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To:

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URBAN GROWN

The Newsletter of the Kansas City Center for Urban Agriculture, October 2007

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"We Made It!"

Two of Kansas City's newest urban growers exhale at the finish of their first growing season



Urban farmers Brooke Salvaggio and Laura Christensen

By Jessica Farmer

The farming fever is contagious. Laura Christensen and Brooke Salvaggio, both wrapping up their first season, have caught the bug. After spending time working with the Kansas City Center for Urban Agriculture, each felt compelled to venture out on her own this year. With a little bit of land, lots of helpful advice and less sleep than they would have liked, each experienced urban agriculture at its best and worst. Christensen, on her farm in Kansas City, KS, and Salvaggio at Bad Seed Farm in South Kansas City, MO, are happy

to be part of a network of dedicated local farmers contributing to a more sustainable Kansas City.

After two years as an apprentice at KCCUA, Christensen began growing organic salad greens, squash, tomatoes, peppers, leeks, eggplant and a variety of other vegetables on about half an acre north of Leavenworth Road, in Kansas City, KS. She sold her assortment of vegetables at the Farmers' Community Market at Brookside. Christensen attributes her success, knowledge, and positive outlook to her time as an apprentice. She says her work with KCCUA familiarized her with the tools and infrastructure that suit smaller scale operations, as well as with the crops themselves. It also gave her a real-world example of the potential for production on a small plot, she adds.

"This is not home gardening," Christensen said. "I think if I had not seen KCCF model a large, diversely stocked market booth with prices that matched the inputs necessary to bring the goods to market that I might have set myself up for failure by not expecting enough from myself, my land or the market." Though she experienced a number of deterrents this year, including blister beetles and hungry white-tailed deer, Christensen is excited and confident about the future of her farm. Next year she hopes to expand her space as well as her vision. She will extend her growing season, build a hoop house and start a small CSA.

On the other side of the city, just a few blocks from busy Bannister Road, Brooke Salvaggio picks heirloom tomatoes and noodle beans barefoot. Like Christensen, she worked on other farms before going out on her own. She made sheep's cheese in Italy and picked tropical fruits in Florida as a way to support her travels. She fell in love with farming and the idea of living self-sufficiently. When she recently returned to her home town of Kansas City, she decided to turn a 1/3 acre plot of land in the back of her grandfather's house into an organic vegetable farm.

"I thought I knew what I was doing, but then I found out that I had no idea," Salvaggio said. "I started really learning about

farming as I was doing it, and it was just unbelievable. It is such a humbling art form. You realize that nature is so much bigger than you. Everything can be destroyed overnight which happened to me several times."

Salvaggio sold produce at the 39th Street Farmers' Market, the Farmers' Community Market at Brookside. She also runs her own Friday night market in the East Crossroads District in Kansas City, MO (1909 McGee, through October 26 from 4 to 10 PM). Here she sells her own vegetables, seconds from other local farms, baked goods, and handcrafted items made from recycled materials. Her pumpkins and peppers are often accompanied by live music. On First Fridays Kansas City art lovers stop in for a vegetable-inspired social hour. "Nobody quite knows what to make of it," she said. "There is crazy, funky music and then there are veggies!"

Ultimately, though, she hopes to serve her local community. Next season she will expand her growing space and start a small CSA. Eventually, she would like Bad Seed Farm to become a centralized CSA pickup location, market, and a space for cooking and gardening classes. Salvaggio's goal is an interactive center for sustainable urban living.

After a hectic and fruitful season, the two farmers Christensen and Salvaggio are grateful for the small break that winter will offer. But, as soon as the ground thaws next spring, these enthusiastic women will continue to grow, learn and create strong roots in Kansas City.

For more information contact Laura Christensen at christensen.lh@gmail.com and Brooke Salvaggio at BadSeedFarm@hotmail.com.

KC Funders Step Forward in Support of Urban Ag

KCCUA was honored to receive two grants recently from institutions right here in Kansas City. The Menorah Legacy Foundation generously donated \$20,000 in support of our Urban Farms Development Project. Menorah's Executive Director Gayla Brockman says her organization "seeks out grants that positively affect behavior, not just alleviate symptoms. The Kansas City Center for Urban Agriculture epitomizes our mission as KCCUA helps more residents gain access to fresh and healthy food, develops stronger communities and builds sustainable and productive urban farms."

