National Association of Conservation Districts

2020

URBAN AGRICULTURE CONSERVATION GRANT INITIATIVE FINAL REPORT

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Executive Summary

Since 2016, the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) has successfully partnered with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to award grant funds to conservation districts (CDs) to conduct conservation technical assistance related to urban and community farming. In 2020, NACD:

- Awarded grants to 21 CDs in 13 states, with project budgets totaling $932,232.11.
- Supported grantee activities addressing a variety of resource concerns, not limited to pollinator conservation, water quality and quantity, the protection of native species (both flora and fauna), increased crop biodiversity, management of invasive species, augmenting and properly managing urban green spaces, and soil conservation.
- Encouraged district activities related to the provision of technical assistance to historically underserved communities, including lower income populations, environmental justice areas as defined by the Environmental Protection Agency, veterans, beginning farmers, immigrants and refugees, and many others. Together, the UAC grantees reached over 165,000 individuals through their activities.
- Promoted partnerships as a means to enable long-term sustainability of district capacity related to urban and community agriculture and conservation; districts partnered with over 100 additional organizations including federal, state and local government agencies, faith-based, youth-oriented, and environmental nonprofits, schools and community gardens, and local businesses.

Together, districts reached over 160,000 individuals through technical assistance provided through workshops, farm tours, virtual and online events and learning opportunities, and through a variety of other outreach strategies.

Additional information on the grant program is available on NACD's website, or by contacting NACD's Pacific Region Representative, Ariel Rivers, PhD.

Program Background

As a joint effort through the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Urban Agriculture Conservation (UAC) Grant Initiative enhances the ability of conservation districts nationwide to provide technical assistance to urban and community farmers, gardeners, and small-scale livestock producers.

Conservation districts (CDs) may apply for 1-year grants of up to $50,000 to cover staff time, workshops, outreach, community needs assessments, partnership development, and other activities that help agricultural producers increase their knowledge and abilities related to natural resource conservation.

Since 2016, NACD and NRCS have awarded 122 grants to 102 conservation districts (CDs) in 35 states, totaling over $5.58 million (Figure 1). Through the initiative, NACD awards up to $900,000 annually to projects which meet the project criteria as defined by the RPG evaluation team. Projects are selected for how well they match the goals of the program—to increase district capacity to provide conservation technical assistance in urban and community-oriented settings—and based on a series of criteria established by the RPG to ensure that the district would be able to complete their project within their proposed budget and time frame.

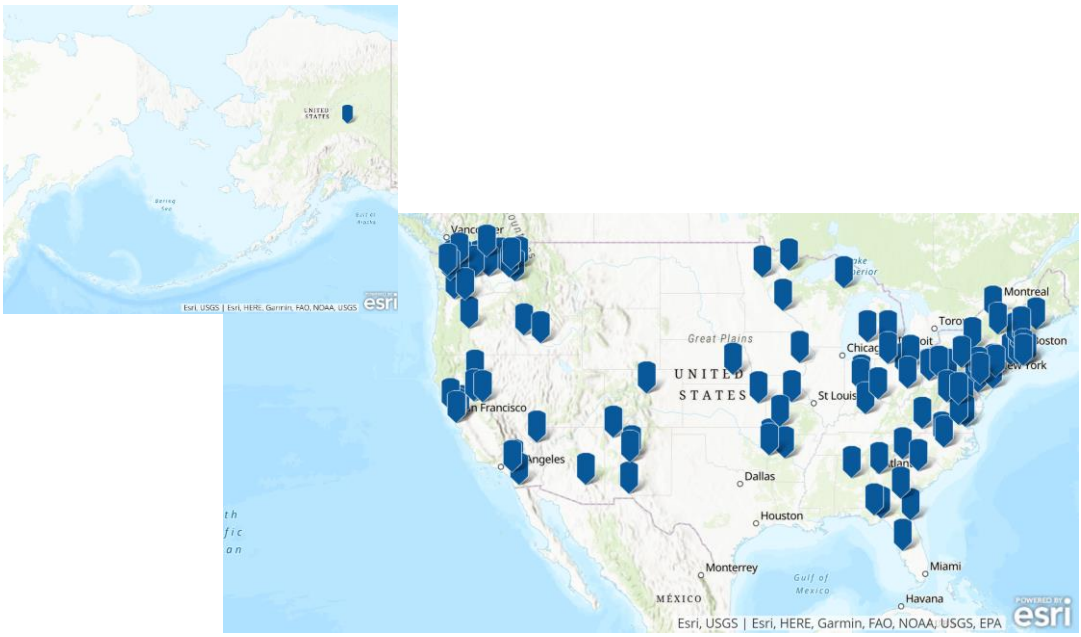

Figure 1. Map of UAC Grantees to date; 102 districts conducting 122 projects in 35 states. Note: map is not to scale.

In 2020, NACD and NRCS awarded over $900,000 to 21 districts in 13 states through the program (see

Appendix A: 2020 Grantee Project Descriptions). Each CD increased their capacity related to urban technical assistance and small-scale conservation, while addressing community needs in both rural and urban contexts.

Progress for the 2020 grantees was slowed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with many districts needing to alter their proposed activities or extend their timelines. However, each district completed their project successfully by the end of the 2021 calendar year. Despite the challenges associated with the pandemic, the grantees each showed a level of creativity and resiliency in how they approached providing conservation technical assistance to their urban agricultural communities.

Project Coordination – FY 2020

The NACD Urban and Community Resource Policy Group (RPG), composed of district officials and partners, serves as the main oversight body for the UAC grants. Each fall, the RPG reviews the Request for Proposals (RFP), Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ), evaluation criteria, and outcomes to date through the program. Through this process, the RPG members and NACD staff seek out ways to improve access to the program by new CDs, while also ensuring that districts can provide technical assistance to clients who may not traditionally adopt agricultural conservation practices.

To promote the program widely and ensure a robust application pool among NACD's members, staff shared application announcements regularly through our weekly newsletter eResource and in NACD's quarterly report The Resource, hosted an informational webinar about the program in November 2019, and sent direct marketing emails throughout the application period. We also featured individual grantee spotlights on the second Tuesday of each month in the weekly newsletter, eResource, and several grantees presented in various virtual forums coordinated by NACD staff, including NACD's monthly urban and community conservation webinars and the annual New York State Water Quality Symposium hosted by NRCS. Individual grantees also promoted their own programs through a variety of virtual and in-person platforms, including via workshops, YouTube videos, signage at various urban farming locations, district newsletters, news articles, and other platforms.

The RPG and staff have also continued to improve the application and reporting process to collect better data for monitoring and evaluating grantees and their projects while seeking new opportunities to share lessons learned and outcomes through the program.

UAC Outcomes – FY 2020

Grantees

In 2020, NACD received 60 applications from conservation districts in 29 states, with requests totaling $2,603,759.88. The RPG review team selected 21 CDs in 13 states, with project budgets totaling $932,232.11. A full list of project titles and descriptions is available in

Appendix A: 2020 Grantee Project Descriptions.

Many of the grant recipients operate in stereotypically large urban centers, but many grantees also serve more rural areas. The 2020 grantees provided services to numerous communities within their district boundaries, some of which may not be located within the same city as the district's office.

However, as a point of comparison, the office of **Underwood CD** in Washington is located within White Salmon, a town with a population of 2,619, and a county with a population of 22,107 (Figure 2).

In contrast, **Marion County SWCD** in Indiana serves the city of Indianapolis (population 887,642) and Marion County (county population 964,582).

Such figures indicate the reach of the UAC grant program, and the potential of the grant initiative to support districts as they address the technical assistance needs of communities of any size (

Table 1).

Table 1. Grantees through the 2020 NACD UAC grant initiative, and the populations for the city and county where the district office is located. Note: not all districts operate on county or city boundaries; population numbers provided only for context.

Figure 2. Underwood CD in Washington conducted a series of "Crop Talks" to discuss and demonstrate conservation practices.

