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Date: 4/10/2008 11:05:34 AM

Subject: News from the Kansas City Center for Urban Agriculture

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KCCUA Community Greenhouse: 22 Farmers Growing!

Metro farmers line up for greenhouse space at the KC Community Farm.

By Katherine Kelly



Farmer Nancy Gordon & volunteer Matthew Rader

This time of year, greenhouses are magical places to be. No matter how cold and windy it is outside, inside the greenhouse there is warmth, greenery, and good smells. In the KCCUA Community Greenhouse, there is special magic though! Crammed into 6,000 square feet are 22 farmers growing tens of thousands of transplants for small farms located all over the metro area.

We've got older farmers, younger farmers, men farmers, women farmers, and farmers from all around the world, white, African-American, Hmong, Korean, Mexican-American, Somali, Sudanese, and Burmese farmers. The variety of plants in the greenhouse is astounding and interesting—everything from more common Midwestern vegetables to ginger, bitter melon, edible gourds and herbs from Laos.

Plants grown in our greenhouse will end up as transplants and produce at no fewer than ten markets around the city, supply multiple restaurants, a few grocery stores, and eight CSAs. So, if you go to City Market, the KCK Greenmarket, Bad Seed Market, the Farmers Community Market at Brookside, the 39th Street Market, or one of several others, the chances are pretty good that some of the vegetables you eat started their life in our greenhouse!

Our most experienced grower is John Kaihua, we like to call him the Grandfather of KC Urban Farming, while our newest grower, Dave Bingham, is taking the leap this year from home gardening to market gardening. In between, we've got farmers like Kwang Kim, an experienced grower who lives in Overland Park, farms in DeSoto, and sells to restaurants and grocery stores; Brooke Salvaggio, a second-year grower and founder of Bad Seed Farm, www.badseedfarm.com; Pov Huns, a Hmong grower of vegetables, herbs and medicinal plants who sells at City Market and through a CSA, www.hungsgarden.com. This year, Tom Alonzo who grows in Kansas City, KS, and sells at the KCK Greenmarket joins us; women from the Catholic Charities *New Roots for Refugees* project (see related story in this issue of *Urban Grown*) are also new in the greenhouse this year. They're being mentored by Lew Edmister, the Farm Coordinator for New Roots, who is also growing transplants for his own operation, the Herbn Gardener. Also back on board this year is the J.C. Harmon High School Special Ed Class; they've gotten more ambitious and are growing tomatoes and a fun variety of flowers for the students to sell.

The Community Greenhouse is an important service KCCUA offers. Most urban farmers don't have the space or the

capital to put in their own greenhouse. In the past they have had to buy transplants, which is not only pricey but tends to limit the varieties of vegetables they grow. Having access to the greenhouse saves money, provides urban farmers with a place to grow unique, high quality transplants and creates opportunities for growers to learn from each other, share production practices, solve problems and even form partnerships. For example, Beverly Pender of Urban Soul and Soil and Nancy Gordon of Pearly Gates Organic Farm are working together to grow and sell transplants. Brooke Salvaggio of Bad Seed and Sherri Harvel of Root Deep Urban Farm are also growing transplants together. And a partnership between Lew Edmister and Dave Bingham was born in the greenhouse; the two are sharing land near KCCUA so Lew can increase his production and Dave can get his new operation started. As we like to say in urban agriculture, we're not just growing plants and food but relationships as well!

National Sustainable Ag Program Celebrates 20th Anniversary in Kansas City

SARE's "New American Farm" conference brings farmers, researchers, educators together; highlights local farm businesses.

By Daniel Dermitzel



Conference tours pull into the Kansas City Community Farm for a close-up look at urban food production.

Last month Kansas City hosted the 20th Anniversary Celebration of the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, one of the best-known federal funding streams for small farm research and development. Under the theme "New American Farm Conference -- Advancing the Frontier of Sustainable Agriculture", some 800 farmers, ranchers, educators, researchers and others came together to share information about sustainable farming and discuss the future of the U.S. food system.

The conference was a rare opportunity for Kansas City to showcase its diverse agricultural sector to a national audience; at the Kansas City Community Farm we received two busloads of conference goers interested in small-scale urban food production and in the use of high tunnels for season extension. Other urban growers like Pov Huns of Huns Garden, Ericka Wright of Troostwood Youth Gardens and John Kaiahua of JJ Farms were also among the stops.

In addition to the tours, the conference featured almost two days of workshops and keynotes on topics ranging from inner-city food security and leadership development to healthy soil management and teaching entrepreneurial skills to beginning farmers. While the broad range of topics made the conference appealing to many diverse professionals (farmers, researchers, educators, food activists and others), at times it also made it a little unfocused, at least in my mind.

