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Zoning Update: Efforts Continue To Pass Ag-Friendly Codes

Just how supportive legislators will be of productive urban landscapes remains to be seen.

By Gretchen Kunkel, President, KC Healthy Kids

Since the April edition of *Urban Grown*, Ordinance 100299 has been introduced to the KCMO City Council to provide for and regulate urban agriculture. Sponsors and co-sponsors of the ordinance include Council members Sharp (lead), Gottstein, Curls, Skaggs, and Mayor Funkhouser. As introduced, the changes were designed to support urban farming and improve local food systems.

On April 20, the proposed ordinance received support from the KCMO City Plan Commission and was recommended to the Council's Planning and Zoning Committee for review on April 21. Since receiving the recommendation, the Planning and Zoning committee has met several times and continues to deliberate on the changes to the zoning codes regulating urban agriculture. The next opportunity for the committee's decision is Wednesday, June 2, at 1:30pm at City Hall.

The substitute code has been revised since its introduction in early April. In addition to defining three new categories of agricultural activity--Home Gardens, Community Gardens, and CSAs--the code has recently been revised to include additional restrictions, especially in residential zones. As written on May 19, the additional restrictions in residential zones include:



Urban farms like this one at the Niles Home for Children serve Kansas City with fresh food and a place to experience nature while making productive use of ecological resources.

Crop Agriculture

- Definition: An area of land managed and maintained by an individual or group of individuals to grow and harvest food crops and horticultural products for off-site sale in locations where retail sales are an allowed use.
- Crop agriculture may be a principal or accessory use.
- Special use permit required for on-site sales in all residential zone districts except R-80 (\$100; first year can get a one year permit, then up to five years after that, subject to Board of Zoning Adjustment approval).

Urban Agriculture: Home Gardens

- Definition: A garden maintained by one or more individuals who reside in a dwelling unit located on the subject property.
- Whole, uncut, fresh food and/or horticultural products may be donated or sold on site.
- On-site sales allowed from May 15-Oct 15 only.
- No permit required.
- Private homeowner covenants or restrictions supersede the codes.

Urban Agriculture: Community Gardens

- Definition: An area of land managed and maintained by a group of individuals to grow and harvest food and/or horticultural products for personal or group consumption or for sale or donation.
- May be divided into separate garden plots for cultivation or may be farmed collectively.
- May include common areas.
- All chemicals and fuels shall be stored in an enclosed, locked structure when the site is unattended.
- Community garden group members may or may not reside on the subject property.
- Sales and donation of whole, uncut, fresh food and/or horticultural products grown in the community garden may occur on-site on otherwise vacant property, but may not occur on residentially zoned and occupied property, except property zoned R-80.
- Crops may not be planted in the front yard of a residentially zoned and occupied property.
- May be a principal or accessory use.

Urban Agriculture: CSAs

- Definition: An area of land managed and maintained by an individual or group of individuals to grow and harvest food and/or horticultural products for shareholder consumption or for sale or donation.
- Shareholders may pick up food and/or horticultural products grown on the CSA property at the site and may work at the site.
- May be a principal or accessory use.
- Special use permit required if located in a residential zoning district, except R-80 (\$100; first year can get a one year permit, then up to five years after that, subject to Board of Zoning Adjustment approval).
- Additional standards are also required and include buildings and structure requirements, chemical drainage and storage, machinery/equipment storage, and signage.
- Any number of employees may work up to a cumulative total of 80 work hours per week.

The KC Center for Urban Agriculture, the Greater Kansas City Food Policy Coalition, and its many partners have been heavily advocating on this issue. We continue to strike conversations with Planning and Zoning Committee members to push for a compromise that creates additional opportunities for urban agriculture in KCMO, especially economic opportunities.

If you live or work in KCMO, we strongly encourage you to get involved and stay involved! We need to continue to raise our voices in support of these code changes. Please contact or re-contact your City Council member and ask him or her to support the proposed revisions to the zoning ordinance. Learn how you can take action by visiting www.kcfoodpolicy.org.

You can reach Gretchen Kunkel at ghkunkel@kchealthykids.org.

Urban Ag Zoning Debate Signals How Far We've Come

KCMO Council members face learning curve on details of urban food production.

