

# Green Beings CSA Urban Farming Education and Outreach

## Final Report for FNC07-678

Project Type: Farmer/Rancher

Funds awarded in 2007: \$5,975.00

Projected End Date: 12/31/2009

Region: North Central

State: Missouri

Project Coordinator:

[Sabrina Hilton](#)

## Project Information

### Summary:

#### PROJECT BACKGROUND

Our focus is on community development and wellness promotion through food production. This took shape in the form of education events, tours, and volunteer events. We worked on 1/4 acre, but the total potential area to grow is about 1 acre. We primarily grew annual vegetables, some perennial herbs, flowers and fruits. We grew in raised beds, and other elevated containers. Our networks with local restaurants gave us resources to focus heavily on compost production. We raised Honeybees, worms, and Chickens. We relied heavily on support from volunteers, and our networks with local organizations.

The house that is connected to the project has had an organic vegetable garden to support it as well as a compost bin for the last 10 years.

#### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Goals. On the outset our goals were to promote self-reliance and sustainability amongst lower income families in the city. We planned to support 5 low income families with a CSA share subsidized by paying members of a CSA. Participation was also planned to include trainings every 2 weeks on specific topics including food preparation, nutrition, preserving food, garden planning, garden maintenance, compost, and city animals.

#### PROCESS

We started the project with the Farmer Rancher grant and other financial support from donors, CSA members, and lending agencies. We solicited a lot of help from community members and other organizations to create a garden with 14 raised beds and 3 compost bins. We also had to establish a reliable system of watering. Throughout the growing season we had two work days scheduled every month and 5-20 volunteers from different sources would attend to help maintain the garden, or help to develop new elements of the garden. Our trainings were generally informal parts of work days. We also had regular school visits from a local high school; Metro High School students visited several times during the season as part of their Biology lesson. Many students also attended the work days. Last semester the entire

student population was gathered for a seminar in which Sabrina Hilton spoke with all of them about getting involved with Green Beings as a way to lower their carbon foot print.

Marketing was also key to our exposure and networking ability. The Green Beings work days were advertised in the monthly publication, The Healthy Planet. Green Beings was also represented with a booth at the Healthy Planet Expo; a biannual event bringing groups that advertise in the Healthy Planet together and open to the public. Work days were generally scheduled around tours of the Ecovillage project and the garden. Earth Day and a community Gardeners summit gave Green Beings the opportunity to raise public awareness about the benefit and availability of local produce. The CSA model evolved over the course of 2 seasons. Originally we had a few paying members and donated produce to other needy individuals, but that method did not seem to work. The investment was not there, so the second season participants all paid a subsidized rate to be involved in the CSA. They all lived within walking or biking distance from the garden. Their membership also required participation in maintaining the garden.

## PEOPLE

- Culver Way Ecovillage- supported the project by providing land, tools, water, and people to support the project and be involved in the CSA.
- AmeriCorps St. Louis- AmeriCorps members spent hundreds of hours volunteering at the garden on a range of projects including creating a signage garden, an herb spiral, planting and harvesting.
- Gateway Greening- Gateway Greening is connected to the Missouri Botanical Garden and supported us with trainings, seeds, and a network for other urban food production projects.
- Metro High School- Metro High School is only 100 ft from the Green Beings project. Students are required to complete 200 hours of community service before graduation. We have had many volunteers from Metro as well as opportunities for education with their classes coming to visit the garden.
- Westminster Place maintenance- Our site is surrounded by a housing development called Westminster Place. The maintenance staff was very helpful in security to the site and helping with networking throughout the neighborhood.
- Brickman Group landscaping- they mowed the land around the garden for free every week throughout the season.
- Wine Press Restaurant- purchased herbs from the garden
- Tereene Restaurant- supplies us with pre-consumer food scraps from their restaurant for our compost.
- Cafe; Ventana- supplies us with spent coffee grounds for our compost.
- Northwest Coffee Roasters- supplies us with spent coffee grounds for our compost.
- Ronnoco Coffee Roasters- supplies us with burlap sacks for mulch in the garden
- Kaldi's Coffee Roasters- supplies us with chaff from coffee roasting for our compost.
- St. Louis City forestry department- supplies us with free mulch and soil for our garden.
- St. Louis Urban Farming and Sustainability Meetup groups- Weekly volunteer events are posted which brings a steady flow of volunteers and awareness about what we are doing.
- Eastern Missouri Beekeepers association supported us in the establishment of our hive.

## RESULTS

Based on our experiences in the first season we chose to offer reduced rates to CSA members, but felt that offering free produce was not effective because members did not have an investment that committed them to participation. We had 8 paying CSA

members last year ranging in income levels. We also had 7 neighborhood residents committed to lots in the Green Beings Garden last season. We had 124 different volunteers work with us in the garden ranging from one time visitors to regular helpers. We will continue to take advantage of more and more social networking programs such as Facebook and Meetup to promote events. It isn't solely about the labor that volunteers provide. It has very little to do with productivity. We set out to establish a community around food production, and we were very successful in doing that. The community is our foundation.

We did not weigh our produce this year, but will starting in the 2010 season. We did weigh the compost we collected from restaurants and household scraps. It averaged 300 lbs/ week, and has created quite a volume of finished compost that we will use in beds next season.

#### DISCUSSION

This grant was the beginning of the Green Beings project as it exists today. Some of the barriers that existed originally were access to community members, developing our own skills as gardeners, and financial security. We didn't fully understand the social and racial barriers that can exist even between neighbors, but have managed to navigate them over the past two years, and know many of our neighbors quite well. We have gained access through established members of the community such as maintenance people and store owners. They promote us and tell people about the work we are doing.

Having our hands in the dirt, and doing a lot of independent research was helpful to figure out what it was we were trying to do, but Sabrina also took part in the Master Gardener program with the Missouri Botanical Garden and is currently taking the Growing Gardeners class with Gateway Greening. The Growing Gardeners class is strongly connected with Lincoln University and University of Missouri Extension offices. We are learning how much there is to learn.

Financial security is something that has not been addressed fully. We are working on a few other grants, and also plan to participate in a local farmers market this summer. Advantages of creating a project like ours is that it is socially sustainable. The community grows itself as the garden develops. Urban beautification is a large benefit, creating a safe space for children in the neighborhood, reconnecting people with their food supply and the health benefits of that, as well as empowering people through educating them to take responsibility for their basic needs. Disadvantages are the lack of a financial structure to support the required consistent labor, grant writing and development. I would recommend beginning a project like this with a committed core of a few individuals that have time and can access the project regularly. The core group should also have a range of skills and interests.

#### OUTREACH

We are very fortunate in our access to media outlets. Irresistible Community Builders has enabled us to share our successes with the Eco-village community they are developing as well as the community at large through their various media outlets. We also took advantage of Facebook and Meetup.com. We also created a website [www.greenbeings-stl.com](http://www.greenbeings-stl.com) that we update with news and special events. Over the past season we have put more emphasis on taking advantage of resource streams flowing into the city- which generally end up in landfills. We are working on several grants currently to develop a vertically integrated aquaculture system similar to that in Milwaukee at the Growing Power site. We hope to include the use of a methane digester to heat the greenhouse spaces in the cold season. We will continue to announce our updates on our website.

Throughout the past season we had 124 different volunteers and countless more visitors to the site including 65 students from Metro High School.

## PROGRAM EVALUATION

I would be interested as a participant to be regularly informed about other grant opportunities connected to USDA to keep the project going. I think it would also be beneficial to arrange a possible network with former participants that did similar projects to help guide current participants.

## Research

### Participation Summary

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