

From: "Daniel Dermitzel, KCCUA" <daniel@kccua.org>

To:

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URBAN GROWN

The Newsletter of the Kansas City Center for Urban Agriculture, February 2008

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Urban Farmers Inspired to Work Together to Grow More Food And Promote Sustainability

Farmers set goals for 2008 at KCCUA's Annual Meeting

By Daniel Dermitzel



Annual Urban Farmers Meeting; K-State's Ted Carey talks to KCCUA's Lew Edmister
food production and sustainable cities.

KCCUA's 3rd Annual Urban Farmers Meeting and Roundtable attracted urban growers and supporters from all over Kansas City to network, talk shop and set goals for the 2008 growing season. Some fifty participants crowded into the community room at Masters Community Church in KCK on a Saturday morning in late January, bringing with them a strong passion and vision for urban agriculture, local

I want to double my production for 2008, a Wyandotte county tomato grower told the crowd during the introductions. And I want to raise tilapia fish, said a long-time farmer from KCK. Others shared plans of building greenhouses, raising chicken and compost worms or bringing a few unused acres into food production for the first time.

Projects like these illustrate the increasing significance of urban food production in communities across the metro and the creative buzz thats fueling the local urban agriculture movement. Ive always believed, KCCUA's Katherine Kelly said during her opening remarks, that if we could take all the urban growers and supporters and roll them into one, wed have one brilliant farmer.

To allow plenty of time for our collective knowledge to float to the surface we scheduled a series of roundtable discussions on topics voted on by the participants. These included constructing and growing in high tunnels, forming cooperatives for sharing labor and equipment, utilizing small urban spaces and rooftops for vegetable production, soil building, fruit trees and more. There was also a discussion on policy options for advancing urban agriculture.

An emerging trend this year has been the growing interest in soil building and soil quality. No longer is the belief that it all starts with the soil held only by a small minority of organic farmers. Instead, increasing the soils organic matter and microbial life (healthy soils contain millions of organisms in each handful, working in balance to support healthy crops) are now concerns shared by many urban growers and gardeners. Urban farmers will likely need to pay particular attention to soil quality because their intensive production techniques tend to remove nutrients and organic matter over time. Farmers

discussed strategies like "no-till" vegetable farming (as recently demonstrated during a workshop in Kansas City by Patrice Gros from Foundation Farm in Arkansas), mulching and vermicomposting as possible strategies for maintaining and improving soil quality.

These days high tunnels attract much attention wherever farmers gather, and KCCUA's Annual Meeting was no exception. Younger growers were especially interested in inexpensive designs and smaller tunnels. We discussed the use of PVC, once known as an inexpensive and easy-to-use building material for high tunnels. However, experience on several farms (including the KC Community Farm) has shown that PVC tends to chemically degrade today's formulations of greenhouse films (the plastic sheeting used to cover the tunnel) thereby reducing their lifespan. Some growers choose the more expensive (and durable) structural steel for hoophouse construction but we also discussed the use of steel conduit bent on-farm using a pipe bender. Overall the interest in high tunnels by small urban growers is especially encouraging because these structures tend to increase profitability especially on farms with limited growing space.

We want to thank all who came out to learn, share and support urban agriculture. It is great to see the growing knowledge, skill and professionalism among Kansas City growers! And to catch up one more time before the madness we call "growing season" kicks in!

New Faces Around KCCUA

KCCUA hires training farm coordinator, farm manager

By Katherine Kelly



New on the KCCUA Team: Lew Edmister and Dan Heryer

Lew Edmister has a lifetime of experience with small businesses and with agriculture. In joining KCCUA at the age of 67 as coordinator of our new Training Farm, he declares this is a new phase of my life and hes excited and hopeful about helping develop new farmers for Kansas City.