By Katherine Kelly

When we started using the phrase “urban agriculture” five years ago, elected officials were confused. What the heck is urban agriculture? When we said “urban agriculture” maybe 3 years ago, they mostly got that it was something different than community gardens. About a year or so ago, they started nodding their heads when we blithely tossed “urban agriculture” into a sentence. And now, as we’ve worked with the city to redraft the codes in regards to urban food production, those same elected officials have used the phrase themselves, taking new ownership of urban food production.

They’ve engaged in serious discussions about urban ag and city policy, asking questions about hoop houses, the numbers and locations of farmers’ markets, and the effectiveness of public transportation in getting people without cars from home to fresh produce. They’ve been interested in the economic opportunities in city farm businesses. They’ve expressed concerns about community health, traffic, and potential impacts on the neighbors. There has been, for those of us who eat, sleep and breathe urban ag and food access, some lack of information about the realities of urban food production and consumption, but we have seen significant progress on the part of the elected officials in the room in understanding this “new” issue.

It has been remarkable to witness, through this ordinance change process, how the discussion has developed to the point where most of the elected officials declare that they are in support of urban agriculture. Council members Sharp and Gottstein, co-sponsors of the ordinance and two of the five Planning and Zoning Committee members, have been stalwart advocates. Councilwoman Circo offered up a brief story about how, in her youth, her mother used to hand her a few dollars and tell her to go down the street and buy some tomatoes from the gardener who sold from his home, framing her experience with this as a benefit of urban agriculture. Councilwoman Sharon Sanders-Brooks has testified powerfully to the reality of the food deserts in her district and to her support of urban farm businesses as one strategy to help her constituents get better access to good food and neighborhood-based economic opportunities. Mayor Funkhouser spoke several times very eloquently on urban ag as something good for a changing city.

Not surprisingly though, the “I’m for” from some has been quickly followed by “except for (insert key aspect of urban agriculture).” At times, our group of advocates has listened with alarm, wishing that we’d never raised our heads above the policy horizon. If elected officials’ owning the phrase “urban agriculture” means giving them the power to impose restrictions that the city has lived well without since it was founded in 1838, perhaps it wasn’t such a good idea to encourage them to take this movement seriously? If being “for” urban agriculture means writing laws that would require expensive permits, inspections, and no edible crops in the front yard, perhaps it would be better for our urban farms to continue their “illegal” operations? Perhaps we would have been better off just focusing on our crops, not trooping down to city hall?

The problem though is that we really do want to make our city healthier, greener, and more productive, not just our own backyards and empty lots. We want there to be neighborhood-based economic opportunities in growing and selling fresh produce. We want children to grow up seeing the neighbor down the street growing good food to feed other people. And making those realities possible requires a broad base of support and the engagement of policy makers. It requires changing the conversations about urban agriculture from “huh?” to meaningful discussion about on-site sales, employment and volunteer opportunities, equipment, and all the other issues that have been raised. It requires creating the openings for people to say “I’m in support of urban ag, but…” and then dealing with the consequences.

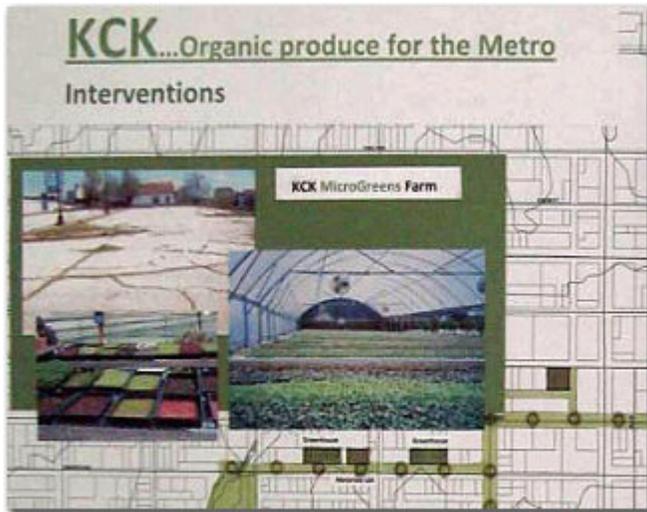
In our gardens and fields, we are used to the back and forth between what we hope to create and what the environment actually gives us. We order our seeds, repair our tools, and lay out our planting maps over the winter months, firmly believing that this will be the best growing year ever. We then we get down to the hard work of growing, we face the realities of too much or too little rain, pests and diseases, and unexpected abundant yields and heart-breaking losses. We are experts at envisioning and planning, then doing, adapting, and accepting, and, miraculously, starting the cycle all over again.