State	District	District Location (City)	City Population	County	County Population	NACD Region
California	Inland Empire RCD	Redlands	71,586	San Bernardino	2,181,654	Pacific

California	Riverside-Corona RCD	Riverside	314,998	Riverside	2,418,185	Pacific
Indiana	Marion County SWCD	Indianapolis	887,642	Marion	964,582	North Central
Maine	Cumberland County SWCD	Windham	18,439	Cumberland	293,557	Northeast
Michigan	Genesee CD	Flint	81,252	Genesee County	406,892	North Central
Missouri	Boone County SWCD	Columbia	126,254	Boone County	180,005	North Central
New Mexico	Valencia SWCD	Belen	7,116	Valencia	76,456	Southwest
New York	Warren County SWCD	Warrensburg	3,981	Warren	64,265	Northeast
Ohio	Ashland SWCD	Ashland	20,423	Ashland County	53,745	North Central
Ohio	Cuyahoga SWCD	Cleveland	372,624	Cuyahoga County	1,264,817	North Central
Pennsylvania	Allegheny County CD	Pittsburgh	302,971	Allegheny	1,218,452	Northeast
Pennsylvania	Indiana County CD	Indiana	13,078	Indiana	84,501	Northeast
Rhode Island	Northern Rhode Island CD	Johnston	29,568	Providence	636,084	Northeast
South Carolina	Richland SWCD	Columbia	136,632	Lexington	295,032	Southeast
Virginia	Colonial SWCD	Williamsburg	14,896	James City	76,397	Southeast
Washington	Kitsap CD	Poulsbo	10,927	Kitsap	269,805	Pacific
Washington	Kittitas County CD	Ellensburg	20,977	Kittitas County	47,364	Pacific
Washington	Palouse CD	Pullman	34,019	Whitman	49,791	Pacific
Washington	Pierce CD	Puyallup	42,973	Pierce	891,299	Pacific
Washington	Thurston CD	Tumwater	23,688	Thurston	286,419	Pacific
Washington	Underwood CD	White Salmon	2,619	Klickitat County	22,107	Pacific

Project Activities and Resource Concerns

The UAC grantees who received project funding in FY 2020 submitted their project proposals prior to the January 10, 2020, deadline, with final contracts signed in late February of 2020. By the time grantees received their project funds and were able to begin work in March and April of 2020, many were subject to office closures and limitations on in-person gatherings due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, these limitations allowed many districts to develop a new online presence and to provide technical assistance in a variety of innovative ways. For their project, **Project Title:** BEEfriend Local Pollinators: Pollinator Conservation Technical Assistance, Demonstration and Outreach, **Richland SWCD** in South Carolina, for example, developed over 20 short videos focused on pollinator habitat, native grasses, biodiversity, composting, and other topics, which they posted on the Richland County YouTube channel. To ensure community members were aware of the videos, they hosted a "Winter Garden Virtual Watch party via Zoom in collaboration with the Richland County Public Information Office and provided door prizes of bee nesting blocks, a rain barrel, and countertop compost bins to the 40 attendees. The videos had garnered over 20,000 views by the time the district submitted their final report in summer of 2021.

Richland SWCD did not limit their outreach to virtual events only, as they were still able to conduct some limited in-person gatherings during their grant term. The district also developed a pollinator demonstration area at a county park in Southeast Richland, which they used to conduct pollinator conservation outreach for agricultural producers, educators, and home and community gardeners.

The garden features 12 raised beds that demonstrate the use of native and food-producing plants, like blueberries, that may provide pollinator habitat, while also showcasing other conservation practices like proper pest management and irrigation techniques (Figure 3). Due to the outreach conducted during the pandemic and an increased interest by community members in spending time outdoors, the district was able to recruit many new volunteers to support ongoing maintenance and outreach efforts.

Figure 3. Socially-distanced volunteers learning about garden maintenance at the Richland SWCD pollinator demonstration garden in South Carolina.

Pollinator habitat is a common resource concern addressed by the UAC grantees, as the inherent nature of the small scale and diverse plantings of urban and community production favors pollinators and the conservation of their biodiversity. Staff from **Riverside-Corona RCD** (California), **Kitsap CD**, **Kittitas County CD** and **Palouse CD** (Washington), **Project** (New York), and **Ongoing Activities:** ACCD has developed or solidified partnerships with several academic institutions and non-profits to ensure the ability of these programs to move forward. Additionally, we are collaborating with City and County Government to ensure sustained funding and grant partnerships to support our efforts moving forward. Partner examples include the University of Pittsburgh's Department of Geology and Environmental Science, Chatham University Food Studies Program, Grow Pittsburgh, Pa Association for Sustainable Ag., Carnegie Museum of Natural History, Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens, the Pittsburgh Food Policy Council, the Black Urban Farmers and Gardeners Cooperative, and Hilltop Urban Farm and Incubator Program.

Lessons Learned: It is impossible to do all this work alone. Sustainability means finding creative ways to partner and share the workload. You must become comfortable not just sharing credit, but sometimes allowing others to take it completely. The results are what matters.

Indiana County CD (Pennsylvania) also conducted a variety of pollinator plantings and educational activities at new or existing community agricultural sites. Many of these activities allowed districts to provide direct technical assistance related to beneficial insect identification and increased on-farm biodiversity.

The 2020 grantees also addressed a variety of other resource concerns, including water quality and quantity, the protection of native species (both flora and fauna), increased crop biodiversity, management of invasive species, augmenting and properly managing urban green spaces, and soil conservation. For example, **Allegheny County CD** in Pennsylvania, which covers the city of Pittsburgh, focused their project on urban soil health for their project—**Project Title:** Soil Health 2.0: Enhancing Productivity in Allegheny County—including strategies for maintaining or improving soil and mitigating potential contaminants like lead (Figure 4). The district tested soil in certain areas to map and identify trends, and to determine potential areas for improvements and to target for conservation practices. Thanks to the district's technical assistance, several the district's clients started composting, amending their existing soil, adopted a diversity of cover crops, and developed plans for rain gardens, swales, or beds.

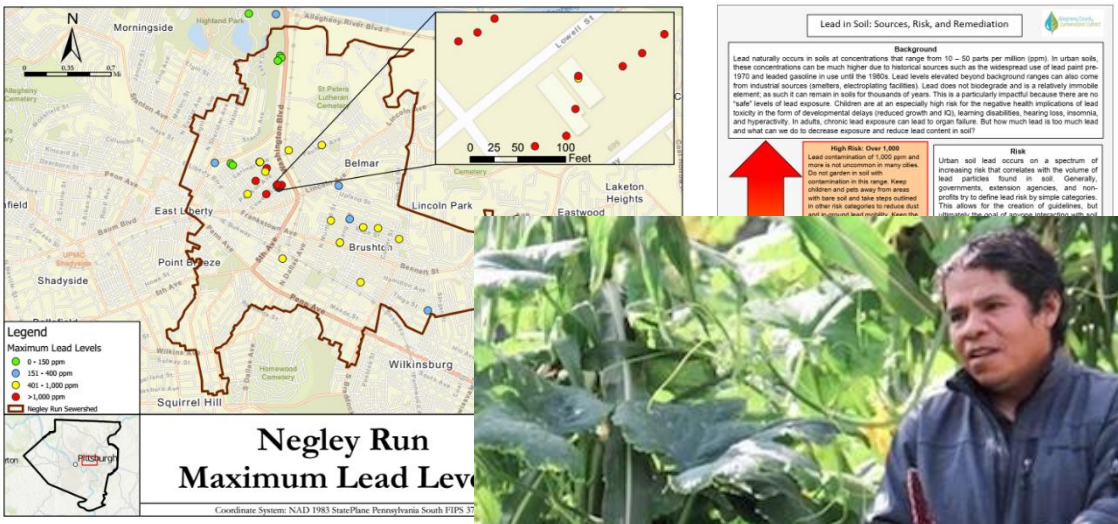

Figure 4. A map of lead contamination levels de
handout regarding how to manage lead contam

Figure 5. A member of the local P'urepecha community discusses the traditional *milpa* farming system at the Pierce CD community garden site in Washington.