Lew grew up working on his fathers farm in Greenwood, MO. They grew potatoes, tomatoes, and other vegetables for sale to Safeway, Milgrams, the A&P, as well as to higher-end stores like Wolfermans and Muelbachs. After high school, he joined the army, went to school in California, spent some

time in LA as a professional actor, and started several businesses, one producing candles and another restoring antique furniture, as well as one designing, manufacturing and selling fine jewelry.

Seven years ago, back in Kansas City, he began growing on an urban lot in the Westside neighborhood. He sold to local restaurants, including the Bluebird Bistro, and then started a 15 member Community Supported Agriculture program on his two urban lots . Lew has been a part of the KCCUA Urban Farmers Network for the last two years, and his farm was one of the liveliest spots on the Urban Farms Tour last June. Hell keep running his own farming operation while he works with the Training Farm, continuing to build his own small farm business while he helps others get their own up and off the ground.

Lew will be organizing the Training Farm in collaboration with Rachel Bonar, hired by Catholic Charities to manage the Refugee Womens Program, and their newly named New Roots Project. Rachel holds a Masters in Social Work and before working for Catholic Charities she worked for the Communities in Schools program of the Kansas City, KS, School District. Shes spent a fair amount of time in the Juniper Gardens neighborhood, having worked with both Banneker Elementary School and Grant Elementary.

Rachel and Lew both bring terrific skills and experience to the Training Farm; were looking forward to a great first year of the program!

Many of you will remember Dan Heryer who apprenticed with us last year. He's now the Community Farms new Farm Manager; hell be the person out in the field full-time (more than full-time!) making sure everything is growing well and that were staying on top of things! In addition to working for us in 2007, Dan has lived and worked at Reids Orchard in Orrtanna, Pennsylvania for two years. He worked both in the field and at their farmers markets in Baltimore and Washington, DC; he developed good farming and marketing skills at this large fruit and vegetable farm.

Dan is a Kansas City native and comes from a farming family; his mothers family still farms out in Miami County; they used to run a family dairy and are still farming row crops. His fathers family was involved in wholesaling of dry foods in Kansas City, so hes got some genetic involvement in food production and sales! Dan also worked in community development while pursuing his Bachelor's Degree from the University of Pittsburgh in Urban Studies. He has traveled for both academic and personal interest in Cuba, China and Peru, and speaks Spanish fluently. At our recent Annual Urban Farmers Meeting, Dan told those present that his goal for the year is to Keep the Field WEED FREE!" Were happy to

back him up in that ambition!

Katherine Kelly and Daniel Dermitzel will still be actively involved in managing the farm, working a bit less in the field and at the farmers market, but the farm has grown significantly since we organized as the KC Community Farm back in 2005. The new farm manager will allow them to more easily balance the needs of the farm with the other needs of our growing organization.

College-Level Certificate Program in Market Gardening Starts in Fall 2008

By Ted Carey



High tunnels at K-State Horticulture Research & Extension Center

Demand for local produce is on the rise across the country as more and more consumers are turning into locavores. Here in Kansas City, a consumer survey conducted in 1999 by David Burress of the University of Kansas estimated the regional market for locally grown food at about \$100 million annually, and all indications are that it has grown further since then.

Stepping up to meet the rising demand for local food has presented significant challenges to local producers in our highly integrated food system awash with cheap calories from distant fields. Today we are still far from what could be considered a healthy local food system.

To be successful, local producers ideally possess a strong combination of entrepreneurial spirit and market knowledge as well as a varied set of farming skills to ensure the production and delivery of a consistent supply of delicious and nutritious fruits and vegetables. It seems likely that, as costs of transportation and production in distant locations increase, local producers will see their opportunities for profitable production expand.

To help producers take better advantage of these opportunities and to help train the next generation of successful market farmers serving Kansas City and beyond, a new certificate program at Johnson County Community College (JCCC) is currently being established. The program titled *Sustainable Agriculture (Market Farming) Entrepreneurship Certificate Program* is scheduled to start this fall. It will provide students with training in crop production and entrepreneurship (business), using a combination of classes and field-based practicums.

