



Twin Cities Metro Growers Network

Exploring Urban Soils Research and Compost at Growing Lots

Our June meeting was at Growing Lots Urban Farm (www.growinglotsurbanfarm.com) where we talked soils and compost, and learned about research looking at the potential of urban farms and gardens to improve water infiltration and reduce runoff, and a host of other benefits. See the TCMGN web site for handouts from this event and past events – www.sfa-mn.org/twin-cities-growers-network --Karl Hakanson, UM Extension-Hennepin County. --Photos Karl H. and Claire Baglien.



(l to r) Seamus Fitzgerald, Taya Schulte of Growing Lots, and Jason Walker, SFA.

Taya Schulte and Seamus Fitzgerald, co-owners of Growing Lots Urban Farm, described the various soil and composting mixtures they have used and why they were willing to be one of the UM research sites. "We are very interested in this research, and we have already benefited from working with Nic and Jennifer, said Taya, the conversations and interactions have already provided many insights and we look forward to the results". As they farm on top of an old parking lot, they rely entirely on materials brought on to the site. In addition, the impermeable layer means there is limited capacity for the soil to adsorb water. While the compost-rich soil does have high water holding capacity, there is only a foot of soil to work with. Growing Lots Urban Farm is a one acre market farm located in the heart of the Seward neighborhood of South Minneapolis. They have transformed vacant parking lots into a highly productive vegetable farm marketing produce to CSA members, farmers markets and wholesale accounts.



Jason Walker, Sustainable Farming Association (www.sfa-mn.org), discussed SFA's mission of farmer networking and education. "It was energizing to see Growing Lots' innovative approach to producing fresh food for market, and hearing about the farmers' experience, challenges and successes. Growing Lots is another example the Growers Network has highlighted that shows creative solutions to reduce food insecurity, grow more food locally and build economic activity."



Nic Jelinski (top) and Jennifer Nicklay, U of MN urban soils researchers.

Nic Jelinski and Jennifer Nicklay, University of MN Dept. of Soil, Water, and Climate (www.swac.umn.edu), are working closely with urban growers - like Taya and Seamus - throughout the whole research process, from generating questions to figuring out the stories of our results. This research is looking at the capacity of urban farms and gardens to provide high-quality food, regulate water quality, improve soil health, support biodiversity, and, fulfill social and cultural needs of communities. They explained the research plots, measuring yield, nutrients, insect biodiversity, soil quality, water quality, and more. The project will wrap up at the end of next year, and the goal of this work is to provide information to growers to help them better manage their gardens and farms for greater environmental benefit, and to inform policy makers as they craft urban agriculture-focused programs and policies.



Claire Baglien, on a sunny evening.

Claire Baglien, Urban Agriculture Programs Specialist, City of Minneapolis, was on hand to promote the Minneapolis Urban Agriculture Survey (www.minneapolismn.gov/UrbanAgSurvey), the Minneapolis Food Action Plan (www.minneapolismn.gov/FoodActionPlan), and the Minneapolis Food Council (www.minneapolismn.gov/sustainability/homegrown). **Claire invited all community members to get involved!**



Network Coordinator Karl Hakanson, UMN Extension, reiterated the goal of this peer-to-peer grower's network --informative, informal, interactive and in-place learning and community building. "A warm evening at Growing Lots Urban Farm ... so was the weather! Thanks everyone for making it a success!" --Karl



A collaboration of University of MN Extension and the Sustainable Farming Association of MN



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