The Village Presbyterian Church donated \$5,000 to the same project. Julie Edge, a volunteer with the Missions Committee, noted that KCCUA's work "fits nicely with Village Church's mission focus and interest in funding organizations that improve communities, provide important nutritional food sources, and help individuals to create a sustainable future for themselves and their families."

Both organizations are visionary in their understanding of the importance of local food and urban farms, and we want to express our deepest gratitude for their support!

Urban Agriculture Visions: *White Bay EcoCity 2050*

Recently a group of design students at the University of Sidney developed a plan for White Bay, a 200-acre strip of largely underdeveloped land located along Sidney Harbor near the city's central business district. They call their project White Bay EcoCity 2050 and it presents a hypothetical framework for commercially viable, yet carbon-neutral urban development. Under the guidance of Rafael Pizarro, Ph.D., faculty lecturer in Urban Design and Planning, the students integrated passive solar design, photovoltaics, rainwater collection and alternative modes of transportation such as GPS-guided stackable cars and bicycles in their proposal. They also included several types of urban agriculture ranging from the futuristic "sky-farms" proposed by Columbia University professor Dickson Despommier to more familiar rooftop gardens and ground-level orchards. The team calls the design "plausible speculation", an effort to bring "much-needed specificity to the debate over cities and climate change." At KCCUA we believe this kind of speculation is an important step toward innovation and implementation, which is why we asked Dr. Pizarro to tell us more about White Bay EcoCity.

By Rafael Pizarro



Vertical farms and rooftop gardens in White Bay EcoCity design

SIDNEY, Australia. Although the renewed interest in urban agriculture throughout society is most welcome, it demands a rethinking of the term within the context of the modern city. Despite ongoing debates over whether agriculture preceded cities or vice versa, we do know that growing food used to be as natural to urban environments as other activities such as commerce, trade and cultural and religious ceremonies. However, today's land prices in core metropolitan regions tend to preclude the low-revenue conventional agricultural plot to be located in such environments.

Out of this economic reality came the idea of growing food in cities in multi-story structures. The White Bay EcoCity designed by the students of architecture and urban design at the University of Sydney was conceived to demonstrate the possibility of designing a new large-scale urban development featuring vertical farms without sacrificing revenue. The students' rough initial estimations of the feasibility of vertical farms in the EcoCity show that the economic yield of an acre of land in Sidney's urban core developed as a vertical farm would match the revenue of the same acre developed for commercial or residential use.

The project suggests that if the vertical farms were located on the least expensive piece of land of the planned development, the produce from the farms would justify the use of that piece of land for agricultural purposes. Questions remain as to the type of horticulture that would be feasible in those vertical farms to make them commercially viable. Given that the amount of produce would have to be at industrial levels to generate high revenue, it is possible that certain low-yield crops and purely organic varieties of vegetables and fruit may become problematic. Nonetheless, studies such as the White Bay EcoCity open up the possibility for local governments and developers to consider urban agriculture within the urban perimeter without sacrificing land rents and with all the obvious economic, environmental, and aesthetic benefits of those beautiful green giants.

Vertical farms are not the only urban agricultural feature of White Bay EcoCity. The project also features about 3.7 acres of orchards at ground level and about 12 acres of rooftop gardens atop residential and office buildings to grow more fruits and vegetables (and, of course, other varieties of plants). In addition to reducing solar radiation absorption (to offset the urban heat island effect) and rain water run-off in the EcoCity, the orchards and gardens are designed to provide city dwellers with an opportunity to be also part-time farmers. Not only will they be able to provide for themselves some fresh produce but also to experience an alternative way of living in cities, and to re-connect them with the ecological reality of the planet. It is hoped that parents, for example, will bring their children to the orchards and rooftop gardens so that they learn the tight symbiosis between the built and the natural environments at an early age. Of course, orchards and rooftop gardens will also serve as habitats for different species of birds, small rodents, insects, and other forms of wildlife, further reducing the gap between the hard granite reality of cities and the soft bio-systems of the planet.