We'll need those exact same skills in our policy work. What we envision and dream about won't ever play out exactly like we hope it will. Our environment will change our best laid plans, but using our hard-won organic growing skills, we'll keep on learning, adapting, and creating food abundance in our city. We're glad to be working with our elected officials on urban agriculture and look forward the years to come, as we make our growing and good eating plans for Kansas City real.

You can reach Katherine at katherine@kccua.org.

New Course On Urban Ag, Sustainability Wraps Up At UMKC

Integrating food into cityscape raises bar for urban design professionals seeking sustainability.



By Daniel Dermitzel, Jacob Wagner & Molly Davies

"Most of what we need to know to design intelligent cities can be learned from farming."

Prof. Randolph Hester, College of Environmental Design, UC Berkeley, in Design for Ecological Democracy.

"Make a city to touch the people's hearts."

Ima Kamalani, Urban Farmer, Haleiwa District of Honolulu, HI. (1)

Students proposed urban agriculture design interventions for diverse neighborhoods across the Kansas City Metro area.

This spring, the UMKC Department of Architecture, Urban Planning and Design (AUPD) and the Environmental Studies Program offered for the first time a newly developed course on urban food production and sustainable environmental design. *Environmental Sustainability: Planning for Urban Agriculture* invited thirty undergraduate students to examine the role of urban farming in promoting

ecological and human health. The course was designed by KCCUA's Daniel Dermitzel and AUPD's Dr. Jacob Wagner. Dr. Molly Davies joined the team of instructors to add her expertise in ecological systems.

Choosing what to include and what to leave out of the curriculum was difficult. Urban agriculture is a rich, multi-disciplinary activity that invites analysis from many angles. To preserve this richness and transmit it to a group of students required, we believed, a frequent shifting of perspectives (individual - community), scales (farm - neighborhood - region - planet) and activities (words - drawings - field work). We wanted students to recognize and respect the detail--much of design is about getting the details right--while remembering that details are interconnected and embedded in the whole. It is from that interconnectedness that details derive their relevance and people the ability to grasp sustainability.

We decided to divide up the semester into eight modules covering topics such as *The Food System*, *Building Urban Agriculture*, *Urban Material Flows*, and *Creating an Enabling Framework for Urban Agriculture*. Expert guest speakers joined the class each month to explore different facets of urban food production, including global food systems, urban soils and brownfields, urban nutrient flows, composting, planning and zoning for agricultural production, and urban food policy. The students quickly earned our respect and gratitude for staying flexible and open-minded as we tugged them along this winding journey which also included a mandatory urban farm work day and a foray into how our culture engenders a psychological sense of disconnectedness that consistently undermines efforts to achieve sustainability. Finally, students were asked to pull together what they had learned in a design exercise, proposing urban agriculture interventions for ten Kansas City area neighborhoods ranging from downtown to the exurban fringe.

Student designs incorporated greenhouses, community gardens, fish farms, living walls and edible walkways, community composting, for-profit farms, healing farms, rooftop farms, rainwater harvesting, rain gardens and much more. Together, these proposals added up to more than healthy fresh food for city residents, but to what Randolph Hester has called "eco-revelatory design", a design that seeks to reveal and interpret, allowing the landscape to teach about itself. "The splendor of urban agriculture," Hester writes, "is that while we cultivate the land, the land cultivates our minds." (*Design for Ecological Democracy*, p. 344).

Throughout this course we had to face the question of "can this really be done?" If our proposals to introduce food production to the city make so much sense, why aren't they already being implemented on a much broader scale? We suspect that each of us felt--at one point or another--a pit in the stomach wondering about the "feasibility" of all these wonderful and ambitious designs. Some answers to this question came during our review session at the conclusion of the course. A small group of design professionals joined us at the Kansas City Arts Incubator to discuss the student proposals. There were technical questions about production methods, questions about who will be doing the farming and where will the money come from. All of these were valid questions deserving answers but admittedly we didn't have all the answers.



