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**Urban Farms Tour 2009: Hold on to Your Hats!**

*KCCUA and others plan weeklong celebration of urban agriculture and local food.*



From field to table: Local food takes center stage at KCCUA's Urban Farms Tour.

By Janet Brown Moss

Some of you may remember the excitement of KCCUA's first Urban Farms Tour in 2005. It featured six urban farms and attracted some 200 folks. Then came the 2nd biennial Urban Farms Tour in 2007: eleven farms opened their doors to more than 600 folks!

Well, hold on to your hats because the Urban Farms Tour is growing again.

Coming this June, get ready to have some good times with the whole family, to create some urban farm memories and learn something about local food and sustainable cities along the way.

This year, by popular request from interested growers and supporters, the 3rd biennial Urban Farms Tour will become a multi-event celebration during the week of June 20-28, 2009. Here's what's being planned:

Our first goal will be to raise public awareness of the variety of ways people are growing food in the Kansas City metro and the potential this has for making our communities healthier and our city more sustainable. To reach this goal, we've started to talk about and plan events like educational programs and displays at area libraries, a documentary film showing, tie-ins with restaurants that use locally-produced food, and maybe some type of art installation. Some great event ideas for this week-long celebration of urban farms and local food haven't even surfaced yet. Maybe you have an idea for an event you'd like to put on in your neighborhood, at your child's school or your religious congregation. If so, let us know!

The week's events will be capped off by the actual day-long tour of urban farms on Sunday, June 28 from 11am to 5pm. Participating will be more than 20 farms from Shawnee, KS, to Independence, MO, from north and south of the river and many points in between. For the first time this year, the tour will include a variety of for-profit, non-profit and other types of

urban agriculture sites. Urban farm businesses will be joined by educational and charitable farms as well as community gardens and urban homesteads, where people are creating a home-grown life right here in KC. At each of these sites you will also be able to enjoy homemade music, sample some home-cooked foods, participate in childrens art & craft activities, see some bees--their honey and wax, watch worms make compost, and more. How much more fun could a body have?

Ask yourself: What could possibly be the impact of hundreds or even thousands of Kansas Citians giving attention to, and receiving information about, urban food production for an entire week? We think it could be huge and perhaps transforming. And we hope there will be all kinds of groups, faith congregations, schools, libraries, civic groups, workplaces and so forth that will bring food production and healthy eating to the forefront during that week.

If you want to join in the Urban Farms Tour 2009, let us know how you plan to do so or ask us how you can volunteer with us or a participating group! Whatever you do, keep your eyes and ears open to hear of the urban food activities that will be happening this June!

For more information and to get involved in the 2009 Urban Farms Tour, email Janet at [janetbridgeworks@sbcglobal.net](mailto:janetbridgeworks@sbcglobal.net).

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### **Growing Savings to Grow the Farm**

*Building a farm business takes production knowledge, business smarts, and CASH.*

By Katherine Kelly

For many small farm businesses, one of the limits to their capacity to grow is having little or no access to capital. They dont have the financial resources that could help them ride through the cash flow challenges of an expansion or buy some of the tools and technology that could increase their farms' yields and income potential.

Being proud, independent, and sometimes ornery people, farmers can be resistant to looking at outside resources that might help them grow. We are leery of taking out loans; weve all seen the most reasonable yields and income projections become meaningless after weeks of drought and high temperatures or a sudden infestation of blister beetles. Taking out a loan predicated on farm income is, especially for new farmers, not always a good financial risk.

There is however a model of savings and community support that gives the small farm business a gentle hand-up and that gives the farmer less risk and more control. It is called Individual Development Account or IDA. It is a matched savings program for low-income people, where the funds that are saved by the person are matched by funds from public or private sources. In brief, an IDA program works something like this:

1. You and an agency that manages an IDA program decide if you meet basic eligibility for the program. There are income and asset guidelines like, for example, these from the Family Conservancys Family Asset Building Program:

Household income must be less than:

- \$20,800 for a family of one;
- \$28,000 for a family of two;
- \$35,200 for a family of three;
- \$42,400 for a family of four; and
- \$49,600 for a family of five (and for each additional family member, \$7,200 more in income).