As a farmer I found the workshop entitled "No-Till and Organic" particularly interesting. A growing awareness of the negative effects of soil tillage has created a need for practical information on how to adopt no-till systems. The workshop featured Ron Morse of Virginia Tech and Jeff Moyers, farm manager at the Rodale Institute. Morse discussed a promising series of trials using mechanically-killed or winter-killed cover crop mulches to raise no-till broccoli, cucurbits, solanacea and more. Information about his work and a slide show are available at <http://www.newfarm.org/features/0104/no-till/index.shtml>. Moyers explained how his team at Rodale developed their "no-till roller crimper", a rolling cylinder that passes over a cover crop, lays it down, crimps and kills it and gets the field ready for planting with a no-till seeder or transplanter (more on this tool and other no-till resources are at http://rodaleinstitute.org/no-till_revolution). Adapting the no-till approach to small-scale, highly intensive vegetable production as we practice it here at the Community Farm presents several yet-to-be-resolved challenges but seeing the work of others around the country is very encouraging.

A workshop on "farmscaping" also caught my attention. Farmscaping has been defined as the "deliberate use of specific plants and landscaping techniques to attract and conserve beneficial insects and other organisms." Farm-scale experiments have shown reduced pest-pressure and increased populations of beneficial insects and pollinators as a result of specific landscaping techniques throughout the farm and along its perimeter. Like "no-till", farmscaping is a deliberate attempt to replicate natural occurrences (e.g., undisturbed soil and diverse populations of native plants with accompanying insect diversity) within a highly managed farming system.

I enjoyed the workshops, running into a few familiar faces and picking up information that will help me become a better farmer. I also liked the chance to tell visitors about urban agriculture in Kansas City. Best of all, I didn't have to get on an airplane and fly to a far-away city; it all happened right here in Kansas City.

Local initiative works to form a Food Policy Council to address urban agriculture and other food system policies.

By Sarah Shmigelsky and Gretchen Burak

Kansas City is one step closer to having a local Food Policy Council--a formal group charged with guiding the development of policies for sustainable local food, health, and agriculture. What started in early 2007 with the Healthy Food Policy Forum culminated last week in the first meeting of a Core Working Group to hammer out the details of setting up the Council. Kansas City's urban farmers are among the diverse stakeholders in this process, hoping to gain recognition, policy support and possibly funding.

It started with the reauthorization of the 2007 Farm Bill. This pending legislation motivated two local nonprofits--KC Healthy Kids and the Healthcare Foundation of Greater Kansas City--to invite KC community stakeholders from various corners of the food system to discuss ways to align national food policies more closely with our national health goals while supporting sustainable food systems. The Healthy Food Policy Forum brought together some 80 health care professionals, government officials, educators, farmers and others and resulted in the KC Healthy Food Policy Initiative. Visit the Initiative website at <http://www.kchealthykids.org/Initiative-HealthyFoodPolicy/Index.htm> to access all the resources.

The Initiative's three main goals are:

1. to help community leaders envision a more sustainable food system focused on better health for the community, environment, and economy,
2. to form a Food Policy Council (FPC) in the Kansas City area, and
3. to provide support and feedback to the FPC once it is formed.

Throughout 2007 the Food Policy Initiative focused on learning about the local food system and understanding the barriers and opportunities to getting fresh, healthy food to the community. In 2008 the focus turned to making the case for an FPC. Mark Winne, national FPC consultant and food systems expert, visited Kansas City to help stakeholders better understand how to develop a council and the important ways coordination with government policies can positively affect local food systems. From that meeting a core working group was established to document specifically why Kansas City needs an FPC and outline the most effective FPC model.

Food Policy Councils can take many forms but they generally consist of 10-20 people who represent different components of the food system. Councils can strictly be a grassroots effort or can be commissioned by state or local government. They address food policy issues and make recommendations to decision makers regarding policies that could be improved to impact the overall health of the community. Food Policy Councils have been successful at educating officials and the public, shaping public policy, improving coordination between existing programs, and starting new food and agriculture-related programs. Councils can choose to work in a number of arenas, including schools and other institutions, local agriculture, anti-hunger efforts, and even urban development, transportation, and zoning policies as they pertain to the food system.

As far as urban agriculture, members of the Core Working Group have so far identified the following priorities:

1. formulate and implement pro-farming and gardening policies--make farming economically viable by addressing issues such as land use policies, property tax rates, and the cost of water,
2. conduct an economic analysis of the production and consumption of local food.
3. create a mandate to purchase some percentage of local foods in schools, governments, and other institutions,
4. increase municipal, county, and state funding for agriculture, gardening, and food security projects.