Student teams presented their work to local design professionals at the KC Arts Incubator.

What we did have that evening was a heightened sense of possibility and direction; of how each of us can contribute to making urban agriculture real and of the importance of doing so. An insightful analogy came to mind (heard last year at a local food conference): If we picture our vision as being attached to us by a rubber band, we know that if the vision is too far out, it will stretch and break the rubber band but if the vision is too familiar and close, the rubber band won't do much to pull us toward it. Urban agriculture, edible landscapes and urban sustainability are not just technical challenges but human choices. At the end of the evening and our course, our diverse group was closer to *choosing* urban agriculture, knowing what such choices can look like and being pulled by a vision that was sufficiently ambitious. And it is doubtful that any of us will look at a large corporate lawn, a vacant parcel, a downtown rooftop or even a parking lot without seeing at least the potential for a truly productive urban space. A tangible benefit of the course was creating a cohort of students with integrated knowledge of agricultural, ecological and urban systems. We hope the ripple effect of their knowledgeable enthusiasm will be extending across Kansas City.

The AUPD faculty has welcomed food systems planning as an important addition to the curriculum and is planning to offer a regular course on this topic with the assistance of Daniel Dermitzel and KCCUA. We would like to express our sincere thanks to all who helped with this course, including Dr. Mary Hendrickson, Dr. Sabine Martin, Timothy Walters, Kevin Anderson, Gretchen Kunkel and Patty Noll, as well as the urban farmers who gave our students a chance to get their hands dirty: Pov Huns, Marty Kraft, Marlon Hammons and the KC Community Farm and Juniper Gardens Training Farm. Lastly we would like to thank all the reviewers who took time to give feedback and the KC Arts Incubator for making their facilities available.

(1) As quoted in R. Hester, *Design for Ecological Democracy*, p. 278.

Reach Daniel Dermitzel at daniel@kccua.org, Dr. Jacob Wagner at wagnerjaco@umkc.edu and Dr. Molly Davies at daviesc@umkc.edu.

Urban Food Production In Detroit: A Practitioners' Perspective

Core values of sustainability and self-reliance fuel city's unique urban ag movement.

Many stories have been written about Detroit's economic woes and restructuring. As is often the case, hardship leads to innovation and today cities across the country are watching carefully the innovative responses being developed by Detroiters. A recent online magazine targeting readers in Pittsburgh headlined a story on Detroit "[What Detroit Has That Pittsburgh Wants. Really.](#)" The story highlights Detroit's innovative urban food production and restaurant scene, business incubation models, mass transit projects and public art as evidence of the city's creativity amidst a changing economy. We asked Ashley Atkinson of The Greening of Detroit and her colleagues to give us their on-the-ground perspective on urban agriculture in their city.



Grown in Detroit: Sustainability and self-reliance.

By Ashley Atkinson, Devin Foote, and Janell O'Keefe

Since 1950 Detroit has lost more than half its population leaving behind a woefully inadequate tax base and more vacant land than any other city in the nation. Today there are more than 50,000 vacant lots (without structures) owned by the city, state, or county in Detroit and if the latest estimates are true, in the next five years upwards of fifty percent of the City's property will be vacant. With all of this land and a changing economic landscape there is room to begin to re-imagine what our city could look like; in fact it's long overdue. While the media and our city government are just starting to wake up to this fact, urban gardeners and food activists have been working diligently to reimagine and rebuild Detroit's food system for more than a decade.

The national urban agriculture community recognizes the movement growing here in Detroit. As a result, our city is looked to as one emerging example, central to on-going conversations around urban food production among post-industrial cities and beyond.

The uniqueness of what is occurring in Detroit isn't focused on one large organization. The lush 1.5 acre EarthWorks Urban Farm and the happenings there serve as evidence. EarthWorks was launched as a partnership between the Capuchin Soup Kitchen and Gleaners Community Food Bank in 1997 and is now growing organic produce for the soup kitchen and other neighborhood outlets; a great example of how collaborations and partnerships begin. They also grow the majority of the transplants for the Garden Resource Program collaborative.