The classroom instruction will consist of courses in horticulture, hospitality management, and entrepreneurship; it will be complemented by a horticulture practicum covering a full annual production cycle.

Students will be immersed in practical training, both through production and marketing of crops during their practicum, and through multiple opportunities to interact with leading producers already serving Kansas City, particularly through the established Growing Growers Training Program, an ongoing and complementary effort to train new growers through apprenticeships and workshops (see www.growinggrowers.org).

The K-State Horticulture Research and Extension Center will provide a rich setting for practical training. Here, students will learn to produce and market a diversity of fruit, vegetable and flower crops using a range of organic and sustainable conventional production practices at scales ranging from relatively mechanized field production to more intensively managed high tunnel production. Crop production and marketing modules will be managed to simulate business enterprises by the students, providing practical skills and insights for future application.

We are really excited about this effort! We plan to work closely with each of the departments at JCCC to develop the best applied program possible and to ensure that graduates will have a strong set of skills necessary to hit the ground running as market farmers.

Who should consider enrolling in the market farming certificate program? Anyone who has an ambition to farm. We hope to attract would-be farmers from a wide range of backgrounds, including those with land and/or other farming experience, who have an interest in diversifying their operations by adding a new horticultural enterprise. For more information about this program email Ted Carey at tcarey@ksu.edu.

Dr. Ted Carey is a JCCC Adjunct Professor and K-State Extension Vegetable Specialist. Dr. Carey will be the primary instructor of the certificate program's field practicum at the K-State Horticulture Research and Extension Center. He is also on the Board of Directors of the Kansas City Center for Urban Agriculture.

By Katherine Kelly



Who wouldn't plant a crop by this name? Chinese broccoli seeded in hoop-house on the last day of January.

"What do Farmers do in the Winter? Well, first off, we order SEEDS! We peruse the piles and piles of seed catalogues that clog our mailbox, we get on line and look at pretty pictures of vegetables, we dream that this is going to be the best year ever for yields, for quality, for beautiful and tasty vegetables! We started spending money on seeds back in December, and now the seed packets are piling up! It is a little mind-boggling that we can spend literally thousands of dollars on these tiny specks of germplasm (surely those wont really emerge into something as wonderful as a tomato??) but it sure is fun. Every year we stick with the varieties weve grown to know and love, and we add a few just to keep life interesting.

This year, the new veggies were looking at include:

Passion Fruit: Ever since we saw this tropical plant grow at Vanna and Gee Herts farm in KCK, weve been wanting to try it ourselves. It might very well end up coming under the category of farmers follies but it looked so pretty and it is a nice fruit to eat.

Jelly Melon: This is a truly funny looking member of the melon family, it is shaped like a rather ungainly cucumber with pokey bits. It is widely eaten in Asian and African cultures. The flavor is described as sour-sweet, banana-lime-tropical fruit so it will be an adventure, also!

And, every year you pretty much have to add a few new varieties of tomatoes (though this is an inclination that can quickly get out of control). Once you head down the road of non-hybrid, non-red slicers, it is a slippery slope. Were trying a pinkish variety called Flamingo that looks like a really brilliant pink and is said to have great flavor; one called Paul Robeson that Dan Heryer liked at the farm in Pennsylvania, a couple of oxheart varieties that look really different but lay claim to good taste. And, there is a red we couldnt say no to, Watermelon Beefsteak. Marketing really is everything in naming tomato varieties.

And, what else do we do right now? Were getting the high tunnels into shape for early season production. Our first seeding is happening this week, spinach and broccoli raab and Chinese Broccoli, into the ground under the high tunnels where it is warm and toasty during the day. The heat in the greenhouse is now on, and weve got broccoli, cabbage, onions, tomatoes, herbs, and more well past the cotyledon stage. Lets hope these cold temperatures break soon, or else those greenhouse heating bills are going to kill us!