The Kansas City Center for Urban Agriculture (KCCUA) is a key partner to the Healthy Food Policy Initiative, helping it better understand the priorities and barriers to growing and selling in an urban setting. But of course, Kansas City is also closely connected to its rural neighbors and these connections offer other unique opportunities to meet the demand for fresh fruits and vegetables. Developing a healthy sustainable food system will involve urban, peri-urban and rural agriculture as well as a host of other system components. Our challenge is to integrate these components into a whole that offers health, sustainability and community to all. A Food Policy Council will move us in that direction.

Sarah Shmigelsky and Gretchen Burak are co-coordinators for the Healthy Food Policy Initiative, a project of KC Healthy Kids (www.kchealthykids.org), a nonprofit, private operating foundation focused on promoting fit and healthy kids in Greater Kansas City. They can be reached at sarah.shmigelsky@gmail.com and grburak@yahoo.com.

Field Notes from the Kansas City Community Farm

By Dan Heryer



KCCUA apprentice Jake Johannes pots on transplants in the greenhouse

This spring, we all carry our coats and extra layers with us wherever we go. We walk about in uncertainty, not knowing whether temperatures will rise or fall. At the Kansas City Community Farm, this uncertainty plays out on a much larger scale. We find our traditional planting dates unreliable this year as we work in cold and wet ground. Seeds are slow to germinate; plant growth is behind. Even our hoop houses, so reliable in the past, have presented challenges in more extreme conditions.

We often think that modern farming techniques make us less susceptible to the ups and downs of spring but nature forever humbles us. We lost our gamble on early broccoli, cauliflower and cabbage when a freeze killed much of our first planting. Our hoop house tomatoes have responded poorly to the cold soil that surrounded them even in their enclosed environment. Thus, we have begun to replace planting dates with soil temperatures, and find the thermometer a more valuable guide than the calendar. We have delayed our planting of cucumbers, beans, and other warm season crops until warmth finally arrives.

Despite these setbacks, our lettuce heads look full and lush, our white turnips resemble goose eggs tucked away in the soil, and the greenhouse provides a lovely work environment for preparing transplants for market.

Remember that **SPRING IS A GREAT TIME TO VOLUNTEER!** If you're feeling that gotta get out there and get my hands dirty spring eagerness, we're happy to oblige! We've got plants to pot on in the greenhouse, transplants that need to go out in the field, seeds needing to be sown, and, oh so early, weeds needing to be pulled! And, we've got a really terrific field crew to work with, so you'll have a good time while you're satisfying your gardening desires. Email me at danheryer@kccua.org to set up a time to come out.

Urban Farm Seeks to Double Harvest in 2008

Now in its second season the Cross-Lines Garden feeds families in need.

By Katherine Kelly



Cross-Lines Garden in Kansas City, KS

Last year, the Cross-Lines Community Outreach Garden, a project that KCCUA helped start, produced over 4,000 pounds of fresh vegetables on a 9,600 square foot lot at 7th & Shawnee in Kansas City, KS. Some of the produce was sold to staff and volunteers, most went to low-income families through their food pantry and through the meals program.

This year, they have set a goal of doubling their yields so they can provide more good, healthy produce to families that really need it. People were so excited to get fresh vegetables says Carey Sterrett, Garden Coordinator, even when they weren't sure how to cook with them, we would give them recipe cards and talk to them about how to prepare them, and they were just so pleased to get something fresh to eat.

Cross-Lines figured out that the garden supplied 10 pounds of produce per family over the season in addition to the regular bag of commodities and donated food the pantry gives out. "We'd like to give them more," says Sterrett, adding that "many of the families we work with are struggling with diet-related health problems; if they can eat more fresh fruits and vegetables, it will make a difference for them."

This year, Cross-Lines plans to organize cooking and nutritional classes to help clients eat healthier. Having the garden on site will ground those educational efforts and help make the benefits and fun of eating vegetables more tangible. According to Sterrett, we heard some great stories last year of how our vegetables were used. One woman had never eaten fresh green beans before! We showed her how to snap them, told her how to cook them, and she came back and told us that her four-year-old son ate all of them! She talked about how good they tasted, and how snapping them gave her a really nice activity to do with her son.

Sterrett says the older people who come to the food pantry were especially pleased to see the garden grow over the summer and to get the fresh produce. They all had stories to tell about how they used to eat garden-grown produce when they were kids.