Asset guidelines:

The family can own one vehicle and a primary residence. It can also own other assets totaling no more than \$10,000.

2. You develop a business plan and make a case for how you want to use your savings plus the matched funds. Help is often provided with this process; for example, KCCUA can help KC urban farmers and there are a variety of other good resources for small business planning.

3. You work out a savings plan and agreement with the IDA agency.

4. Once youve saved the agreed-upon amount, the agency that manages the IDA program pays the matched amount directly to a designated vendor or, in some cases, to your business account.

5. Best of all, the dollars you save are doubled or tripled depending on the program you sign up with.

What might a farm business owner do with this matched savings plan?

- Buy a high tunnel. High tunnels generally pay off their cost in the first year if a good high value crop, like tomatoes or salad mix, is grown in them. By extending the season and offering better growing conditions than the field, they can provide extra months of farm business income as well as more consistent yields even during the summer heat.

- Buy a water hook-up or drill a well. More consistent yields will result from consistent watering; and more consistent yields generally mean more consistent sales.
- Build a coop and buy chickens and feed. Adding fresh eggs to your product line can bring in new customers and increase your sales.

There are many ways that a farm business could usefully invest IDA funds--buying fruit trees, putting in a walk-in cooler, getting deer fencing or fencing for livestock. The possibilities are as varied as the farm operations that are out there.

KCCUA is part of a group of farm organizations in the Midwest working to set up a regional Farm Finance Alliance, specifically offering IDAs and other financing mechanisms to help low-income farmers capitalize their businesses. There are other non-profit organizations as well that are currently offering IDA programs. The above-mentioned Family Conservancy is one, their website is [www.thefamilyconservancy.org](http://www.thefamilyconservancy.org). You can also contact contact Nora Reyna-Brown, (913) 342-1110 x 1958 or [nbrown@thefamilyconservancy.org](mailto:nbrown@thefamilyconservancy.org) on the Kansas side; and Tracy Kimbrough, (816) 418-2638 or [tkimbrough@thefamilyconservancy.org](mailto:tkimbrough@thefamilyconservancy.org) on the Missouri side.

We need to find ways to help our farm businesses grow. The demand for our products, even in these economic times, is there. Our communities need us to grow more food. We need to get creative and be open to new ways of financing our growth; IDAs may be one excellent way to do that.

*Starting this February Katherine Kelly, KCCUA Executive Director/Farmer, will be writing a monthly column on urban agriculture in Growing for Market, a national publication for farmers growing for local markets. For more information, go to <http://www.growingformarket.com>. As always, reach Katherine at [katherine@kccua.org](mailto:katherine@kccua.org).*

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### **Cutting Waste in the Food System**

*National gleaning program seeks partnerships with regional growers.*

By Lisa Ousley

In hard economic times, we all try to waste less and make each dollar do more. The Society of St. Andrew is here to offer a new way for growers to waste less and make a greater difference in the lives of our poorest neighbors.

The Society of St. Andrew (SoSA), a 30-year old anti-hunger nonprofit dedicated to salvaging produce to feed impoverished people, opened its western headquarters (SoSA West) in Kansas City in May 2008. We are seeking to partner with growers from the Mississippi River to the California coast to salvage the produce they grade out for cosmetic reasons, and transport it to food banks that distribute to feeding agencies. Here in the Kansas City area, we work with Harvesters the Community Food Network to get fresh produce to over 550 feeding agencies.

An article by KCCUA Executive Director Katherine Kelly in the December issue of Urban Grown (see: "[Bless You for the Food You Grow](#)") focused on a gleaning event at the Miller Farm in Platteville, CO, last October. Gleaning is actually one key way SoSA West works with area growers to salvage produce.