Were sourcing supplies for the farm like compost to add nitrogen to the soil and organic matter; pallets to build greenhouse benches; row cover and plastic mulch and drip tape and all the stuff that makes vegetable growing possible in our Midwestern climate. If we can just get ourselves organized enough before the season really gets rolling, then all we have to do come March is plant, weed, and harvest. Thats the theory, anyway.

If the thought of being in a nice, warm greenhouse surrounded by growing things seems appealing to you, consider coming out and volunteering for a few hours. You can help plant the seeds for the new year!

Growing Excitement About Urban Agriculture Project at Juniper Gardens

KCCUA solicits community input for training farm / community gardening project in Kansas City, KS

By Rachel Bonar

Will Kansas City soon have its own Urban Training Farm? We hope so. A beautiful, unused eight-acre parcel is available at the Juniper Gardens Housing Development in Kansas City, KS. Several residents are already lined up to work with KCCUA on becoming market gardeners and we hope others will join. We're also looking to establish a community gardening project for those who'd like to start out as hobby gardeners (who knows, they may catch the bug and scale up to market gardening later!).

Recently, Lew Edmister of KCCUA and I and took to the streets surrounding the new training farm to tell the community the good news. We knocked on doors, talked with groups of young people, visited with churches and distributed flyers. The response was overwhelmingly positive. One neighbor was thrilled as he told of the garden that he used to tend in his old neighborhood. A local church suggested having a community garden space to work with their young people. Two twenty-something girls hugged and announced that it was a project they would do together. On this first round of door knocking, eleven community members indicated interest in having a garden space and everyone in the neighborhood seemed thrilled to welcome the training farm.

Over the next month or so we hope to settle the remaining details with the KCK Housing Authority which owns the land.

Cross your fingers and stay tuned for more.

Rachel Bonar manages the Refugee Women's Program at Catholic Charities. Several Somali and other refugees of the program are slated to receive training at the new Training Farm. Rachel can be reached at rbonar@catholiccharitiesks.org

Wanna Get Your Hands Dirty? Volunteer & Apprentice Opportunities at KCCF



Volunteers & staff

clean shallots for market.

We are always looking for volunteers to assist us with growing our delicious produce here at the farm. Tasks vary for different skill levels and you'll fit right in regardless of your experience. This month, we will begin transplanting crops into hoop houses, clean our herb bed, seed for the greenhouse, and much more! If the winter months have left you itching for the outdoors, come restore your energy by volunteering on the Kansas City Community Farm! We're easy to reach in the Argentine neighborhood just off I-635 and I-35. We have flexible hours to suit your schedules. Email Dan Heryer at danheryer@kccua.org for more information.

We also still have part-time field crew positions available! If you desire training as a market farmer, this position can provide experience in all aspects of vegetable production. Positions pay \$8 an hour, and require strong physical stamina. If you're interested, contact Dan Heryer at danheryer@kccua.org right away. Also, check our job posting at <http://www.kccua.org/news.htm>.

Organic Soundscapes

Audiences left hungry for more by Vienna Vegetable Orchestra

A group of Austrian musicians loves to play with food. Seriously. They cut it, rasp it, drill into it and scrape it, then they hit it, shake it, blow into it and pluck it. The concert starts with a trip to the farmers market. Cabbage, carrots, eggplant, leeks, pumpkins, cucumbers and celeriac become the stock from which delicate, fragrant and decidedly perishable instruments are fabricated. Pepper trumpets and leek violins are joined by carrot recorders and cucumberphones in a unique performance of organic rhythms and earthy melodies. Word has it we may see similar activity at our farmers market later this year... See and listen for yourself: http://www.gemueseorchester.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=46&Itemid

KCCF CSA Members Renew Commitment To Urban-Grown Produce

100 percent renewal rate means no new sign-ups for 2008; but other options exist.