The ownership of the orchards and rooftop gardens has not been specified in the project, but it is anticipated that they would become communal areas for all residents (and visitors) in the EcoCity. While community gardens are now common in many cities around the world, the idea behind designing these areas as public space is to encourage a new form of land use that will engage the citizenship actively (through growing food) in its use, care, and protection. Most public spaces in cities are unfortunately thought of as leftover space to be enjoyed by the residents but tended and maintained by the local government. With the system of vertical farms, orchards and rooftop gardens proposed in White Bay EcoCity, residents may develop a sense of stewardship of the land as a common responsibility and a renewed relationship between their day-to-day activities and the city they inhabit.

For more information about White Bay EcoCity please visit www.ecocities2050.org or contact Dr. Pizarro at r.pizarro@arch.usyd.edu.au. To learn more about sky farming visit www.verticalfarm.com.

Rootlessness and Rootedness

A religious holiday stirs reflections on food and human belonging

By Katherine Kelly

We recently were part of Congregation Beth Torah's Sukkot holiday--a holiday which reminds Jewish people of the forty years of wandering in the desert and which honors the fall harvest. In learning about the Sukkot holiday, I found resonance with our current relationship to growing and eating the food that keeps us alive. Part of the holiday involves building a "sukkah" a shelter in your yard that you "live" in for seven days to remind Jews of the forty years of temporary

shelters and homelessness during the exodus from Egypt. The other part of the holiday is a celebration of the fall harvest, the completion of the growing season. It is a holiday that, from a non-Jewish view, looks to be about the experience of being rootless and about its opposite--being rooted enough to have crops to harvest and honor.

In the last 50 years, human beings have come to live in cities in great numbers. More than half of the world's global population is believed to live in urban areas today. We live in built and highly controlled environments where food is at the grocery store, nature is in parks, and where, as much as possible, we move from one climate controlled space to another. That relocation from the country to the city has had the consequence of separating us from the soil, from the natural environment and from people engaged in food production. This means that we no longer understand food, we don't understand nature, we don't understand our reliance on both of them. We have become rootless; we are living in ways that are counter to thousands of years of human experience. While it is good to no longer be subject to local famines and natural disasters, we've lost some important aspects of being human in the world.

I think that many of our health problems--obesity in particular--are a manifestation of our rootlessness and disconnection from nature. In the past, when humans ate food, they understood that the food resulted from a relationship to the natural environment and to the community, and to a spiritual life that helped us understand and mediate our dependency on nature. A potato was not just a potato, it was a full season of weather, of people working together, and of religious practices to support its growth. It provided us with more than calories and nutrition. Today's potato, a staple of the fast and snack food industries, has lost this quality almost completely. When we consume it, in some part of our brain and bodies, we know that something is missing. So we eat more, trying to fill ourselves up.

In promoting urban agriculture, KCCUA addresses the human need to be "rooted" and to be connected to the act of feeding ourselves and others. By locating farms and food production in the city where we live and work, we are helping people reconnect to their human reliance on food and nature, we are helping them become rooted. The garden on the corner inserts itself into your consciousness, knowing the farmer who grows the crops helps people to pay attention--when it rains, you are more likely to think of the rain's importance to the crop if you know a farmer who has talked about how the lack of rain has reduced yields. Rain becomes more than an inconvenience, it becomes a life-giving event. You become more aware of our dependence on food, on the person who grows the food, and ultimately, on our specific geographic location and on nature.

What is wonderful about the Sukkot holiday is that it gives us both of these things--the wandering lost and rootless, and an answer to that, which is to ground your life through the fruits and vegetables that feed your body and your soul. Urban agriculture is one way to help with this. It brings our dependency on nature and on food into the communities we live in, where it can become a part of our everyday consciousness and lives, like humans have lived for thousands of years.