Gleaning is a practice that dates back to Old Testament times, whereby farmers opened their fields, vineyards and orchards after the harvest to invite widows, orphans and other impoverished people to come in and gather the culls for food. This practice reduced waste and helped to sustain people living in poverty.

SoSA has proven that gleaning is still an effective practice. Across the nation, we enlist thousands of volunteers from churches and civic groups each year to glean the fields and orchards of farms of all sizes. The fresh fruits and vegetables are bagged up by volunteers and transported to food banks and feeding agencies.

The program was brand new to Kansas City in 2008, but several local growers opened their orchards and fields to be gleaned. SoSA West thanks the Alldredge, Gieringer, Rasa and Dailey Orchards, and Karbaumer and Red Barn Farms for allowing us to glean.

Kansas City area residents who volunteered to glean in 2008 were given opportunities that many people living in cities and towns never enjoy. They worked together in the fresh air in a field or orchard on a beautiful day, enjoying all the sights and sounds that growers enjoy every day. They picked fruit or vegetables and learned important things about the food they eat. And they had the satisfaction of knowing that the produce they had gathered that day would provide much needed nutrition to the poorest residents in their own home town.



Trying to leave nothing behind, this volunteer gleaner is gathering apples at Rasa Orchards in Lexington, MO.

People of all ages enjoy gleaning. Its a great community outreach activity, appealing to congregations of all faiths as well as many civic groups like Boy and Girl Scouts, school groups, clubs and organizations. SoSA West representatives

organize and supervise the events, training volunteers, watching after their safety and ensuring that the growers property is treated with respect and care. Each volunteer signs a liability waiver form to protect the property owner in the event of an accident.

SoSA West offers a second produce salvage program called The Potato & Produce Project, for produce that has already been harvested and is subsequently graded out or rejected. Through this program, growers, packers, etc., donate a variety of produce in loads of all sizes, for which we provide packaging and transportation, and locate a receiving food bank or agency. Again, in the Kansas City metropolitan area, Harvesters receives first consideration for large quantity loads, however, for smaller loads, SoSA West sometimes works with a Harvesters agency to receive the produce directly.

Among local growers participating in our Potato and Produce Project in 2008, SoSA West thanks Gieringer and Pome on the Range Orchards and Fahrmeier Farms. We are looking to expand this program in 2009, and are considering new ways to partner with growers, possibly by providing volunteers to assist with the grading process.

The Potato & Produce Project is also a means through which SoSA West is able to work with large-scale growers across the West to provide produce to food banks and feeding agencies across the West. Through the Potato & Produce Project, SoSA West delivers semi truckloads of fresh fruits and vegetables to Harvesters including potatoes, tomatoes, cabbage, squash, onions and more.

Nationally, the Society of St. Andrew worked with growers and other produce handlers to salvage 23,506,058 pounds of fresh produce in 2008. Since it opened 1979, the organization has salvaged 567.36 million pounds of produce.

In 2009, SoSA West seeks to grow its programs. We work with growers, packers and other produce handlers of all sizes. We even offer backyard gleaning program for fruit trees. Contact Lisa Ousley at (816) 921-0856 or visit [www.endhunger.org/sosawest](http://www.endhunger.org/sosawest) for more information.

Lisa Ousley is the director at SoSA West. Her email is [sosawest@endhunger.org](mailto:sosawest@endhunger.org).

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### **Urban Ag Eases Hard Economic Choices**

*Americans need to grow a collective "spine" but common wisdom and some retooling can go a long way.*

By Semie Rogers

Gloom and doom. Money that evaporates before it hits the ground. Everywhere people are spending less and are hoarding their dollars. What's a fundraiser to do? Since my job is to make sure KCCUA has enough money, this has me worried. We need to pay our staff and pay our bills, so we can do what we do best: help grow urban farmers across Kansas City.

Times are terrible, but the time is right now for urban agriculture. I can't think of a better place to invest your money if you want to make the world a little better in hard times.