Communities and Outreach

Every recipient of a 2020 UAC grant prioritized technical assistance to clients previously unreached by CDs and/or who may be food insecure or lack access to fresh produce. Common audiences through the district efforts include lower income populations, environmental justice areas as defined by the Environmental Protection Agency, historically underserved individuals, veterans, beginning farmers, immigrants and refugees, and many others.

Through the various outreach campaigns, workshops, delivery of produce, educational activities, volunteer days, training programs and other activities, the 2020 grantees estimated they reached over 165,000 individuals. This number provides a snapshot of the number of people who accessed programs through the UAC grant program during the grant time frames but does not necessarily reflect the total number of people who will continue to have access to healthy, culturally appropriate foods that are grown with the help of various conservation activities.

For example, **Ongoing Activities**: As this project collaborated with the Pullman Community Garden Board that is working towards a unified community vision and strategic plan, the legacy and longevity of this project will be housed within the strategic plan. Based off interest provided by the community, a need was represented to

continue urban agricultural education at the community garden. We have a great working relationship with the Pullman Community Garden Board and are already seeking funding efforts to help support their mission and maintain partnership. We will be working with WA State Department of Ecology to focus efforts on the riparian corridor that flows adjacent to the community garden. Maintenance of physical property such as the pollinator plot and signage will hopefully be provided through in-kind programs such as our volunteer events.

Lessons Learned: As this funding is for a short period of time, it is important to work closely with community partners to build out a vision that aligns with the partner's goals or whoever may be overseeing tangible products after the funding has ended. It was important for us to maintain direct communication with the Board and outline clear expectations throughout the project.

Be willing to be flexible and think outside the box. The local restrictions of COVID-19 challenged us to think creatively on how we can maintain community engagement without face-to-face interactions. Thinking of alternative avenues of communication and how best to reach people during a national lockdown, taught us

Pierce CD in Washington used their grant for their project, titled **Project Title:** Tribal Sovereignty and Medicine Garden in East Tacoma, to provide access to a new community garden site for two previously unreached groups: a P'urepecha population from Mexico and the Puyallup Tribe of Indians. The P'urepecha community used a traditional *milpa* farming system at the site, which incorporates the culturally important crops of squash, beans, and corn, thus providing access to native foods while demonstrating farming practices that conserve water, provide soil organic matter, and increase beneficial insect biodiversity (Figure 5).

The new garden site is adjacent to an early learning center of the Puyallup Tribe, and the district staff helped support the development of a garden specifically to serve the school's children. One of the P'urepecha community members partnered with the center to design and build the children's garden, planting traditional and medicinal plants with informational signs in the Puyallup Language (Lushootseed).

In addition to the farming activities that took place at the garden site, many of the gardeners took an interest in- and began additional conservation activities for the location. The district worked with several local agencies focused on water quality to start a project to clean and maintain a nearby salmon-bearing stream. As of September 2021, volunteers have removed 1.77 tons of trash and have continued to work on stream care since.

While many of the district projects through the UAC program are targeted to urban farmers, many are also implemented to engage students and their families in agriculture and conservation. **Kittitas County CD** in Washington used their Thorp School District "Farm to School" Initiative to provide technical assistance during the conversion of unused land on school grounds into a working farm.

Thorp is a small rural school district in the heart of the Kittitas Valley. They began planning their farm to school project in 2018, and with the help of a Capital Projects Levy passed by Thorp taxpayers, the school could implement some major infrastructure improvements to their facilities, including the remodel of the shop and computer lab, building a greenhouse, and remodeling the kitchen in an older building. These infrastructure improvements provided some of the match toward the district's UAC grant, which they used to provide technical assistance to the school related to establishing a pollinator garden, restoration of native plants along an adjacent waterway, the development of a nature trail through the site, and installation of an irrigation system.

The district also helped to facilitate some of the activities at the farm site, including partnering with the Veteran Conservation Corps to clear the land (Figure 6), and helping to develop a website to share information about the garden to others within the county.

As a learning site in addition to a working farm, the school has already had success growing vegetables on site while proving educational opportunities for their students. At least two student clubs, Future Farmers and Future

Figure 6. Veteran's Conservation Corp interns chip a pile of debris at the Thorp School Farm in Washington (left) and a one-page handout developed by the district describing some of the needs for starting a school farm in Spanish (right).

Business Leaders of America (FFA and FBLA) have used the gardens to grow flowers and other seedlings from the greenhouse in the spring and pumpkins in the fall to then sell as fundraisers for their activities.

To help other schools start similar efforts, the district also developed one-page handouts in English and Spanish, with information on who to involve, informational resources, and the type of space needed for a school farm.

Partnerships

The CDs participating in the UAC grant program partnered with over 100 organizations to support their activities. Many of these partners contributed to the development of community farming and gardening programs, expanded outreach to current and underrepresented clients, provided land or other infrastructure, served as hosts for events or other activities, or supported the development of new markets or provided other avenues for urban farmers to share their harvest. Common partners included youth groups like 4-H, FFA and Scouts, faith-based and community-centered organizations, school and park districts, local and state governments, universities and educational groups like county extension offices, and environmentally focused nonprofits.

As an example, **Thurston CD** in Washington worked closely with at least 24 different organizations to conduct their project, Home Grown Yelm. Thurston CD planned and implemented a community garden on park land in the City of Yelm, on the same site where the city host's a weekly farmers market. The garden site allowed for opportunities to host workshops, educational events and volunteer days with the Nisqually Indian Tribe, multiple youth and community organizations, the school district, local governments, Washington State University Extension and Master Gardeners, and several other organizations (Figure 7). The implementation of the community garden provided ample opportunities for the district to reach new audiences on topics related to soil health, water conservation, pollinator habitat, and small-scale livestock production. Many of the individuals reached lack access to fresh produce, and through partnerships with Yelm Community Services and Crossroads Community Covenant Food Pantry, the district was also able to help community gardeners donate additional produce to food insecure individuals.

Figure 7. Staff and volunteers with Thurston CD in Washington build garden beds.

This district is especially notable for the partnerships among the grantees in FY 2020, not only for the high number of partners and the success of their relationships, but because of additional outcomes that will extend beyond the time frame of the grant. Staff from Thurston CD noted that their UAC grant helped forge new partnerships that will allow for continued collaborative work in the community, and they have also been asked to participate in local work groups like the Puget Sound Regional Food System Steering Committee, a coordinated multi-year initiative addressing food system policy and actions at a regional level.

Likewise, **Ashland SWCD** in Ohio also partnered with a high number of organizations, over 25, to conduct their project. Initially, the district had planned to deliver a variety of in-person programming related to conservation within small scale food production and stormwater management, but thanks to some creative partnerships, they were able to develop a variety of successful events and activities. The district developed monthly in-classroom programming for 107 Head Start students, who are typically low-income or meet other at-risk criteria for inclusion in the program, which quickly transformed into weekly series of #TeachMeTuesday videos. These videos cover topics as diverse as raised bed gardens, how to use garden produce, why soils are important, hatching chicks, and rainbows. These videos have been very successful for the district, with hundreds of views.

For the same Head Start students and their families, the district also planned community-wide drive-thru events for Arbor Day, during which students received an apple tree to take home. The district also installed rain barrels and raised bed gardens at the county's four Head Start centers, to demonstrate rainwater harvesting, stormwater management, and small-scale gardening. During the grant time frame, Head Start parents were not able to participate in any direct gardening activities at the centers, but they each received a windowsill herb garden and recipes for incorporating herbs into kid-friendly meals.

The district also partnered with several other organizations to provide demonstration sites and workshops related to stormwater management on private property (Figure 8), including a very successful event they call Rain Beat on Main Street. Local businesses support the purchase of rain barrels for the event, and local artists donate their time to paint the rain barrels. The barrels are then displayed throughout two communities in the county to garner support for at-home water conservation, as well as additional district activities related to stormwater management.