For Cross-Lines, the garden was also good PR. It gave neighbors a reason to step out of their houses and walk to the garden to see what new things were happening with the plants. Program participants and neighbors kept an eye open for the garden and Sterrett says she didn't see any theft from the garden. She believes neighbors and program participants shared a sense of ownership and interest for the garden: Everyone wants to talk to you about the garden. When you're out there spreading chicken manure, people want to know "What are you doing?" and then you get into conversations with

them about the garden, about feeding people, and they just get interested and supportive.

Besides doubling their yields this year, the goals for the garden include Keeping the weeds down! and getting more volunteers involved in garden maintenance. If you'd like to help out, contact Carey Sterrett at carey@cross-lines.org.

Agriculture Returns to "The Farm"

Municipal jail develops gardening program for women offenders.

By Nancy Leazer



For these women at MCI gardening provides food and therapy

In an effort to provide positive activities for women incarcerated at the Kansas City, MO, Municipal Correctional Institution (MCI), staff, volunteers and inmates are once again gearing up to plant a vegetable garden on jail grounds. With planning help from KCCUA, this year's garden, though still modest in size, is to be the facility's largest yet.

The project started several years ago, when inmates planted flowers in front of the administration building. The women were immediately enthusiastic about working in the garden and especially loved cutting a few zinnias for their dormitory.

Later, when an area outside the women's dormitory was enclosed with a fence so they could have additional time outside, the food garden started to take shape. Staff called on the Kansas City Community Gardens to till a small piece of land and

the women planted some tomatoes and peppers.

Gardening efforts at MCI have remained small in scale largely because the jail staff has very little time to devote to this. However, the women inmates have continued to plead to work outside. They love being outdoors and enjoy the fresh air. In addition, the work in the garden tends to bring back fond memories, often of childhood gardening with a loving grandparent or friend. Working the soil is a healthy activity for these inmates, causing them to talk openly about their drug and alcohol addictions or their longing for a better way of life.

Past efforts to find community volunteers to garden with the women on a regular basis were unsuccessful but staff continued to promote the idea and last fall Joanne Katz, a professor in the department of criminal justice and legal studies at Missouri Western State University in St. Joseph, became intrigued by the idea. "I liked the idea of allowing inmates to work in a food garden," said Katz, "studies indicate that gardening in a jail setting may have therapeutic effects."

Katz began promoting the idea with friends and colleagues. Someone suggested that we get in touch with KCCUA and we did. KCCUA's Katherine Kelly and Daniel Dermitzel have been instrumental in developing plans for the garden. Also involved are Master Gardeners Katherine Hoggard and Wanda Ryan and All Souls Unitarian Church which donated \$250 for plants. We are delighted that a group called "Friends of the Farm" has organized to help the inmates fulfill their desire to work in a garden. This is one more way in which we can offer hope where it is needed most.

Kansas City, MO, operates the Municipal Correctional Institution for municipal ordinance offenders. The jail was founded over 100 years ago and sits on a 2000-acre tract south of the Truman Sports Complex. Until the 1970s, it was a working hog farm with inmates involved in all aspects of the operation. To this day it is commonly called "The Farm." Currently, the jail holds about 150 male inmates and 50 female inmates. Common charges are drug paraphernalia, stealing, simple assaults, and driving with a suspended (or no) drivers license. Most inmates are repeat offenders.

Friends of the Farm is a developing organization beginning to attract additional volunteers. Its pilot project for 2008 will be a 40 x 40 food garden in the womens enclosed area. Friends of the Farm will document the positive impact on the participants and hopes to expand the project in years to come. Please contact Joanne Katz at 913-362-6279 to volunteer or make a donation.

Nancy Leazer is the Superintendent of Corrections at the Kansas City Municipal Correctional Institution. She can be reached at 816-513-9630.

Farmer Training Builds Global Connection in Kansas City

Refugee farmers are first to train for KCCUA's Incubator Farm.

By Rachel Bonar



Somali Bantu refugee using rototiller

KCCUA has partnered with Catholic Charities to develop an incubator farm right here in Kansas City. The first year will be specifically for refugee growers but we plan to open the training program to anyone in years to come. The program involves basic agriculture education, infrastructure and support to help participants successfully develop farm businesses.

Workshops are underway for refugee participants of the program, which we have named New Roots. Workshop topics include an introduction to the training farm model, soils, greenhouse production, marketing, vegetable varieties, and tools. The women are eager and engaged. Three Burmese Karen women pulled out a disposable camera and asked me to take their picture in front of the rototiller they'll be using. And I get stopped every day at the office by women participating in the program, asking me when they can get back to the greenhouse to do more planting.