The Garden Resource Program (GRP) is a joint effort of EarthWorks Urban Farm, Greening of Detroit, Detroit Agriculture Network, Michigan State University, and hundreds of other organizations and individuals. It operates just as its name suggests, as a resource to urban gardeners and farmers, providing seeds and transplants, tools, compost, technical assistance and education. The GRP is an inside-out model, with a focus on community leadership and decision-making. Throughout the year, GRP members get together to set goals and to make decisions about resources, workshops, and program organization.

The result of our partnerships and collaboration: Detroit today has a more robust urban agriculture movement than exists anywhere else in the U.S., with more than 16,000 gardeners and farmers networked in 1,300 community, market, school, and family gardens across the city in 2010. In the last six years green-thumbed Detroiters, representing every race, class, education level, and neighborhood in the city, have collectively taught and attended nearly 20,000 hours of training in some of the most cutting edge agriculture principles and practices in the world, including workshops on harvesting, cooking, and food



Creating productive landscapes with urban agriculture in Detroit.

preservation. This education is evident in the productivity, diversity, and quality of crops grown in Detroit gardens and farms.

At the heart of the burgeoning urban agriculture movement here exists a core value that our local food system should benefit Detroiters first and foremost and should implore a model of sustainability and self-reliance. Beyond that, urban agriculture needs to operate at a human scale. Shared organizational beliefs seek to establish gardens and farms sized appropriately for the urban landscape and blending into existing or emerging neighborhoods as a gathering point, a place of shared ownership. Being the Motor City was not always good for the environment, and producing food should be a process that improves our soil, land, water, and air, not something that continues to destroy it.

Everyone talks about green cities now, but too often this talk doesn't result in any more than curbside composting and tacking solar panels onto rooftops while we continue to drive, to shop and to eat organic pears flown in from Chile. The sustainable future that we are striving for will require more than surrendering selective bits of environmentally unsound privilege; it's going to require a fundamental shift away from excessive materialism. And those here in Detroit who have lost so much or, never had anything to start with, those growing numbers of gardeners and farmers here in our city who share their newly-found love for the soil and their healthy harvest with the rest of us, will be among the leaders to that kind of sustainable future.

In Detroit, residents are engaged and excited about getting their hands dirty and growing not only food, but also communities. Gardeners and our neighbors are seeing first-hand the positive impact urban agriculture can have. Many neighborhood residents have lived in their homes for thirty, forty, or fifty years--they have roots and a unique perspective on what their communities may be confronting. Community gardens and small urban farms become instant and powerful symbols of stability and resilience. Many studies have proven what Detroiters seem to know instinctively: urban gardens build (or rebuild) relationships, reduce crime, and make neighborhoods more livable.

So this week, tens of thousands of Detroiters are welcoming spring by dusting off shovels and breaking new ground, unearthing potential and breathing new air and life into our soils and communities with the simple act of growing food.

Ashley Atkinson is Secretary of the Detroit Food Policy Council, Director of Urban Agriculture at The Greening of Detroit, and Co-chair of the Detroit Agriculture Network. You can reach Ashley at aatkinso@umich.edu. For more information about urban agriculture in Detroit visit www.detroitagriculture.org.

KCCUA Board Members: Passion For Local Food And Community

In the fall of 2009, KCCUA invited new members to its Board of Directors to replace founding members whose terms were expiring and to increase total board membership. KCCUA board members bring diverse experiences and skills to our organization and play an important role in providing leadership, vision and support. In this issue of Urban Grown, KCCUA Development Director Semie Rogers profiles two new board members with a strong passion for local food and community. Look for similar profiles in the future. And many thanks to all our board members for their service.

By Semie Rogers



Gwen Wurst is a local community volunteer who joined KCCUA's board in December 2009. She attended St. Olaf college in Northfield, MN and worked at the MS Society for ten years, raising funds. She and her husband Tim have two children, ages five and eight.

How did you first connect to KCCUA?

Growing up, my family lived in Kansas City, MO, and we didn't have a big yard, but we had a huge garden. We always went to the farmers' market. I moved back to Kansas City from Colorado and wanted the same for my kids. We started a vegetable garden in our

"It makes sense to use the earth's resources that we have here to grow food."
- Board member Gwen Wurst.

back yard, but it wasn't enough. So I joined the KCCUA CSA several years ago. When KCCUA asked CSA members if they would be interested in board service, I said yes. I strongly believe in the mission, and KCCUA needs help with fundraising. That's what my background is. I want to help in any way I can to increase locally grown food.