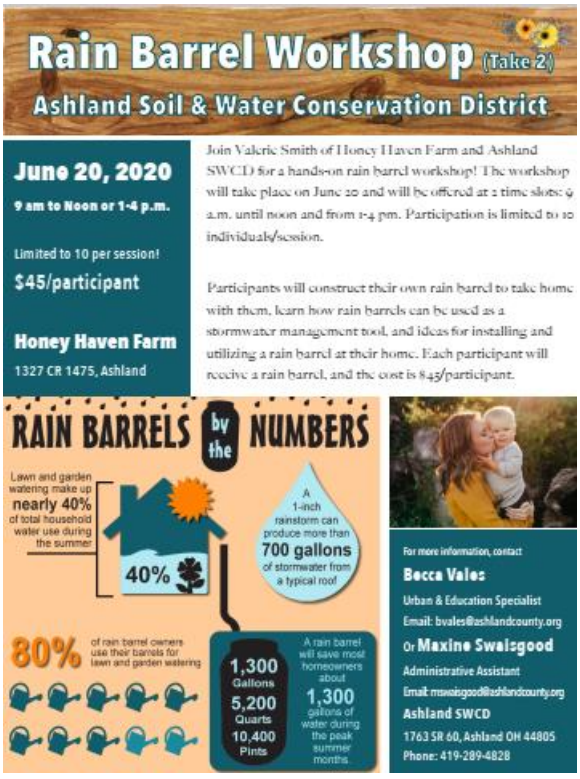

Figure 8. Promotional flyer for a water conservation workshop offered by Ashland SWCD in Ohio.

These partnerships have enabled to district to provide

conservation education to previously unreached audiences, and they plan to continue similar programming thanks to partnerships with the Ashland County Park District, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, and others.

Many of the other UAC grantees were able to identify and forge new partnerships, providing excellent examples for other districts wishing to reach new or previously untargeted audiences for conservation districts. **Colonial SWCD** in Virginia, for example, partnered with the local non-profit Williamsburg Community Growers (WCG) to enhance urban agriculture and conservation education opportunities for students and community members throughout the greater Williamsburg region. Both organizations share missions to increase conservation education opportunities for the public; provide demonstrations of urban agriculture conservation practices; and increase access to fresh, local produce. Since 2016, WCG has operated a community garden that has seen tremendous growth in membership and a teaching farm that is supported by local students and volunteers.

Colonial SWCD was able to employ a part-time Urban Agriculture Technician to oversee all aspects of production at the WCG teaching farm including crop planning, planting, harvesting, pest management, irrigation, and post-harvest handling. Recognizing the need for sustainability beyond grant funding, the Urban Agriculture Technician also developed a revenue stream to continue the position. Several projects were implemented to accomplish this goal, including a pilot CSA, a weekly farm stand to sell produce to the public, and a new partnership to sell produce to a local restaurant.

The restaurant, called Lokal, offers many plant-based dishes that feature locally sourced produce, so developing this partnership supports the missions of both entities. With flexible menu options, Lokal has purchased whatever produce is currently harvestable at the teaching farm, although in the future this partnership may be expanded to include specific produce requests from Lokal into seasonal planting plans.

Figure 9. Student volunteers harvest produce in collaboration with Colonial SWCD in Virginia.

Other outcomes from Colonial SWCD's project include almost 4,000 pounds of produce donated from the teaching farm to local food pantries and low-income families; dozens of new volunteers, including students (Figure 9), helping in the teaching farm; and the creation of an educational workshop series to introduce community members to gardening and conservation. The district considers these partnerships and connections integral to the future success of their urban agriculture efforts.

Timeline and Budget

Typically, grantees in the UAC program are given 1-year to complete their projects, and rarely receive extensions due to circumstances like delays in planning or partnership activities. Most of the 2020 grantees began their projects in February and March of 2020, with a projected end date of April 2021. However, due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, all but 2 of the grantees required an extension to their project timelines, with some needing as much as an additional 6-months because of the need to change project activities due to restrictions related to in-person gatherings. Nonetheless, the districts showed an unparalleled level of creativity and resilience when

modifying their proposed activities, while continuing to provide conservation technical assistance to their clients and partners.

As a requirement of the grant, districts must provide a match in funds at least equal to 25% of the total project funds provided by NACD, from nonfederal sources. Many of the grantees worked with the abovementioned partners to provide cash or in-kind match, with contributions totaling $588,126 on a required match of $233,058.03.

While many districts are not faced with challenges in meeting the match components of the grant, some have faced budget issues related to the rising costs of hiring and retaining staff. Many of the districts that apply for a UAC grant have the staff in-place to conduct activities related to urban agriculture, but many others use the grant to explore new opportunities with previously unreached clients. **Boone County SWCD** in Missouri is one such district, who applied for the UAC grant to build capacity to support and sustain urban agriculture technical assistance through the creation of a new Urban Ag Specialist position (Figure 10).

Figure 10. An urban farm visited by Boone County SWCD in Missouri; the UAC grant enabled the district to newly provide technical assistance to urban producers.

The district was initially able to hire the Urban Ag Specialist, with this individual quickly moving on for a higher-paying and longer-term position. Staffing then proved challenging during 2020, with the district struggling to find employable people for a shorter-term contract. Nonetheless, they were eventually able to fill the position for the duration of the UAC funding and have prepared for future staffing issues by working with partners to quickly apply for additional funding opportunities. In addition, the district has prepared job descriptions, duties, onboarding materials, and tools to refill the Urban Ag Specialist position once they are able to secure additional funding.

As a result of their experience, district staff indicated that their UAC grant that has better enabled them to build their capacity related to reaching urban agriculturalists. They have a clearer picture of the staffing landscape, and their budget needs to provide technical assistance. Additionally, they have developed several successful partnerships that will support their established work while they seek out longer-term funding sources.

Sustainability

As districts are currently limited to two UAC grants of $50,000 each, and they cannot apply for consecutive funding cycles, the ability to support their programs outside of this funding program is essential. Many have secured ongoing funding through their partnerships, with some of these relationships described previously. Several other districts were able to successfully leverage their UAC grants into funding through additional grant opportunities, including **Cumberland SWCD** in Maine (Figure 11). The district developed a project to assist communities in creating Community Agriculture Plans (CAP), with the intent of incorporating urban agriculture into larger, municipal comprehensive plans and budgets. The district successfully piloted the CAPs in four communities, with each CAP also serving as an opportunity to conduct needs assessments related to urban agriculture in each community. These surveys provided information on the perceived value of urban agriculture,

Figure 11. Results of an urban agriculture needs assessment conducted by the Cumberland SWCD in Maine (left); stakeholders for the Portland Community Agriculture Plan gather in-person for the first time to conclude the project and discuss next steps (right).

potential partner organizations, and awareness of ongoing urban agriculture efforts.

The district was awarded a $30,000 grant through the Environmental Protection Agency to conduct outreach on soil lead contamination and provide free, facilitated soil testing and plant tissue sampling for lead contamination. The proposal was based on knowledge of community needs gained in part through the CAPs conducted during their UAC grant.

Similarly, **Valencia SWCD** operates the East Valencia Urban Garden Program (EVUGP), which supports two community gardens in the eastern part of their county in New Mexico. The gardens demonstrate conservation practices like no-till cover crops and composting and to provide education on topics like soil health and pollinator habitat, while youth interns can learn about agriculture and potential careers (Figure 12). Several local partners support the district in distributing the harvested produce (over 2,500 pounds of food annually) to low-income families in need, as well, allowing the gardens to serve multiple goals of the community related to increasing education, access to healthy produce, and conservation.

Figure 12. Youth interns weigh produce harvested at gardens in the East Valencia Urban Garden Program (EVUGP) managed by Valencia SWCD in New Mexico.

The ongoing successes with the EVUGP (the FY 2020 UAC grant was the district's second, with the first in 2016) allowed the district to expand their youth education components by successfully securing a $30,000 New Mexico Children, Youth, and Families Department grant. The new funding will allow the district and partners to hire additional youth interns to support in garden management, as well as implement a children's garden program and plan additional educational events.