There is something magnetic about farming with refugees that has been apparent even during our first few trainings. Perhaps its the ease with which agricultural principles are shared, often requiring little spoken language. Maybe its the healing, spiritual nature of a connection to the earth that we all belong to. It could be the potential for relationships and growth that comes with getting our hands dirty together.

The first round of market gardeners are largely Somali Bantu and Burmese Karen. Both groups traditionally have had an agricultural way of life that was uprooted during their displacement and time in refugee camps. The Somali Bantu are an ethnic group that has an agricultural past spanning hundreds of years. As a result of colonization and military regimes throughout the past century, the Bantus fertile farms were confiscated as they were forced into slave-like labor, often on their own land. During the planning phases of the training farm this history has re-surfaced. The women mention vegetables and fruits that were grown in their home country. They explain the ways the ground was tilled using water buffalo and basic tools. They are eager to grow ginger, lemongrass, tomatoes and corn.

Some refugees have spent their entire lives displaced and unwelcome. The connections they are making through the New Roots Program, to their agricultural heritage, to American soil, to the Kansas City community, and to refugees from around the globe are contagious. I wait anxiously to watch them sprout and grow into self-sufficient farm-business owners, providing income for their families and a renewed agricultural legacy for generations to come.

Rachel Bonar manages the Refugee Women's Program at Catholic Charities of Kansas City, KS. She can be reached at rbonar@catholiccharitiesks.org.

Job Opening at KCCUA

Hiring for Development Director

KCCUA is looking for a full-time Development Director to manage all aspects of contributed income, including individual gifts and corporate, foundation and government grants. For information, visit our website, www.kccua.org, or email Katherine Kelly at katherine@kccua.org.

Calendar of Events

*Farmers Community Market at Brookside, Saturday, April 12, 2008, 8am - 1pm. **OPENING DAY!** Come out for this first market day of the 2008 season. Say hi to farmers, neighbors and friends and pick up some of the earliest, freshest local organic produce in town. Also shop for transplants for your spring garden. Border Star Montessori School, 63rd & Wornall, Kansas City, MO. More information at www.farmerscommunitymarket.com.*

Earth Fair 8, Saturday, April 12, 2008, 10am - 3pm. The Eighth Annual Earth Fair. A day full of activities, exhibits and entertainment, propelled by a growing awareness of the global climate crisis and interest in choosing more sustainable lifestyles, this Earth Fair promises to be the best yet. KCCUA will be there with fresh veggies and transplants! Shawnee Mission East High School, 7500 Mission Road, Prairie Village, KS.

Growing Growers Workshop: Plant Production, Monday, April 14, 4pm - 7pm. Seed catalogs may seduce you with their green-filled centerfolds but it takes a lot to turn those tiny seeds into healthy productive plants. We will cover the science and practice behind the production of transplants and direct-seeded crops. This workshop starts with a formal presentation and is followed by a farm tour and talk at KCCUA's Community Farm in Kansas City, KS. The event is part of a series of workshops for beginning market gardeners. To register and for more information on this and future workshops visit the Growing Growers website at www.growinggrowers.org and click on "Workshops."

Local Foods, Local Folks: Walking the Green Mile, the Future of Food in Kansas, Wednesday, April 16, 7:30pm. A

panel discussion about local food featuring Rhonda Janke of the K-State Department of Horticulture, Kirk Cusik from the Kansas Rural Center and KCCUA's Daniel Dermitzel. Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS. Little Theater of the Student Union. For more information call 816-651-5060.

Urban Agriculture and its Effect on the Built Environment, Thursday, April 24, 2008. 12pm - 1pm. A *Lunch & Learn* event at the American Institute of Architects, Kansas City. KCCUA's Daniel Dermitzel will discuss urban farming in the context of green and sustainable design, community development and public health. The event is free to members and nonmembers but registration is required. For more information and to register visit http://www.aiakc.org/chapter_events.asp.

Farm to Table Farm Tour & Cooking Class, Sunday, May 18, 2pm - 3pm. Featuring Katherine Kelly of KCCUA and Rebecca Miller, Whole Foods Marketing Director and Natural Foods Chef. This event starts at the Kansas City Community Farm and moves to the Whole Foods Cooking Studio. See whats in season and meet the farmer and the chef. You will tour the farm and harvest spring vegetables, herbs and flowers straight from the field to incorporate into your meals. Gather back at the Studio to create and share a wonderful seasonal meal from all the bounty the farm has to offer! To register, call 913-652-9633 and ask for Chris Clarke, Cooking Studio Director or Rebecca Miller, Marketing Director.

To subscribe or unsubscribe please send an email to info@kccua.org
For editorial comments please contact *Urban Grown* editor Daniel Dermitzel at daniel@kccua.org
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