At a recent talk I attended, a top fundraising consultant described patterns of giving in recessions. One of the best things about Americans is that we are a generous people. Even during recessions, we give and give enough. Throughout the Great Depression we continued to give, at levels only 1.5% down from previously.

But the ways in which we give change in economic downturns. We home in on crisis giving--feeding and housing people, job retraining--taking care of our neighbors in need.

What we may feel we can't afford to support in downturns are our ideals. We may value these causes deeply, but we don't see them as meeting an immediate need. The consultant's research indicated causes likely to come up short on money this year include the environment and chronic disease prevention.

If you support urban ag, it's a false choice: your neighbors or your ideals. By giving to support urban agriculture you are giving to help feed people now, to help people earn an income and stay self-sufficient in hard times. This is here and now.

But you can feel good about your ideals too. The food grown by urban farmers is not a short-term fix. It may be eaten this summer, but it will also be eaten next summer, and the next. You are part of a lasting solution that attacks poverty and hunger at its roots.

When you invest in urban farming, and in small farmers who sell to people they know, you support improved health. Farmers' markets are a proven tactic to increase peoples' consumption of fresh produce. Farmers--your friendly neighborhood farmers--are on the frontline in the war against obesity and diabetes. They're shooting squash (or maybe this is a new kind of a pea-shooter?). Well, maybe not. But urban farmers connect with people. It's that personal connection that motivates people to eat more home-grown veggies. And home-grown veggies are a simple fix to one of the biggest problems we face today.

I read daily about "the slumping economy," as though the economy is a creature unto itself--if it would just develop better posture, then we'd be just fine. But what this phrase means, at bottom, is that we need to grow a collective "spine." As President Obama put it in his inaugural address, the economy is weak because of "our collective failure to make hard choices."

Strangely enough, some of these hard choices aren't so hard--they just take a little retooling of priorities, and a little readjustment to common wisdom. Urban agriculture is one way to make those hard choices easier--to create jobs here, to grow food sustainably, to make our urban core a place of beauty that grows delicious food.

Investing in urban farming is about making good choices for our world, our country, our community and our bodies. If you think it can't be done, you should see the hope sprouting in our greenhouse.

You can reach Semie at [semie@kccua.org](mailto:semie@kccua.org).

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### Healthy Foods from Brownfields?

*Research project to examine risks and develop mitigation strategies for growing crops in contaminated soils.*



Soil scientist Ganga Hettiarachchi, Ph.D. is a member of the K-State brownfields research team.

By Sabine Martin, Ph.D.

Local gardening and marketing initiatives, and agricultural activities in urban areas, are on the increase especially recently, due to rising energy costs, demand for fresh, locally grown food, and society's interest in sustainable practices. Vacant and abandoned lots may be re-used for gardening activities including food production, and many local farms are or will be located on land that may be impacted by previous use. These kinds of properties, i.e. vacant or abandoned properties with real or perceived contamination issues are called brownfields.

Little is known about the number and characteristics of contaminants that can impact local farming activities. Substances such as lead and other metals, asbestos, chlordane, and other contaminants from previous land use including certain gardening practices may pose threats to gardeners and food safety. This

may especially be true for sites with limited or no previous environmental assessments, unknown institutional controls (for example, deed restrictions), or where organic manures, irrigation with reclaimed waters, and background urban or natural contaminants are factors. Appropriate risk management and education is needed, if brownfields are used for farming/gardening.

Kansas State University (KSU) was recently awarded a grant by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to conduct research on contaminant distribution in soils associated with local gardens and farms on brownfields sites and the subsequent contaminant uptake by plant material. Over a five year period, KSU will work with select communitybased gardening/farming initiatives to evaluate uptake of heavy metals and other contaminants by food crops, and develop recommendations for seedbed preparation and corrective/protective actions to address contaminants. Selected research sites will stay in the project for a minimum of two years to monitor soil and crop conditions and to verify food safety and the success of any corrective actions.