While securing ongoing funding through other grant programs provides opportunities for districts to continue their work related to urban agriculture and conservation, establishing long-term, secure funding streams is still a relative challenge for many of the UAC grantees. Some have been able to identify the potential for sustainable revenue streams, with the **Inland Empire RCD** (IERCD) in California providing one such example.

The district supports the Huerta del Valle Community Garden (HdV), which serves as a training and farming site for disadvantaged communities—those that are most impacted by environmental pollution, low income, high unemployment, and high rent burden—as designated by the State of California. Many of HdV's farmers are also underrepresented minority urban agricultural producers, migrant and non-English speaking individuals, who may otherwise lack access to technical assistance, fresh produce, and educational opportunities (Figure 13).

The district hired a full-time staff member to develop two new monthly pop-up market opportunities in the communities of San Bernardino and Jurupa Valley to bring locally grown produce to food desert communities, resulting in 38 additional market days with over 700 market visitors. Additionally, the district piloted a new model to sell their produce with Cookbook LA, a local greengrocer who has agreed to pay retail pricing and will order large quantities of produce from HdV on a weekly basis. These opportunities, as well as the potential for relationships with other grocers that the district is currently working to secure, will enable IERCD and HdV to sustain staff while keeping produce prices low for communities in need.

These relationships are also instrumental in providing funding for continued technical assistance on emerging conservation needs. For example, through a partnership with the UC Cooperative Extension, IERCD staff also organized six virtual workshops for farmers and community members focused on food preservation and the Asian Citrus Psyllid, an extremely harmful pest for Southern California citrus. Too, IERCD staff worked with new and beginning farmers affiliated with HdV to support them in completing their Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) certification to be able to sell their produce to larger markets, which often require a GAP certification. While the hope is that the market and grocery opportunities will eventually support the staff fully to provide this technical assistance, the district has secured additional funding through California's Department of Conservation to fund staff focused specifically on the Asian Citrus Psyillid work, and to contribute to other regional agriculture planning projects.

Figure 13. IERCD and HdV staff member Evelyn Hurtado providing pickiling kits for community members, made from produce at HdV.

Lessons Learned

Every district awarded a grant in FY 2020 provided ample lessons learned for other districts that may be looking to expand their own urban agriculture conservation initiatives. For example, to ensure farmers new to technical assistance within the United States have access to USDA programs and other learning opportunities, **Northern Rhode Island CD** (NRICD) further developed their existing Urban Growers Leadership Program (UGLP) through their FY 2020 grant. The UGLP is a workshop and mentorship program that provides leading urban growers and gardeners with the skills they need to address the significant problem of food deserts in the urban areas of Providence County.

Figure 14. Kinyarwanda-speaking participants gather around a facilitator, to talk about the "lasagna" method of composting.

Thanks to the FY 2020 UAC funding, the UGLP was available to non-English speaking participants, with all program elements offered in both English and Kinyarwanda, a Rwandan language commonly spoken by a large population of refugees residing in Providence County (Figure 14). Future years of the program will also be offered in additional languages to increase its accessibility to other non-English speaking communities.

For district staff who do not speak languages other than English, working with translators can provide the skills needed to ensure clients are reached in a culturally appropriate way. Through their experience offering the UGLP in Kinyarwanda, NRICD suggests allocating plenty of time when working with translation and interpretation services, and to develop relationships with multiple translators and interpreters to ensure programs are not interrupted if an interpreter becomes unavailable. Likewise, the district suggests practicing patience and flexibility while keeping an open mind, not only for creating useful programming in general, but especially in the event of a global pandemic.

With the help of these lessons learned and the district's early successes, NRICD has secured additional funding to expand the UGLP program in coming years, with the potential to grow both the cohort size (currently 10, with half speaking Kinyarwanda) and the number of languages in which the program is offered.

Additionally, **Cuyahoga SWCD** in Ohio provided several additional lessons learned, thanks in part to staff departures and the loss of a project site. The district applied for their UAC grant to work with community groups to design and install a perennial urban agroforestry site and learning and eating orchards (with a focus on native North American fruits) at school sites in Cuyahoga County.

The district was able to successfully install two urban agroforestry sites, after a new staff member joined the team. This staff person was able to identify new sites for the project while also establishing several successful partnerships. As a result of these challenges, Cuyahoga SWCD staff emphasize the need to establish memorandums of understanding (MOUs) with partners prior to agreeing to any project activities or seeking out funding to realize a project. These MOUs can help identify clear partnership goals and responsibilities prior to starting any activities, which allows for boots and shovels to hit the ground as soon as possible according to the district.

Figure 15. Students from Case Western University help clear an urban agroforestry site managed by Cuyahoga SWCD in Ohio.

Additional Information

This report does not provide a comprehensive overview of all activities conducted by CDs under the 2020 UAC grant initiative, and only summarizes various aspects of the projects. For additional information about the UAC grantees, including past project reports and information about each grantee, visit NACD's Urban and Community Conservation webpage.

Grantees through the program are also frequently featured in NACD's monthly Urban and Community Conservation webinars; the full archive is available online.

Appendix A: 2020 Grantee Project Descriptions and Outcomes

California

Inland Empire RCD

Project Title: Developing Urban Agriculture Projects and a New Generation of Urban Farmers in the Inland Empire

Project Description: The Inland Empire RCD will develop new farmers market opportunities in an underserved community to engage with local residents and encourage urban agriculture. Local farmers will be offered opportunities to participate in these markets and will be supported though Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) Assessments trainings, New Farmer Trainings, and other technical assistance.

Ongoing Activities: The staff member responsible for the implementation of this project will continue to work through a partnership with Huerta del Valle and IERCD. The position will be funded through both organizations to continue this work and take on new projects related to food access in underserved communities.

IERCD has also hired a new Sustainable Ag Lead position with funding from a California Dept. of Conservation grant that will continue the efforts on outreaching to farmers about Asian Citrus Psyllid and the resulting Citrus Greening Disease and contribute to other regional agriculture planning projects in line with this NACD project.

Riverside-Corona RCD

Project Title: Conservation Projects for Northside Heritage Meadows

Description: The Riverside-Corona RCD will provide planning and interpretive assistance, plus outreach for the Northside Heritage Meadows Project, which will serve emerging farmers, community gardeners and disadvantaged residents. The project will include interpretive signage, publications, conservation assistance, and community engagement in development of a 7-acre urban agriculture, greening and community garden project.

Ongoing Activities: Because of the variety of challenges this community faces, a team of Riverside City staff, several community members, and partners including RCRCD sought a competitive state grant. The City was awarded $3 million to fund Phase 1 of the project. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f4itDhwYlD8;

The community garden planning committee meets monthly, is establishing garden rules, and is fundraising. Love Tito's is bringing a grant of $35,000 for the garden buildout and two-day event in March 2022. This event will be promoted in Spanish and on a Spanish-speaking radio station.

Lessons Learned: [Partners can be] very slow at implementing the project, which delayed [the district's] component.

Indiana

Marion County SWCD

Project Title: Native Plant Agriculture on Urban Farms

Description: The Marion County SWCD will utilize the conservation practices of cover crops, hedgerow planting, and multi-story cropping to enhance farm-scaping with native plants to provide perennial agricultural food and medicinal products as well as valuable ecosystem services including biodiversity and critical habitat for beneficial insects and pollinators.

Ongoing Activities: Through trainings and workshops, the SWCD and partner Indy Urban Acres now have increased capacity to provide technical assistance in the realm of native plantings and perennial agriculture to

growers, agencies, and the public.

Indy Urban Acres organic farm and the SWCD Eagle Creek Demonstration Garden have native plant demonstration areas that are being utilized for educational workshops and technical assistance. To ensure establishment of recent plantings, the SWCD and farm staff are coordinating with volunteer groups such as universities, extension, and youth groups to help maintain the areas while receiving education.

The SWCD's partnership with the Indiana Native Plant Society has been strengthened through this grant, and both organizations have increased support for each other in outreach and on-farm technical assistance.