More and more people are discovering Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs in and around Kansas City. A CSA is a subscription program allowing consumers to purchase "shares" in a farm. By paying an up-front fee (usually in late winter), shareholders get to partake in the ups and occasional downs of local food production. They receive weekly bags of fresh, flavorful local produce, sometimes even eggs, meats and other goodies. They tend to develop a special relationship with "their" farmer, knowing that they are supporting her or him through seasonal uncertainties and helping pay for supplies and seed that are needed early in the season before farmers receive the bulk of their income. There's a lot of information on CSAs online; you could start at <http://www.wilson.edu/wilson/asp/content.asp?id=804>. CSAs are a wonderful way to reconnect with agriculture.

Now, here's the latest on our own CSA program. Since last fall we have received many inquiries from folks wanting to join our CSA. We told you that we'd be signing up new shareholders early this year and asked you to check back with our website for sign-up information. Then we were a little surprised ourselves to find that ALL our existing CSA members renewed their shares! A 100 percent renewal rate is a wonderful vote of confidence that we take very seriously and we want to THANK all our CSA members for their support. Of course, the downside of this is that we won't be able to accept any new members.

We suggest that you check the Kansas City Food Circle at www.kcfoodcircle.org and sign up with one of the other CSAs in the area. Or if you really really dig our urban-grown fare, by all means, see us at the Brookside Farmers Market starting in April (more info at www.farmerscommunitymarket.com).

Thank you all for your interest and support!

Upcoming Events

Coming Home to Eat--How Do We Build A Regional Food System? Saturday, February 16, 2008, 8:30am - 4:30pm. Workshop featuring Ken Meter, internationally acclaimed expert on sustainable agriculture and community self-sufficiency. All Souls Unitarian Universalists Church, 4501 Walnut Street, Kansas City, MO 64111. Registration: \$20, Lunch: \$10. Contact Ben Kjeshus at 816-767-8873 or bkjeshus@sbcglobal.net for details and to register.

Eating Local: What is it? Why does it matter? How do you do it? Sundays, March 2, 9 & 16, 2008, 9:30am - 10:30am, The Village Presbyterian Church, 6641 Mission Road, Prairie Village, Kansas 66208, (913) 262-4200, www.villagepres.org. Do you eat locally grown food? Do you know where your food comes from? Are you interested in joining a CSA (community supported agriculture)? What difference does it make if you eat food grown by local farmers rather than food shipped in from California, Florida, or Chile? Are there significant environmental, economic or social justice issues to consider? Discuss these and other important issues relating to food in the 21st Century in this three week course led by Katherine Kelly of the Kansas City Center for Urban Agriculture and the Growing Growers Program and John Kurmann of the Kansas City Food Circle. You will also have the opportunity to learn more about CSAs in the Kansas City area and where/how to join.

Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) New American Farm Conference. March 25-27, 2008. Kansas City, MO. Learn more about how sustainable farming is rapidly changing the face of American agriculture. Come to the New American Farm conference a gathering for farmers, ranchers, educators, researchers, students, advocates and the curious consumer. Meet others who share a passion for quality agriculture. Scholarships are available; apply by February 15. Complete information at <http://www.sare.org/2008Conference/index.htm>.

Eat Local! KC Food Circle EXPOs 2008; 10th Annual Exhibition of Farmers. At TWO locations: Saturday, March 29th, 2008, 9am - 2pm. Shawnee Civic Center, 13817 Johnson Drive, Shawnee, KS 66216 AND Saturday, April 5, 2008 from 9:30am - 2:30pm. Roger T. Sermon Community Center, 201 N Dodgion St., Independence, MO 64050, near the intersection of Truman Road and Noland Road. High-quality, organic vegetables for sale on-site and through CSA memberships; free-range meats; eggs and dairy products; veggie seedlings and plants for spring gardens; information on organic agriculture and gardening. For all the details and lots more on local food and agriculture visit the KC Food Circle website at www.kcfoodcircle.org.

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For editorial comments please contact *Urban Grown* editor Daniel Dermitzel at daniel@kccua.org
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