How did you come to be so passionate about locally grown food?

Eating locally grown food has always been of interest to me from a taste standpoint and a health standpoint. I grew up that way. It's scary to me that it's not an option for a lot of people. I want us to make it an option for everyone. It's more than just being able to put a tomato plant on the patio. It is a *blast* to see kids try things straight from the garden, or walk around the farmers' market and try things. I've seen kids understand the difference between food we've grown here, over food that's shipped halfway around the world. The boy who lives behind us doesn't like strawberries, but he loves ours. It makes sense to use the earth's resources that we have here to grow food.

What would you like to see KCCUA accomplish in the next few years?

I would love a physical presence on both sides of the state line. We already have mission presence on both sides of the state line. I'd like to see more empty lots on both sides of the state line used for farming. Teaching the next generation how to take care of their own food needs in their backyard, and their neighbor's yard and their back lot, is a great hope.

Why do you like fundraising? A lot of people are afraid of asking for money.

It's a really easy way for people to connect to the mission--a way that people can make a significant contribution. I've never had a problem asking for money for something I cared about. When you present it to people that they're investing in change, then it's easy.



David Smith also joined the KCCUA board in December 2009. He is chief of staff for the Kansas City, KS, school district (as of July 1st). David has been in district administration in the Kansas City, KS, and Kansas City, MO, schools for the last seven years. He and his wife Krista Calvert have two young children, and he has two grown children.

How did you get involved with KCCUA?

I've been a CSA member for several years. I've been cooking since I graduated from college. I started getting more serious about food and ingredients, really looking for freshness. When you have freshness, you can let the food speak for itself. Also, it's become more important to me, having young children and paying attention to what they're eating.

"My hope is KCCUA will be at the center of the blooming."
- Board member David Smith.

I'm a gardener, mostly perennials, but I've been growing some vegetables. I've always tried to garden organically. Stuff gets eaten. I've got some collards right now that are full of holes. My son comes out to the garden with me sometimes: we learn about the circle of life. We compost. We talk about where it all goes.

As long as I've been coming here [to the farm], we've always talked--Katherine and Daniel and I. I like doing things myself, I like to create things, and this is a place where people *do* things. This is a place where things happen.

What do you see for KCCUA over the next few years?

I see a very bright future. Urban farms connect so many things--the environment, to health...to re-creating the sense of community. My hope is that KCCUA will be at the center of the blooming. Obviously we won't do it all. I think that we'll be connected to other organizations that will be part of the greenscape.

What are some things you would like to be involved with?

To be helping to get information out to underserved communities. If there are ways to connect schools to edible gardens

and reach kids' parents that way, I want to help. As a person of color, wanting to make sure that the community is able to connect to urban ag, because of the lack of access to healthy food, and all of the attendant problems that creates.

What are a couple of things that people might not know about you?

Well, I went to seminary [at Yale]. And I've been knitting for almost 30 years. In the winter you'll see me wearing some of the sweaters that I've made.

You can reach Semie at semie@kccua.org.

Field Notes From The Kansas City Community Farm



After several years of growing onions on plastic mulch we are returning to straw mulch to feed our soils.

By Alicia Ellingsworth

Organic farmers try to use what comes their way by turning it into something they need and they often turn it into a thing of beauty. Maybe it's the artist in them, or the connection to the earth they experience in simple everyday ways. I've talked to many farmer friends while thinking about this article on mulching, hoping to learn something new or to get a great quote. These individuals have a love and respect for what they do that translates into more than rotted organic matter.

One of KC's best-known farmers is Lew Edmister. Lew has mulch mania. He started incorporating reclaimed beer filters into his mulch last summer. These filters are donated and collected locally. The 40'x40' sheets are roughly 3/8 inch thick and have the appearance of off-white carpet padding when Lew hauls them to his garden site on the Westside. He stresses that the filters are only part of a larger system which also includes layers of straw and compost. This system of reused organic matter is the foundation for his no-till urban garden. Initially Lew used the filters as a weed barrier, now several months later they have decomposed into the soil and are part of his incredibly loose, fertile beds. Lew says, the filters are made of diatomaceous earth and cellulosic fiber. No plastic (therefore petroleum) products ever reach his garden. Lew feels strongly about many things; he feels particularly strongly about that.