Field Notes from the Kansas City Community Farm



Tender crop of clover and rye in front of high tunnels at KC Community Farm

As temperatures have gotten cooler lately, we're seeing a fairly typical fall rebound on the farm. Crops that were barely holding on under the stress of heat and drought are recovering, blossoming, fruiting and producing. This week we're harvesting our first filet beans in weeks, our peppers are loaded with fruit, the eggplant's looking better, all the greens are sizing up and we're getting some beautiful white hakurei turnips (yum!).

Looking back, it's been an excellent season for us. Our tomato crop was unprecedented in spite of the usual disease pressure. This year we gave the plants a little more room in our high tunnel by planting fewer rows; the result was a healthier, longer-producing crop. All season long, we participated in a regional trial with other growers and K-State Research and Extension to test the effects of fertigation--injecting organic fertilizers into our drip irrigation lines--on high tunnel tomato production. Results of this trial are pending but indications are that fertigation is effective and possibly economical under our growing conditions. We'll share any important findings from this trial with you as they become available. Another crop that did well this year: sweet potatoes--here again we eased up on the plant spacing (2 rows vs. 3 in a 4-ft wide bed) and harvested larger tubers with improved marketability. And speaking of sweet potatoes, we continued to develop the market for sweet potato greens this year. The heat-loving plants produce flavorful tops (prepare the leaves like you would spinach) when most other greens simply refuse to grow. After some initial hesitation, many customers came back for more.

To get ready for winter, about half our field has already been seeded to a cover crop of rye grass and clover. Cover crops add organic matter and fertilize the soil, improve soil texture, stop erosion and prevent nutrients from leaching out. They are not harvested but simply tilled back into the soil prior to planting next spring. Clover, a legume, will fix nitrogen from the air and thereby increase soil fertility. Rye grass with its extensive, fast-growing root system will scavenge any nutrients left in the soil and store them until it, too, gets returned back to the soil. In addition, when its deep and extensive roots die they leave behind a fine network of channels which help with soil drainage and aeration.

Urban Agriculture As A Matter of Policy

Forthcoming research paper by University of Kansas planning student surveys efforts to guide urban food production through policy

Following is a brief summary of research findings by Moses Nkhoma, a Fulbright Scholar from Zambia and masters degree student in urban planning at KU Lawrence. Nkhoma is assisting KCCUA by surveying local and regional policies in support of urban agriculture in the United States and Canada. As he continues his research he welcomes any information regarding such policies, either enacted or in the drafting stage. Please contact Moses Nkhoma at mnkhoma@ku.edu. His research paper entitled Urban Agriculture: A Survey of City Policies in the United States and Canada will be posted to the KCCUA website when it is completed later this year.

By Moses Nkhoma

Urban agriculture is becoming increasingly popular among a growing number of urban practitioners, policy-makers, not-for-profit organizations, environmental groups, and city residents in the United States and Canada. This is particularly interesting in an era of growing urban populations, rising health concerns, and environmental degradation. In this context, policy-makers are placing increasing emphasis on policy interventions that support urban agriculture.

A number of cities are currently taking steps aimed at greening the urban landscape through the promotion of urban agriculture. Chicago, Seattle, Vancouver, and Toronto are all developing new ideas ranging from innovative urban designs (e.g. rooftop gardens) to working with refugees and immigrants. For example, the City of Chicago is implementing the "Chicago: Eat Local, Live Healthy" plan, a strategy that seeks to coordinate the local food industry to achieve public health and create entrepreneurial opportunities. The City of Seattle, on the other hand, has an interesting program known as the P-PATCH Community Gardening Program Initiative that seeks to promote community gardening, market gardening, and youth gardening among city residents. Other cities have taken steps toward incorporating urban agricultural issues into their comprehensive plans. For example, San Diego, Seattle, Portland, Vancouver and Toronto all have included references to community farms and gardens in their comprehensive plans. Also interesting is the presence of not-for-profit organizations seeking to promote urban agriculture among city residents. Such organizations include the NeighborSpace Program in Chicago; the International Refugee Committee in San Diego; the P-PATCH Trust in Seattle among others.