Training and technical assistance will be provided to participating gardening/farming organizations as well as other interested parties. Educational materials will be developed regarding methods and best practices for local farming on brownfields sites. These will include easy-to-use tools and protocols for laypeople to ascertain the suitability of a brownfields site for gardening/farming, and guidance documents for the selection of appropriate crops to be planted on specific brownfields sites. A database on contaminants detrimental to gardening/farming and their associated plant uptake will be developed as well. KSU intends to distribute the research findings and associated educational materials via workshops, seminars, web pages and site specific assistance.

The goals of this project are (1) to enhance the capabilities of garden/farming initiatives to produce crops locally without potentially adverse health effects to the grower or the end consumer, (2) to contribute to the meaningful revitalization of brownfields sites in a sustainable manner, (3) to increase confidence in urban food production quality and (4) to provide resources for producers, urban land managers, local and state government, and extension agents to implement proposed best management practices for the detection and mitigation of potentially harmful substances in soils on brownfields sites.

An integrated approach of research and outreach will increase the understanding and awareness of potential problems associated with farming on sites negatively impacted by previous uses, and will provide solutions to these problems. As a result, KSU expects to see an expansion of local food production operations in urban areas and an increase in consumer confidence regarding foods produced in urban settings. Local farmers/gardeners will likely see rising profits

from the increased safe use of brownfields for gardening/farming, jobs will be created, fresh produce will be available locally and brownfields will be used in a beneficial and sustainable way.

Currently, KSU has identified potential research sites in Kansas City, Flagstaff, AZ, Yuma and Holyoke, CO, and is in the process of identifying sites in Gary, IN. Our intent is to add sites over the duration of the project, as funds allow.

*Sabine Martin is the TAB (Technical Assistance to Brownfield communities) coordinator at the Hazardous Substance Research Center at Kansas State University. She can be reached at [smartin1@ewu.edu](mailto:smartin1@ewu.edu).*

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## Field Notes from the Kansas City Community Farm



Larry Davis on the backhoe searching a leaky water line.

By Daniel Dermitzel

It's early February and most of the farm has been in a slumber for the past couple of months. We have a handful of crops growing in our high tunnels but even they are more surviving than thriving at the moment. But things are changing quickly now. We've started our weekly seedings and each day the benches in our greenhouse are populated with a few more trays.

Winter is a time for repairs and farm improvements. We're giving some needed TLC to our high tunnels this month. Some of the plastic cover is in rough shape and a few PVC bows need replacing after snapping under a strong wind.

We also tended to a major headache that's been nagging for several months, a leaky water line leading to our field. The underground line had been sending moisture up through our driveway last season. To fix this we needed to first find the pipe itself (not surprisingly, no drawings exist of supply lines that were installed here decades ago). So with a small backhoe, expertly operated by farm volunteer Larry Davis, we started digging. We couldn't find the pipe and so we kept digging. And we kept digging. And we kept digging. It felt a bit like a Disney cartoon with Donald Duck chasing a gopher and turning over the whole yard while the gopher is sitting on the fence laughing.

Eventually, with no sign of the pipe, we had nowhere else to go but *under* the paved driveway. It was back to the equipment rental to get a concrete saw and cut into the asphalt (now the asphalt contractor was smiling, too). After some more digging we finally hit the pipe and the leaky portion. Yippee! A little more excavating and a trip to the plumbing store and we had it fixed. The hole is filled up now and the driveway pieced back together (we'll wait calling the asphalt company until we're sure the repairs holds up).

You can reach Daniel at [daniel@kccua.org](mailto:daniel@kccua.org)

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## EcoRadio KC: A Local Voice for the Whole Community of Life

*New environmental program aims to reach beyond the "choir".*

By John Kurmann

Many people may not have heard yet, but we have an all-too-rare jewel among our radio-listening options in Greater Kansas City, a genuine community radio station. I'm referring to [90.1 FM KKFI](http://90.1FMKKFI), which is community-funded and features many programs produced by local volunteers.