Angela Greene is definitely a believer. She hopes using organic mulch reduces the stress the plants might experience during harsh weather conditions. Angela has not bought any bagged mulch, but instead gathers city-collected woodchips that have decomposed into beautiful compost-like mulch. She also uses straw, hay, grass and leaves. Always looking for ways to be more efficient, Angela uses mulch for paths in and around her urban garden which allows her earlier access to the beds in the wet spring conditions. The mulch suppresses weeds, but also makes her garden look better. Angela trains many neighborhood teens at her farm in Kansas City, KS. Together they improve soil, grow food and make a difference.

Grass is a favorite mulch of Omaha urban farmer, Nicole Engels. Although clean clippings are hard to come by since many lawns are sprayed with herbicides, Nicole uses them to hold down weeds. Nicole has experienced how the decomposing clippings produce enough heat to kill weeds. They also add a fix of nitrogen for the plants just when they might need it. It's all about timing. Nicole enjoys using anything (straw, hay, leaves) ground-up that can be easily tossed with a pitchfork. She also adds a mix of leaves and small twigs to her compost pile. Those twigs create spaces for better air circulation. Everything is useful in nature. Nothing is wasted, says Nicole.

The seed catalogs and garden shops are full of fancy mulches. Some made from recycled and biodegradable paper, some are plastic and they come in all colors each claiming to be the best for a particular plant or a particular time of year or to keep out particular weeds. Aluminum foil mulch is a possible choice. We can order these mulches, pay (in many ways) for

their shipment to our farms, lay them down with expensive implements, then remove them in the fall and send them to the landfills. Or we can do what farmers have done for centuries before ours. We can use what we find in the area around our farms. We might meet a neighbor who might also be a farmer and who might become a friend.
Reach Alicia at alicia@kccua.org.

Vegetable And Fruit Production Return To Historic Farm On Edge of Town

Members of Unity Village organize to promote sustainable ag, local food and community.

Not all urban farms are located in city neighborhoods. So-called "peri-urban agriculture", i.e., agriculture along the urban perimeter, is a potentially important part of a localized urban food system. The sizeable tracts of land located on our cities' outskirts can supply city residents with large quantities of food and offer them opportunities for agricultural employment, recreation and education. The historic Unity Farm on the Eastern edge of the Kansas City Metro area was a thriving example of this peri-urban food supply line. Now efforts are underway to once again grow "local food for local folks" at the newly-formed Gardens at Unity Village.



By Linda Chubbuck and Stan Slaughter

In the fall of 2008 several small clusters of Unity Village Chapel members independently began discussing the possibility of re-establishing a working garden on the grounds of Unity Village. The energy beneath these discussions was electric. Soon the small groups found each other, and critical mass was achieved. Weekly meetings began and the project was launched.

A little history: In the early 1900s the founders of the Unity Movement, Charles and Myrtle Fillmore, purchased land and established Unity Farm on the outskirts of Lee's Summit, MO. Both the farm and the movement grew until the headquarters moved there from downtown Kansas City. Unity Farm (now Unity Village) was then one of the largest farming/orchard operations west of the Mississippi.

Fruit trees once again grace the grounds of Unity Village.

Unity Farm was run by individuals committed to maximizing the resources at hand. They worked in harmony with their surroundings to provide healthy food for themselves, their community and the Unity Inn (a once-famous vegetarian restaurant). These individuals were "organic farmers" and pioneers in sustainability before the terms had been coined. They did what they did as a natural expression of the connectedness of all that is. With 4000 fruit trees, 500 chickens, a dairy herd, and a large vegetable operation, the farm became famous for its apples, apple cider and apple butter, all processed in and sold from a three-story barn that still stands on Colbern Road. The produce fed the Unity workers, the Unity Inn, and was also sold to the public.

By the late 1970s the farm became a lower priority to Unity School of Christianity and operations ceased. The apple trees were removed and the land was leased to tenant farmers.

Back to 2008. With literally scores of volunteers now interested in the new gardening project, it soon became apparent that the group's top priority needed to be organizational development. The desire to farm the land on Unity grounds required permission from the Unity School. From the winter of 2008 through the spring of 2009 a business development team devoted hundreds of hours to creating a proposal and detailed business plan to present to Unity School.