In the cities surveyed, access to land seems to be the major stumbling block in the process of promoting urban agriculture. The high cost of land, development pressures and current land use practices all constrain the proliferation of urban agricultural activities. Land use decisions tend to favor and promote so-called high-value land uses which are considered a significant source of cities' revenue earnings. The encouraging news, however, is that some cities are opening up city-owned open spaces for urban agricultural purposes; examples include San Diego, Chicago, Seattle and Portland.

A number of preliminary conclusions can be drawn from this ongoing survey of city policies concerning urban agriculture. First, there is a growing number of not-for-profit organizations seeking to promote urban agriculture, working with many different urban residents including refugees and immigrants. However, these organizations still need to be strengthened and supported financially if they are to achieve their goal of popularizing urban agriculture. Secondly, access to land is a major obstacle on the way to promoting urban agriculture. This situation is especially critical for refugees and immigrants who often do not have the financial resources or, perhaps, the legal status to access land. Land in urban areas tends to be very expensive, a factor that makes it impossible for such groups of urban farmers to gain access to it without the support of key stakeholders. Lastly, with a few exceptions, cities generally lack a comprehensive framework specifically tailored to the promotion of urban agriculture, a problem that is compounded by contemporary land use planning practices that do not regard urban agriculture as an economically viable land use in the urban core.

Combined Federal Campaign 2007

It's that time of year again! The Combined Federal Campaign is a national fundraising drive to encourage federal employees to make charitable contributions to nonprofit organizations. If you are a federal employee please consider the Kansas City Center for Urban Agriculture as you decide on the charity of your choice. Our organization's CFC code is 18178. The campaign will end on November 14, 2007. KCCUA staff will be thrilled to give a short presentation about our organization at your federal workplace. Please contact Daniel Dermitzel at daniel@kccua.org to schedule a time. Thank you very much for taking the initiative to promote the CFC at your federal agency! To learn more about the Combined Federal Campaign please visit www.heartlandcfc.org.

Upcoming CFC Presentation Dates:

October 10: US Department of Agriculture

October 23: US Department of Commerce

Please check with your CFC coordinators for more information.

Farewell to Toni Gates-Grantham

Toni Gates-Grantham, our Development Director, has moved on to other work. Toni raised funds, marketed us, and kept us organized for nearly two years and we are sad to see her go! She is fun to work with, has a beautiful sense of design and approach, and we will truly miss her. You'll still find her singing (as a professional singer, that is) around town, and she is working with Synergy in their fundraising department. Visit her website at www.tonigates.com to stay in touch. We hear there's a terrific show coming up on October 19! Check her out!

Wanted: Farm Manager

The Kansas City Center for Urban Agriculture is hiring a full-time Farm Manager for the KC Community Farm. KCCUA is a non-profit organization that promotes small-scale, urban food production in the Kansas City metropolitan area. We offer technical assistance, farm development support, community education, and a variety of other educational and community programs; we also run the Kansas City Community Farm. For a full job description and application process please visit our website at www.kccua.org.

Upcoming Events

One Last Chance to Stock Up: Season's Final Farmers Community Market at Brookside, Saturday, October 13, 8:00AM - 1:00PM. Wornall & 63rd Street in Kansas City, Missouri. www.farmerscommunitymarket.com.

Eating Local--What It Is And Why It Matters, November 7 & 14, 6:30 PM - 8:00PM. What difference does it make if you eat food grown by local farmers rather than food shipped in from California, Florida, or Chile? Is the food healthier? Does it taste better? Are there issues of the environment, economics, or social justice you might want to consider? Katherine Kelly of the KC Center for Urban Agriculture and the Growing Growers Program and John Kurmann of the KC Food Circle will present two connected workshops, exploring the issues of local food and your own food choices. For registration information, contact Gordon McClellan at gordon.mcclellan@villagepres.org

Immigrant and Refugee Farmers Workshop, December 1, time and place tba. Please tell any immigrants or refugees about this and plan to attend. Visit www.kccua.org/RME-Home.htm or email daniel@kccua.org for more information. A day of presentations and discussion on topics ranging from small farm production, marketing and management to farmer networking and the immigrant-refugee experience.

Urban Grown is published bi-monthly and edited by Daniel Dermitzel.

Please direct editorial comments to daniel@kccua.org.

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