And now we have another great reason to tune in to KKFI: EcoRadio KC, a new half-hour program airing at noon each Tuesday (followed by [Bioneers](#): Revolution from the Heart of Nature). I'm one of the hosts on the team of volunteers producing the show, and our goal is to explore positive solutions to the challenges we face as we work to create a healthier future for our community and for all species.

Our show topics are diverse, much like the interests and expertise of our dedicated volunteers: We've talked about gardening and farming, recycling and waste reduction, and energy use at home and in our vehicles. We've also discussed Christmas consumerism and what to do about it, indigenous worldviews and how they can help us meet today's ecological challenges, reflexology and nutrition, ecovillages and much more.

EcoRadio KC has a magazine-show format and includes interviews, live commentary, and prerecorded stories. We incorporate music in the show so we'll be entertaining as well as informative. EcoRadio KC is determined to reach beyond "the choir" of people who are already paying close attention to the state of the world and are working to make it better.

The program draws upon other members of the community and area organizations (including KCCUA) for their knowledge, experience, and ideas. We seek to explore humanity's relationship with the rest of the world, showing the connections

between the ways we choose to live and the well-being of the whole community of life. There is, after all, only one world continuously circulating the same air and water, relying on the same soil, year after year, for nutrients to support all life, including human beings. In short, we can only be healthy as part of a healthy world.

For upcoming weeks, we're planning stories about local food and how to start a spring garden, the healing benefits of raw foods, the future of transportation, the risks of carbon monoxide poisoning in our homes, and the human and ecological health benefits of getting farm animals back out on pastures. We hope you'll tune in at noon on Tuesdays. If you're interested in getting involved with the show (we can always use more help!) or want to tell us how we're doing, please get in touch at [EcoRadioKC@gmail.com](mailto:EcoRadioKC@gmail.com). We look forward to hearing from you.

*John Kurmann is a community activist and writer working on issues of cultural change, food, energy, and climate; he can be reached at [willowjohn@gmail.com](mailto:willowjohn@gmail.com).*

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## **Closing the Circle**

*Getting sustainability right in our food system.*

By Ben Champion, D.Phil.

Life, it seems, is rather circular. I've been thinking more about sustainable food systems lately after a good bit of time exploring other areas of sustainability. Part of what has brought me back is the very real sense in which foods are all of our lifeblood and food issues infuse themselves into everything we do. As Wes Jackson of The Land Institute is prone to say, If we don't get sustainability right in agriculture we won't get sustainability in anything. I'd slightly modify that to say that we need to get sustainability right in our food systems rather than merely agriculture.

Why have I come back to food systems concerns? I think it's because I'm now seeing concrete evidence of how food systems tie together so many other themes here in Manhattan, KS. For instance, the student-run organic produce farm at K-State now sells to on-campus dining centers as well as external entities like the local cooperative grocery, the town farmers market, and more. However, the dining centers have now begun sending their food waste back to the student farm for composting to become organic produce in the next season. This small food system is a metabolism of student education, sustenance, environmentally benign waste management, and outreach. It opens our view to new possibilities. Where previously there were singular projects, now there is circularity.

This food system metabolism was on display and attracted healthy attention at K-State's *Leading Kansas in Sustainability* conference on January 23, 2009. What happens when the Manhattan Chamber of Commerce comes to us and wants to use the K-State model as something for the entire city's hospitality industry to emulate? Or when the model builds to include local urban farmers and gardeners or new edible gardens in our elementary schools? Were not there yet, but the conversation has definitely begun, and it makes me keenly aware of how much sustainability truly depends upon community.

I think a lot about sustainability, what it means, whether we have any hope of attaining it, whether it is even a state of being. Some say it's about balancing social, economic, and environmental priorities for the long term, a sort of steady-state approach. Find the right sustainable arrangement and then maintain it! Others are increasingly talking about an adaptive approach, that we never reach sustainability but we can make our society more resilient, more durable, capable of lasting. I'm not sure where I land in the spectrum.