The proposal was to form a 501c3 non-profit, volunteer-driven organization dedicated to providing assistance to the community by growing healthy food, protecting the environment and teaching others to do the same. Its mission: to restore

the original Unity Farm ecological legacy of sustainability, land stewardship, and interconnectivity, and to share through educational programs.

Within a few short weeks, Unity approved the proposal with enthusiasm, leasing us about seven acres for vegetables and another two acres for an orchard as well as access to the lower floor of the historic Apple Barn on Colbern Road. In August 2009, the stand opened with excited volunteers, eager customers and produce procured from the local Amish auction.

There were challenges encountered along the way. Each person had a different idea of what gardening is or should be. Some had strong opinions about which steps were most important and about the timing. Meetings occasionally became heated and lengthy. Prayer and spiritual principles were critical in bringing everyone together in a unified front. The bylaws of The Gardens at Unity Village were approved at the first annual meeting in Fall 2009. Anyone can be included in our email list and volunteer in the Gardens, at the market stand or in other ways. Full membership is by \$100 donation, which is how the initial start-up funds were raised.



High tunnel construction at The Gardens At Unity Village.

Of course, donations of any kind are welcome. One member spotted a nursery operation in disrepair and soon a large hoop house was obtained, taken down and rebuilt on site. Compost bins were built from repurposed lumber and food scraps are being composted. The compost will be used throughout the gardens to further enrich the soil. As a side note: while organic and no-till methods are being used in the production of our vegetables, organic certification is not currently planned.

The land sits on rich upland prairie soil but has been conventionally farmed for several decades. Members started plants early this year and transplanting has begun. Because unity grounds are heavily forested and deer, turkey and rabbits abound, protecting the crops from the wildlife has been an important priority. One of our board members is an experienced cattle farmer and has fenced three quarters of an acre with a five-strand solar powered electric fence which seems to be effective. The orchards have been re-planted in a separate location, with twenty trees (apple, peach, pear plus berry bushes) planted in a ceremony in late fall 2009.

A market stand which funds the non-profit programs was open late last summer and fall, selling vegetables purchased at auction. Word spread rapidly and business was brisk. Many customers have mentioned that they remember buying cider or apples at the barn and are excited to see the building in operation again. This season's offerings at our market stand will be a combination of crops of our own and those purchased from local auctions. The market stand opened May 15, 2010 and is currently operating every Saturday morning from 8am to 1pm (through the end of October) with the possibility of additional days/hours once ample produce becomes available.

The Gardens at Unity Village is an exciting gardening community with a combination of spiritual, health, community, and educational goals. It's about healthy food, fun, and friends. Learn more about The Gardens at our Facebook page "The Gardens at Unity Village" and our soon-to-be operational web site: www.gardensatunity.org.

You can reach Linda at songs@lindachubbuck.com.

Calendar Of Events

New Rosedale Farmers Market. Every Sunday through October 17. 12pm to 4pm. Southwest Boulevard Family Health Care, 340 Southwest Boulevard, Kansas City, KS. This market includes nine local farmers and three community gardens. Family activities and nutrition education are also provided. SNAP/EBT & Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Benefits accepted. For more information on this market, visit www.rosedalefarmersmarket.com or email rosedalehealthykid@att.net.

Kansas City Community Farm "Work the Farm Day." Saturday, June 26, 10am to 2pm. Too early to say what exactly we'll be doing, but be assured it will be fun in the sun! The Community Farm is located at 4223 Gibbs Road, KCK 66106. Email alicia@kccua.org for questions and to RSVP.

Growing Growers Workshop: Equipment for Vegetable Growers. Monday, June 14th, 3pm to 7pm. K-State Research and Extension Station, 35230 W 135th St., Olathe, KS. This workshop will include presentations on tractor safety, drip irrigation and high tunnels. Following the presentations, a variety of equipment and equipment demonstrations will be available to view, including the Drangen motorized work cart, tillers, hand tools, mulch layer, tractor and more. A tour of the JCCC Student Farm, located at the station, is included. For more information on this and other Growing Growers workshops visit <http://www.growinggrowers.org/Pages/workshop.htm> or email Laura at growers@ksu.edu. Cost for this workshop is \$15.00.

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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