The SWCD helped Indy Urban Acres incorporate native plants into their annual plant sale, which funds their mission to provide produce to those in need. The farm saw great success in the first year and is continuing to grow and sell native plants.

The Indiana USDA-NRCS has witnessed the success of the Marion County SWCD soil health program and has entered into 5-year cooperative agreement with the SWCD to continue this work.

Maine

Cumberland SWCD

Project Title: Community Agriculture Planning Project

Description: The Cumberland SWCD Community Agriculture Planning Project will assist municipalities in creating Community Agriculture Plans to be easily integrated into larger municipal comprehensive plans and budgets. Implementing this project will expand the SWCD's work to propagate enduring community agriculture programs throughout the county.

Ongoing Activities: Extensive efforts were made to promote project sustainability:

- Project toolkit was distributed to partners
- Presentation made to NACD, MACD, and local partners
- Community agriculture plans were presented to department level staff and relevant municipal committees
- For each municipality with a community agriculture plan, a primary point of contact and responsible Department was identified to provide continuity. The goal is for the contact person to promote the plan's action items on the municipal level, and update it as needed.
- CCSWCD has been awarded another EPA grant ($30k) to conduct outreach on soil lead contamination and provide free, facilitated soil testing and plant tissue sampling for lead contamination. The proposal was based on knowledge of community needs gained in part from work on the NACD grant.

Michigan

Genesee CD

Project Title: Urban Agriculture and Conservation Technical Assistance

Description: The Genesee CD will provide technical assistance to urban growers and backyard conservationists in Flint, Michigan. The CD will operate an agriculture-producing market garden, convene local food system partners, repurpose vacant lots by applying conservation systems, develop community forestry and conservation outreach materials, and maintain their urban wood tree reutilization program.

Ongoing Activities: An opportunity for enhanced capacity may be realized if Genesee County, Michigan county commissioners and voters will support a multi-year millage. In July 2021, the Genesee Conservation District Board of Directors, and the Flint River Watershed Coalition Board, voted to pursue placement of the initiative on the

County's August 2022 ballot. If the millage passes, it will provide needed stability for the district's operations in urban, suburban, and rural areas.

Lessons Learned: Other Conservation District's may want to approach urban conservation initiatives in a similar manner to GCD. Our lesson is to start small. In our case, we started with stormwater management public education, then urban and community forestry, which we implemented on an increasing scope for several years before expanding into urban agriculture and vacant lot restoration.

Missouri

Boone County SWCD

Project Title: Building Capacity to Support Urban Agriculture in the Boone County

Description: The Boone County SWCD will build its capacity to support and sustain urban agriculture technical assistance, activities, outreach, promotions, and conservation practice education and implementation in central Missouri through the creation of a new Urban Ag Specialist position.

Ongoing Activities: Several steps have been taken in grant proposal preparation to make things easier for the SWCD to identify grant opportunities and submit proposals in a timely fashion, including an inventory of our accomplishments, capabilities, and future objectives. We are continuing to work with partners we connected with through this project to identify and apply for grants and other funding opportunities.

In addition, we have job descriptions, duties, onboarding materials, tools, and other important pieces in place to refill the Urban Ag Specialist position and get them quickly up to speed once additional funding has been secured in the future. Through the work that has been done we've made additional connections in the community with urban producers.

Lessons Learned: It's important to balance funds for program activities and to be able to support a staff position, but the landscape has changed so much [since 2020] that additional funds are necessary to recruit and retain staff. The unofficial minimum wage is at least $15/hour, but we have fast food restaurants offering $17+/hour locally and need to target large grants to fill any special positions going forward. Compensation is something that needs to be properly addressed, even though we had no idea that things would change so much in a short period of time, we will now make sure we have higher wages in the budget of proposals.

Building relationships with urban producers is a great way to connect with that community, and the easiest way to reach them is through word of-mouth between those community members. It's difficult to target them with advertising or to try and connect at farmers markets when they are busy managing their stalls, but they communicate with each other and will gladly spread the word about anyone who helps them and may be helpful to others.

New Mexico

Valencia SWCD

Project Title: East Valencia Urban Gardens Program

Description: The Valencia SWCD will enhance the East Valencia Urban Gardens Program by expanding a community garden, implementing a kids' gardening program, establishing garden Community Advisory Boards, creating a school garden network, developing a grower's market, and building partnerships to support new farmers district-wide.

Ongoing Activities: We have secured a FY22 grant and are working to hold multiple events in 2022 at the gardens.

We are hoping to build a Community Advisory Board in 2022 and are committed to a more effective garden intern recruitment strategy for the coming year. The district obtained funding through New Mexico Children, Youth and Families Department (NM CYFD) and NM Next Generation Grant.

Lessons Learned: Gaining community support is beyond critical and very hard to secure; start small and be sustainable—under promise/over deliver.

New York

Warren County SWCD

Project Description: The Warren County SWCD is partnering with Warrensburg Community Gardens in constructing raised beds to demonstrate soil health best management practices and installing a hedgerow for beneficial insects and windbreak. The SWCD will host workshops on soil health BMPs including no-till, cover crops, mulching and nutrient management.

Ongoing Activities: Promoting the implementation for best management practices for soil conservation will continue to be a priority for the district. Offering this grant at the Warrensburg Community Garden opened new approaches to promote soil conservation for many of the gardeners. Since the work began at the community garden, gardeners took an immediate interest in soil health. We were requested to assist them with their plots, discuss what practices we were utilizing, and were even asked to visit other garden plots at their personal property. This also proved to be the case after we hosted out first workshop titled Healthy Soils & Community Garden Workshop. Many of the members began to plan at that point for ways they could incorporate soil conservation practices into their farming approaches. When we offered a 25lb bag of peas and oats for folks to try, the bag was completely emptied within a week and essentially all the beds were cover cropped with the mix.

This grant opened new avenues for us to work closely with the Warrensburg Beautification Committee and the Warrensburg Parks and Recreation Department. The Warrensburg Parks and Recreation staff provided us with the much-needed equipment and support to complete this grant. They were also very pleased with the progress made at the garden as they needed to build a new composting unit which the grant was able to provide funds for. In addition, the hedgerow was a great addition to the community garden as it acts as a pollinator garden and best management practices for water quality at the newly developed Paper Mill Park.

Ohio

Ashland SWCD

Project Title: Encouraging Urban Agriculture in Ashland County

Description: The Ashland SWCD will partner with Main Street Ashland, local Head Start and FFA programs to install urban gardens at Head Start centers bringing garden access to low-income families, efficiently managing stormwater, and improving pollinator habitat – all while creating hands-on agricultural education opportunities for at-risk preschool students.

Ongoing Activities: Our #TeachMeTuesday video library was created to adopt to COVID-19 restrictions but will be a valuable tool for educators in our community and state for years to come. We provided Growing Up Wild certification and training to several early childhood teachers in our community, which will empower them to incorporate those principles into their classrooms into the future. We assisted two of the head start centers in completing Project Wild education grants that will allow them to install bird-watching stations and habitat at their centers; those proposals are still awaiting a funding determination.

The rain barrels and raised bed gardens installed at our county's head start centers will be used for years to come

as well. Additionally, each family received a windowsill herb garden kit and seeds that they will hopefully be able to use and care for to incorporate fresh herbs into kid friendly meals into the future. Our rain garden and rain barrel workshops were received with great enthusiasm, and we will be continuing those programs. This success also allowed us to add rain barrel kits to our annual tree sale offerings. We have installed a rain garden and rain barrel demonstration area at the Ashland County Fairground that will be seen by thousands of visitors each year. Our Rain Beat on Main Street rain barrel art program and auction raised $2,100 for stormwater education last year and has grown from 10 barrels in 2020 to 15 barrels this year with tremendous community response and support.

Cuyahoga SWCD

Project Title: Establishing Perennial Food Systems in Cuyahoga County

Description: The Cuyahoga SWCD will work with community groups to design and install a perennial urban agroforestry site and a school's learning and eating orchard in Cuyahoga County with a focus on native North American fruits.