Of one thing I am fairly certain, however the need to build new models and new systems as capacity for the future.

Cities have always been melting pots mixing cultures, economics, politics, and environments in creative new ways. What excites me most about the urban farming movement and about the work of KCCUA is the way it is a creative movement. It is about creative expression of new possibilities, developed using elements from out-dated systems. It takes unused land from one system and uses it as a space to generate life and sustenance. It takes people marginalized from one system and allows them to express another vital form self-sufficiency and food democracy. It features, above all, diversity through development of unique urban spaces according to their unique qualities and the unique foods and relationships that go along with them.

Creativity does not automatically produce sustainability, though. It is the first arc of the circle, and from this first arc come the new models that can grow and build true societal capacity for the future. As KCCUA builds its network of farmers that all help each other and learn from each other, they prepare for the growth and capacity-building of this second arc. What are the next stages, arcs, that will complete the circle?

At our sustainability conference, we heard David Orr speak about a \$300 million redevelopment of the town of Oberlin, OH. They are redeveloping the downtown with environmental design, walkability, and some urban gardens. But they're also building a large green-belt around the city devoted strictly to growing a large proportion of food required by the town. This comes after a decade of local food developments in the town of the sort K-State is now pursuing.

This is Oberlins food movement returning to the beginning of the circle/cycle. It leads me to a big question about sustainability. Should we really be asking whether this or that activity is sustainable, or should we be asking what it will take to build the capacity for the future? While I wait for an answer to that one, I'm excited, more than anything, to see what happens in Manhattan and Kansas City through the capacity building of KCCUA, K-State, Peoples Grocery, and all the other great works.

*Ben Champion, D.Phil, is Director of Sustainability at Kansas State University where he also teaches courses in geography. His past research includes an analysis of the Kansas City food system. Reach Ben at [champion@k-state.edu](mailto:champion@k-state.edu).*

## Urban Farmers Meeting High on Optimism

*Fertile minds share knowledge and "can-do" spirit at KCCUA's Annual Meeting.*

By Daniel Dermitzel

For two hours each year, KCCUA invites farmers, would-be farmers, community gardeners, food-not-lawners, food retailers, wholesalers, chefs and urban ag supporters to come together to get acquainted, connected, informed, energized and recognized. It's always a fast-paced kind of meeting, held with farmers' busy schedule in mind, packed with opportunities to network and learn through mini workshops and discussions over coffee and pie.

We call it the Annual Urban Farmers Meeting and this year some 100 folks filed into Master's Community Church in Argentine, KCK, on Saturday, January 24--a record turnout and a sign that word is really catching on about growing local food and rebuilding urban communities. And while a fresh dusting of snow covered the cityscape outside, inside it felt like the growing season was already underway. The meeting bubbled with ideas and questions and answers about growing and selling farm products. Short workshops on high tunnel production, CSA farming, organic agriculture, recession-proofing your farm, farm gleanings and other topics helped structure the conversation.

Participants came from all over the metro and some from farther away. A group of students from K-State, calling themselves H.O.E.S. (Harvesters of Environmental Sustainability) drove in from Manhattan, KS. One of them, Bjai Rice, commented later: "It was really inspiring to meet farmers in their 30s, 40s and 50s who have been growing for as little as two or three seasons, and a couple of newbies like me. I learned a good deal about the experience of starting your own urban farm [and] networking was awesome."

In a workshop on small CSAs, participants explored the costs and benefits of running a subscription program (pre-paid weekly deliveries of fresh produce) with only a handful of subscribers. Urban farmers often operate very small farms that can't supply 20 or 30 CSA subscribers for a whole season. Small CSAs of five or six folks, however, still have substantial fixed costs that can place a significant burden on the farmer who may be attending a weekly farmers market as well. The question was raised how a restructuring of small CSAs, of distributing weekly shares and of communicating with members could ease this burden? As in other areas of urban agriculture (input purchasing and farm infrastructure) the key to achieving profitability may lie in cooperative approaches.



