they are doing. Keep in mind that SWCDs have some unique strengths compared many non-profit or government agencies involved in community agriculture work, so try to play to those strengths. In particular, erosion and sedimentation control is often not well considered at and adjacent to community ag sites.

Learning about successful programs at other Districts (especially with sustainable funding mechanisms) is extremely valuable.

Building food forests is an outstanding community organizing and development strategy. The benefits extend well beyond the surface level (aesthetics and food production). These types of projects bring neighbors together in a way many other efforts do not, helping to instill community trust and enhance sense of place.

Lilias Pettit-Scott, Jefferson County SWCD

Spend time building relationships with other organizations in your community to broaden your program's reach and leverage limited resources.

Connect with residents in your district by attending community meetings and listening. It is the best way to build relationships and hear about their concerns.

Leverage the grant money as much as possible by applying for additional funds, using the NACD grant as a match.

Share the story of what your conservation district is doing at region conservation district meetings and state meetings. This is a chance to expand the work of our districts and grow our impact statewide.

PROJECT CONTACTS

AK	Fairbanks SWCD	Joni Scharfenberg fairbanksswcd@gmail.com
AL	Jefferson County CD	Katie Heath and Holly Killian jefferson@alconservationdistricts.org
AR	Perry County CD	Kim Thibodaux perrycountycd@yahoo.com
CA	RCD of Greater San Diego	Ann Baldridge ann.baldridge@rcdsandiego.org
CA	Riverside-Corona RCD	Diana Ruiz ruiz@rcrcd.org
CO	Jefferson CD	Maria Bumgarner bumgarnermaria@gmail.com
CT	Connecticut River Coastal CD	Jane L. Brawerman jbrawerman@conservect.org
CT	Eastern Connecticut CD	Michael Soares Michael.Soares.ECCD@comcast.net
FL	Hillsborough SWCD	Betty Jo Tompkins bjt6890@gmail.com
FL	Leon SWCD	Tabitha Frazier Tabitha@leontrees.org
GA	Flint River SWCD	Casey Cox casey@flintriverswcd.org
GA	Oconee River SWCD	Robert Amos ramos@gaswcc.org
IN	Hamilton County SWCD	Claire Lane claire.lane@hamiltoncounty.in.gov
IN	Marion County SWCD	Kevin Allison kevin-allison@iaswcd.org
KY	Jefferson County SWCD	Lilias Pettit-Scott urbanagconservationist@gmail.com
ME	Cumberland County SWCD	Damon Yakovleff dyakovleff@cumberlandsxcd.org
MI	Kent CD	Jessie Schulte jessie.schulte@macd.org
MN	Ramsey CD	Ann WhiteEagle Ann.WhiteEagle@co.ramsey.mn.us
MO	Boone County SWCD	Ethan Miller ethan.miller@swcd.mo.gov
MO	Greene County SWCD	Will Rhodes will.rhodes@swcd.mo.gov
NC	Durham County SWCD	Michael Dupree mdupree@dconc.gov
NC	Wake SWCD	Dale Threatt Taylor dthreattaylor@wakegov.com

NH	Hillsborough County SWCD	Kerry Rickrode kerry.rickrode@nh.nacdnet.net
NJ	Hudson-Essex-Passaic SCD	Glen Van Olden glen@hepscd.org
NM	Valencia SWCD	Lindsey Díaz EVUrbanGardens@gmail.com
NV	CD of Southern Nevada	Amber Bosket abosket@staterenewableenergy.com
NY	New York City SWCD	Shino Tanikawa shino@nycswcd.net
OH	Cuyahoga SWCD	Justin Husher jhusher@cuyahogaswcd.org
OH	Lucas SWCD	Jessica Wilbarger jlwilbarger@co.lucas.oh.us
OH	Muskingum SWCD	Nicole Hafer nicole.hafer@muskingumswcd.org
PA	Allegheny County CD	Jonathan Burgess jburgess@accdpa.org
PA	Blair CD	Beth Futrick bfutrick@blairconservationdistrict.org
PA	Lycoming County CD	Carey Entz-Rine centz@lyco.org
PA	Montgomery County CD	Jessica Buck jbuck@montgomeryconservation.org
SC	Greenville County SWCD	Kirsten Robertson kirobertson@greenvillecounty.org
VA	Henricopolis SWCD	Nicole Anderson Ellis nicoleandersonellis@gmail.com
VA	New River SWCD	Tracy Goodson thgoodson@embarqmail.com
WA	Clark CD	Zorah Oppenheimer zoppenheimer@clarkcd.org
WA	King CD	Deirdre Grace deirdre.grace@kingcd.org
WA	Lincoln County CD	Valerie Vissia v.vissia@conserveva.net
WA	Pierce CD	Renee Meschi ReneeMe@pierced.org
WA	Spokane CD	Patricia Munts PMUNTS@spokanecounty.org
-	NACD	Debra Bogar deb-bogar@nacdn.net