Ongoing Activities: To ensure that the Food Forest will continue to be enhanced and cultivated Cuyahoga Soil & Water Conservation District has built partnerships with both the Coit Road Farmers Market and Central State University Extension to continue maintenance and programming on the site. We have planned additional plantings in the Spring of 2022.

There is also a Hoop House that is being re-constructed on site. This Hoop House was previously abandoned but was able to be recovered and will have new life serving as a point of operations for the Tree Corps operated by Holden Forest & Gardens. Additionally, trees and plants will be propagated from the nuts/seeds and used to continue to fill in the forest on site as well as be given to residents and groups in the area to allow for at home growth or enhancement of other community sites and projects. At the Garfield Heights High School site will be continued to be maintained by the city and serve as a possible educational spot for both the highs school as well as the community garden directly adjacent.

Lessons Learned: Pre-grant work is the major key to success. Have all MOUs out and greed to with project partners and sites secured, or ready to be secured with funding. This allows boots and shovels to hit the ground as soon as possible.

Pennsylvania

Allegheny County CD

Project Title: Soil Health 2.0: Enhancing Productivity in Allegheny County

Description: The Allegheny County CD will support a series of soil health science and management workshops, development of an Urban Soil Management Guide, provide staff support for a pilot Master Composter program, and map out soil properties for potential Urban Ag lands across vacant lots in two low-income communities.

Ongoing Activities: ACCD has developed or solidified partnerships with several academic institutions and non-profits to ensure the ability of these programs to move forward. Additionally, we are collaborating with City and County Government to ensure sustained funding and grant partnerships to support our efforts moving forward. Partner examples include the University of Pittsburgh's Department of Geology and Environmental Science, Chatham University Food Studies Program, Grow Pittsburgh, Pa Association for Sustainable Ag., Carnegie Museum of Natural History, Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens, the Pittsburgh Food Policy Council, the Black Urban Farmers and Gardeners Cooperative, and Hilltop Urban Farm and Incubator Program.

Lessons Learned: It is impossible to do all this work alone. Sustainability means finding creative ways to partner and share the workload. You must become comfortable not just sharing credit, but sometimes allowing others to take it completely. The results are what matters.

Indiana County CD

Project Title: Growing Community Education of Urban Agriculture with Community Partners

Description: The Indiana County CD will establish local partnerships to improve operations and locate spaces for edible plants to provide onsite examples for workshops on urban agriculture and soil health BMPs. CD staff will be trained to prepare and run workshops to expand knowledge of local agriculture as well as soil and water management.

Ongoing Activities: The ICCD has partnered with the Indiana Community Garden (ICG) and Mack Park to establish a pollinator meadow and educational signage on the site. The ICG are very active in maintaining the meadow and the surrounding area and are eager to provide additional information and resources to interested individuals. ICCD has also made four informational webinars that have been recorded and uploaded to our YouTube channel on pollinators, community gardens, backyard gardening, and rain gardens.

Lessons Learned: Being able to adapt quickly in a changing environment is very important. As the COVID-19 situation changed everything throughout 2020, we needed to adjust from planning in-person workshops at Mack Park to virtual webinars. It is very likely in the future other unforeseen circumstances will arise and any organization must be able to adjust accordingly to continue providing useful services, specifically for underserved communities.

Rhode Island

Northern Rhode Island CD

Project Title: Urban Growers Leadership Program

Description: The Northern Rhode Island CD, in partnership with leading urban farming and gardening organizations, will provide technical assistance to support a new class of skilled urban growing leaders and trainers in Northern Rhode Island through a series of “Train the Trainer” workshops and long-term guidance.

Ongoing Activities: Thanks to new funding that has been secured to begin on September 30, 2021, this project will continue next year in an enhanced capacity. The 2021-22 program will offer two cohorts, doubling the number of producers who are able to participate, and will once again be offered in two languages. The 22-23 and 23-24 programs will feature three cohorts and be offered in three languages.

Lessons Learned: In this year’s program, we learned to allocate plenty of time when working with translation and interpretation services and to develop relationships with multiple translators and interpreters so that there are options to pursue when “life happens.” We also were given ample opportunity to practice flexibility and learned that keeping an open mind is essential to creating useful programming in the time of COVID.

South Carolina

Richland SWCD

Project Title: BEEfriend Local Pollinators: Pollinator Conservation Technical Assistance, Demonstration and Outreach

Description: The Richland SWCD will up-fit and expand a pollinator conservation demonstration and teaching area

in a county-owned park and will use this resource to provide pollinator conservation technical assistance to small farmers, educators, and home/community gardeners in the midlands of South Carolina through a series of outreach events and publicity campaigns.

Ongoing Activities: A detailed management plan was developed to guide future garden maintenance as a part of the Urban Agriculture Conservation grant work, and this document will provide a road map for continuing the demonstration garden. Pollinator garden maintenance has been taken on by a team of community volunteers under the leadership of volunteer coordinator Robert Reese. Community interest in the project is high due to project outreach during the pandemic, and the Richland County Conservation Commission and the Richland Soil and Water Conservation District are committed to the continuation of this work at Pinewood Lake Park.

Virginia

Colonial SWCD

Project Title: Enhancing Urban Agriculture Through Conservation and Education

Description: The Colonial SWCD will expand current urban agriculture conservation and education initiatives in partnership with non-profit Williamsburg Community Growers (WCG). This expansion will include demonstration projects with an emphasis on sustainability in a rapidly developing region, public educational opportunities, and continued development of the WCG Teaching Farm and Community Garden.

Ongoing Activities: The development of more sustainable revenue streams was an important objective of this grant. The Urban Agriculture Technician (UAT) employed with grant funding implemented several revenue development projects, including a pilot CSA, a pilot opportunity to sell produce to local restaurants, and a weekly farm stand to sell produce to the public. Beyond these efforts, several large grant applications have been submitted to continue the UAT position, which has proven to be vital to the continued success of WCG. The Colonial SWCD was also able to use internal funds to extend the UAT employment period to July 31, 2021.

Throughout the grant period emphasis was also placed on strengthening WCG as a non-profit by continuing to refine Board positions and seeking training for Board members, increasing outreach efforts for new volunteers, and developing policies and procedures for hosting classes and field trips onsite. These efforts will allow the Colonial SWCD and WCG to successfully continue to offer urban agriculture programming beyond the grant period.

Lessons Learned: The best piece of advice the Colonial SWCD could share for any Districts who are considering taking on a similar project would be to start building relationships and partnerships with other organizations in the community who may be interested in similar objectives as soon as possible. These partnerships will prove to be invaluable for sustainable success and true community support.

Washington

Kitsap CD

Project Title: The GRACE Planting Pollinator Patches Project

Description: The Kitsap CD will promote native pollinator conservation in urban environments by establishing pollinator/herb plantings in urban gardens, conducting outreach, and collaborating on workshops with community partners. While providing fresh herbs to food banks and community meals, the gardens will demonstrate, educate, and expand habitat for native pollinators.

Ongoing Activities: Building on the momentum of the UAC Grant, Kitsap CD received an additional $97,905 in

capacity building grants for partner organizations to purchase refrigeration, freezers, a refrigerated truck, and coolers to store fresh produce. Funding also supported a Farm to Freezer Program to process excess produce into frozen ready-to-eat soups.

Looking forward to 2021, KCD will continue to host an AmeriCorps Service member at the GRACE Garden. This person maintains the pollinator hedgerow and garden, and herb garden and plant a pollinator meadow at the district. As part of these activities, we will document the process for web and print-based outreach, install signage and COVID permitting, organize tours and workshops during summer and fall 2021.

The district is committed to continued support for the GRACE Program with local and state funding and will continue to seek additional grants to build on program success.

Kittitas County CD

Project Title: Thorp School District "Farm to School" Initiative

Description: The Kittitas County CD will assist the Thorp School District in pursuing a “Farm to School” initiative including converting unused land on the school grounds into a viable, sustainable working farm, adding infrastructure including a greenhouse, integrating the initiative into K-12 classrooms, and promoting urban agriculture practices in the community.