Community-based problem solving at KCCUA's Annual Meeting in January.

Mini-workshops on organic farming and organic no-till agriculture stressed the importance of our soils for crop health and yields. Soils that are poor in structure and low on organic matter cause poor root development, hold less water, increase erosion and yield food that tends to be lower in nutrients. Organic farming offers a soil-oriented approach and organic no-till practices are the next "frontier" in soil-based agriculture. We were fortunate to have the expertise of a trained organic farm inspector available for questions from those considering getting certified in organic production.

Another short session on beekeeping in the city revealed a need for improved city codes and ordinances but encouraged everyone to check their local rules, as they are often silent on this issue and there are quite a few farmers and others keeping hives in city limits. Questions also centered around beekeeping practices, management, diseases and honey.

It was inspiring to witness the collective knowledge, creativity and dedication expressed at this annual gathering. Everyone is welcome, everybody's skill and perspective are needed and together we tap into a deeper understanding of how to produce healthier food, care for the earth and for each other.

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As in years past, our thanks go to Pastor Todd Chipman and the congregation at Master's Community Church for letting us use their facilities. Many thanks also to PJ Quell who, in addition to helping us set up and clean up, kept the buffet in

shape and contributed pies with berries from her own backyard. Thanks also to all the other participants who brought along tasty treats and shared in the clean-up at the end. Until next year, happy growing!

Daniel can be reached at [daniel@kccua.org](mailto:daniel@kccua.org).

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## Calendar of Events

*2009 Healthy Food Policy Forum*, Thursday, February 12, 9am - 3:30pm, American Royal. This forum serves as the capstone to 24 months of work by the Healthy Food Policy Initiative, examining how we can improve the food system here in Kansas City. Join us and learn about exciting developments happening locally and nationally for our food system. Registration fee is \$25 to cover lunch. Please go to <http://kchealthykids.org/Event-2009-Healthy-Food-Policy-Forum/Index.htm> or call Carole Damon at (816) 868-9300 for more information.

*Growing Growers Market Farming Apprenticeship Program--Application Deadline*, March 1. Work and learn on local, sustainable farms. For more information and an application, call Laura Christensen at (816) 805-0362 or go to [www.growinggrowers.org](http://www.growinggrowers.org).

*Growing Growers Workshop - Understanding and Managing Soil*, Saturday, March 21, 10am-2pm, Leavenworth County Extension Office, 500 Eisenhower Rd Suite 103, Leavenworth, KS. Soil structure, biology and fertility as well as both home and professional testing options. Organic management practices will be emphasized including composting and cover cropping. Lunch is provided, and a farm tour of Conways Organic Produce follows the workshop (2 to 4pm). Registration fee: \$30.00 See workshop schedule at [www.growinggrowers.org](http://www.growinggrowers.org), or call Laura at (816) 805-0362 for more info or to register.

*Beginner's Beekeeping Class (2 Days)*, Sunday March 22, 12:30pm - 5:30pm AND March 29, 1pm - 5:30pm, Johnson County Fairgrounds. Presented by the Northeastern Kansas Beekeepers Association & the Midwestern Beekeepers Association. For more information call Cecil Sweeney at (913) 856-8356 or email [joli@heartlandhoney.com](mailto:joli@heartlandhoney.com). Download registration forms & programs at [www.nekba.org](http://www.nekba.org).

*11th Annual Exhibition of Farmers: EAT LOCAL! 2009*. At TWO locations: Saturday, March 28, 2009, 9am - 2pm, Shawnee Civic Center, 13817 Johnson Drive, Shawnee, KS 66216 AND Saturday, April 4, 2009, 9:15am - 2pm, Roger T. Sermon Community Center, Truman & Noland Rd, Independence, MO 64050. 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 Kansas City Food Circle at [www.kcfoodcircle.org](http://www.kcfoodcircle.org).

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For editorial comments please contact Urban Grown editor Daniel Dermitzel at [daniel@kccua.org](mailto:daniel@kccua.org).

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