Ongoing Activities: The Thorp School District included the farm to school project in a capital levy passed in 2019. They also received grant funding from the Washington State Department of Agriculture. Together these sources and the NACD UAC grant ensure substantial capital facilities were constructed (greenhouse, pergola, irrigation system, etc.). The levy funds also include updates to the school kitchen facilities as part of the farm to school project. The school also incorporated the project directly into their curriculum and at least two student clubs (FFA and FBLA) are involved as well. They are already selling flowers and other seedlings from the greenhouse in the spring and pumpkins in the fall. The project is well planned and funded and is being implemented per the original schedule (except for some COVID related delays).

Lessons Learned: Projects are easier when working with a highly motivated school district. We were fortunate to come into a situation with exceptionally strong support from the Superintendent and staff. Gathering that support prior to applying for funding is critical to success.

Palouse CD

Project Title: A Koppel Couple Meant to Be: Conservation and Community Farming

Description: The Palouse CD will continue the preservation of Historic Koppel Farm by developing a long-term conservation plan to provide soil health, water quality and invasive species mitigation. The CD aims to encourage and support social programs that engage the community in access to healthy, fresh produce regardless of income.

Ongoing Activities: As this project collaborated with the Pullman Community Garden Board that is working towards a unified community vision and strategic plan, the legacy and longevity of this project will be housed within the strategic plan. Based off interest provided by the community, a need was represented to continue urban agricultural education at the community garden. We have a great working relationship with the Pullman Community Garden Board and are already seeking funding efforts to help support their mission and maintain partnership. We will be working with WA State Department of Ecology to focus efforts on the riparian corridor that flows adjacent to the community garden. Maintenance of physical property such as the pollinator plot and signage will hopefully be provided through in-kind programs such as our volunteer events.

Lessons Learned: As this funding is for a short period of time, it is important to work closely with community

partners to build out a vision that aligns with the partner's goals or whoever may be overseeing tangible products after the funding has ended. It was important for us to maintain direct communication with the Board and outline clear expectations throughout the project.

Be willing to be flexible and think outside the box. The local restrictions of COVID-19 challenged us to think creatively on how we can maintain community engagement without face-to-face interactions. Thinking of alternative avenues of communication and how best to reach people during a national lockdown, taught us

Pierce CD

Project Title: Tribal Sovereignty and Medicine Garden in East Tacoma

Description: The Pierce CD will create an urban agriculture site and traditional medicine garden in a community that has historically been marginalized. This will create access to healthy food in a neighborhood with limited options, as well as access to traditional medicines and knowledge about using these plants.

Ongoing Activities: The work on the site is, in some ways, just beginning. We are continuing to work with the civil engineers that we've contracted with to complete a site assessment. That consists of a topographic assessment that includes guidance about working on issues related to water movement on the site.

We have been hosting quarterly partner meetings with all the signers of the MOU that governs the site — working together on other grants, development planning, and figuring out long term roles and responsibilities. There have also been relationships built with the adjacent community center to help manage garden assignments in an ongoing way.

There have also been other environmental benefits that have occurred during the development of the site that have brought in other partners:

- The clean-up of a nearby salmon-bearing stream was inspired by garden users but has grown to include many other local agencies that care about water health. Over 1.77 tons of trash have been removed and the project has taken on a life of its own.
- An access gate for resource deliveries was built into an existing fence. This led to development of walking trail to provide safer walking conditions in the area in partnership with Downtown on the Go – a local non-profit that supports walking.

Nearly everyone we talk to is excited about the potential of this site and the way it is centering native peoples and their knowledge and preferences. We hope to continue to work to achieve the community's vision!

Thurston CD

Project Title: Home Grown Yelm

Description: The Thurston CD will work with the growing population of Yelm to produce local food. Workshops, technical assistance, and publication of an urban livestock manual will empower this underserved community. Businesses, city government, and community organizations will partner to create a resilient Yelm with improved access to healthy food.

Ongoing Activities: New and strong partnerships between Thurston Conservation District, the City of Yelm, Yelm Community Schools, Bounty for Families, and other community groups were formed through this grant. Those partnerships will allow for continued collaborative work in the community such as a monthly gardening workshop in the co-created Yelm Community Garden tentatively planned for the 2022 season. Additionally, Thurston Conservation District has been able to offer letters of support for Bounty for Families as they have recently sought continued funding to support the Yelm Community Garden Coordinator Position being a year-long position with

increased hours. And lastly, through this grant Thurston Conservation District developed a complete home gardening curriculum of workshops that we are poised to continue offering with little additional funding needs because of their complete nature.

Lessons Learned: By working closely with community partners, we were able to offer resources and services through this grant that best fit the needs of the community and our partners. We learned to make sure to ask those questions of both the partners and the funder to ensure best success.

Trust your partners. In the building of the community garden in particular, our working group of partners effectively divided up the tasks to complete garden construction and then trusted each other to do our assigned work. This made for a timely and complete construction.

Underwood CD

Project Title: Growing Sustainable Agricultural in the Columbia Gorge

Description: The Underwood CD will grow its conservation technical assistance capacity, tool library, and social capital, allowing the CD to assist urban and suburban small-scale farmers in building their skills, soil health, access to equipment and land, and resilience in the face of population growth and climate change.

Ongoing Activities: Most of our UAC grant activities have involved either working with partners, reaching out to new constituencies, or building our capacity in both regards. Thus, we have a working relationship with Gorge Grown we expect to continue in 2022 and beyond to lead on-farm tours (Crop Talks). With each Crop Talk we met more community members and partners in the agricultural sector. We also began a formal relationship with a local grange, which will be hosting our small farm tool library and associated outreach events getting started in fall 2021. Additional planner training for our staff technicians will strengthen our farm-planning and technical assistance capacity from now on, and already new relationships are building with at least two farms receiving these new planner services.

A new backyard/small property outreach program, Yard By Yard, has enabled another form of outreach to the residential gardener and urban farmer communities. Additionally, we helped the Gorge Farmer Collective get started with its commercial operations in 2021 by underwriting (with matching funds from WA State Conservation Commission) a refrigerated trailer for produce delivery. And we purchased a no-till seed drill for farm usage, providing a new opportunity to farmers to protect soil health and increase production. One of our no-till drill users even provided an informative video, now posted at our website (https://www.ucdwa.org/no-till-drill), about how to calibrate the drill and use it properly! All of these are durable items, skills, or growing partnerships. The no-till drill rental and farm tool library do and will generate funds to support tool maintenance and management, but the other programs do not bring significant new funding streams. However, we have launched several relevant programs and services that will compete for future grant opportunities.

Lessons Learned: Maintenance is as important as purchasing. This relates to physical items as much as relationships. In other words, follow-up is critical to long term success – keeping equipment in good repair, continuing to engage in relationships, creating new forms of outreach, keeping programs fresh. That's a key lesson that our activities drove home during this grant period.

For example, our staff has thoughts to purchase a "two-wheeled tractor," like the BCS (https://www.bcsamerica.com/products/tractors), but a professional rental shop cautioned us against it due to ongoing maintenance needs. This would be a helpful piece of equipment for small farms, but only if we had the requisite space, small-engine skills, and budget to maintain it. We held off on that purchase for now, perhaps until our farm tool library has been more established and ongoing management is running smoothly.

Follow-through is important in many other ways – and not always something we have budgeted or planned for. UCD now has several urban farmers and gardeners participating in the Yard By Yard program, and hosts Crop Talks and educational workshops. To gain maximum benefit from those, we could start making a point of contacting participants for follow-up conversations, potential projects, and feedback.

This grant has provided an integral opportunity to start up new programs and build new relationships that are mission-critical, and meanwhile as we begin these efforts, we must build long term maintenance and sustainability into the plans. Conservation work is relational, and those relationships, whether with a landowner or a piece of equipment we hope to work with for many years, need maintenance.