

# Advice to grow on

As NENA's technical adviser, farmer Liz Henderson offers a passionate perspective on the way we live and eat

By Lisa Hermsen



Justin Marantz

*CULTIVATOR: The land calls at Peacework Organic Farm in Newark.*

Picked peas, cleaned cabbage, scrubbed scallions. Few of us do the daily work of food production. Few of us even know the people who do the work for us. For Elizabeth Henderson, these things symbolize not only the labor of what we eat, but a way of living

*Henderson has high praise for garden staff, describing them as “skilled growers.”*

characterized by respect for land and commitment to community.

When Henderson started farming more than 20 years ago, the farm crisis was much advanced and yet advancing. The crisis was particularly acute in the Northeast, where, as Henderson says, our small farms could not compete with the large corporate farms building in the Midwest. In this part of the country, it was apparent that farming could disappear altogether, as 1 million acres of farmland had already been lost. Also lost: sources of fresh, local food grown in season; ecological respect for the quality of water and soil; and the food dollars that contribute to regional economies.

Henderson has written at length to document what these losses mean for the future of U.S. farming. Our food supply is now transported from across the globe, so longer storage life for shipping is more important than nutritional content. As a matter of course, farms now use pesticides, herbicides and synthetic fertilizers to maximize crop yield. And farming in many areas might now be described as agribusiness specialized for export purposes.

In resistance to these distressing trends, Henderson advocates for community-supported agriculture, a system vastly different from conventional farm business. In a community-supported agriculture farm, members buy shares and enter a cooperative relationship with farmers. In exchange for their investment – and, often, for sharing some of the farmwork – members receive a share of the harvest. CSAs grow a wide variety of foods, harvested at their peak of ripeness, with the best vitamin and mineral content. Crops are farmed using organic methods: soil conservation through crop rotation and minimal tillage; soil fertilization through composting; and pest control through the



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cultivation of biodiversity. CSAs also keep food dollars in the region, selling surplus produce to local consumers at farmers' markets and through other venues.

For Henderson, the most important component of community-supported agriculture is the community. For the last 15 years, Henderson has been involved with Genesee Valley Organic Community Supported Agriculture and is now co-owner of Peacework Organic Farm in Newark, which supplies produce for the GVOCSA. Henderson emphasizes the annual commitment and cooperative relationship among members, who agree to share cost, labor, harvest and risk. Members help tend the soil, grow the food and distribute produce. Henderson emphasizes what this means: If the season is good, everyone gets more food. But if the season is bad, everyone gets less. When weather conditions are perfect for gray aphids, for example, as was the case last season, there is a short supply of broccoli. But when conditions yield a bounty of beans or tomatoes, as happened this year, members reap the rewards.

CSAs got their start in North America when visionary Robyn Van En adapted the original CSA model from Europe, beginning with her own Massachusetts farm in 1985. Before she died in 1997, Van En had started to revise a CSA guide she'd written several years earlier, a task that Henderson – her longtime friend and fellow advocate – decided to complete. Henderson's 1999 book, *Sharing the Harvest: A Guide to Community Supported Agriculture*, is an instructional and philosophical history that guides those with an interest in carrying on the CSA movement. The book is one example of how Henderson – through her writing, presentations and grassroots advocacy – counsels farmers, agricultural organizations and policy makers.

As a technical adviser for the NorthEast Neighborhood Alliance and its agricultural venture, Greater Rochester Urban Bounty, Henderson is helping the organization develop a strategy to get the highest yield from small gardens in heavily populated neighborhoods. She has high praise for garden staff, describing them as "skilled growers." And she believes that with good planning, able direction from staff and solid community support, the gardens can provide healthy food options without putting more chemicals into an already polluted urban environment.

Henderson thinks a CSA is an ideal way for GRUB to serve the northeast neighborhoods, and if GRUB's CSA, the Neighborhood Fresh Produce Buying Club, has 100 members within five years, that would be a tremendous success. She'd like to see more gardens take over even more property until Sector 10 becomes one of the most attractive neighborhoods in the city. Residents would benefit from naturally grown, healthful food; beautifully restored landscapes; and a strong sense of community.

Of the broad range of technical advice Henderson offers NENA, much has to do with what she calls "people skills." Namely, how might GRUB attract community members and keep those members involved? She emphasizes that it's important not only for members to be involved, but also to take leadership roles. Only then can they experience real ownership. By planning for community ownership of the gardens, the neighborhood might find residents more willing to protect the properties and their resources – motivated, she hopes, by new respect for the land.

*Lisa Hermsen is an assistant professor of language and literature at Rochester Institute of Technology, which works with NENA on various community-service projects.*



# fall harvest in

## A GARDEN GROWS...

story and photographs by Brooke Levine

WHEN we think of harvest time during a New York autumn, most of us envision ripe country fields, crowned with farmhouses and backlit by mountains of kaleidoscopic leaves. Yet fruits and vegetables bloom at our urban back door as well, transforming vacant lots and street corners, building self-reliance, changing lives.

Sector 10 alone is home to nearly 4 acres of land farmed by friends and members of NENA and NEBCA. From spring thaw through frost, hardy hands plant the seeds, cultivate the crops, harvest the goods and make sure they find a place on local plates. In all, the neighborhood is home to four market gardens: on Sander Street, Clifford Avenue, Hudson Avenue and First Street.

Here, we take a brief look at one of these urban farms and the youth who work the land, as well as the public market and a local restaurant where the food is sold. The cycle of a season. The growth of a community.

-Christina Le Beau  
Editor

**T**he farmland on Sander Street had been neglected for years. But the NorthEast Neighborhood Alliance and the North East Block Club Alliance thought it would be a good idea to revive the gardens there – long called the Vineyard – and bring more locally grown, affordable, healthy food into city neighborhoods.

NENA and NEBCA already were farming other gardens in Sector 10, and had started GRUB – the Greater Rochester Urban Bounty – to oversee their growing agriculture business. GRUB employs neighborhood youths and a variety of professionals to work in the gardens and sell the food. Many local residents also come to the farm to see if they can volunteer. A project like this one helps bring the neighborhood together.

At the farm, which covers 2.69 acres, the farmers grow a variety of vegetables, from collard greens to squash, using all organic methods. Also grown here are fresh herbs and some fruits. When the products are harvested, they are then sold at the public market, and to local restaurants and food stores. And when there is



It's the end of another work day at the Vineyard. Only the scarecrow has to stay through the night.

some extra time, farm workers go door to door to see if anyone is in need of healthy food.

Working on the farm has made people realize that if you want something, you have to work for it. Running a farm isn't as easy as it looks, and this is one of the things youth learn while working there. On a larger human scale, the Vineyard and the other gardens represent human struggle. Everyone is there to make a change, and it's not an easy one. But there is so much more involvement with the community. "It's almost like a chain reaction," says James Sarria, NENA's farm manager. "No one wants to be the only person standing around while everybody else is working."



Nikita, one of the youth workers at the Vineyard, bundles parsley to sell at the Rochester Public Market.



# rochester



Matt Howard helps Arthur, a customer and long-time GRUB supporter, pick the freshest produce.

## ...A WORK ETHIC EMERGES

story and photographs by Brian Marcus

The next time you visit the Rochester Public Market on a Saturday morning, go straight through all of the farm stands and don't stop until you get to the building with a sign bearing the word GRUB. That's at 50-52 Public Market, in the group of warehouses known as Commission House Row. There you will find a couple of hardworking kids and some darn good organic produce.

Sure, there are plenty of stands to choose from, but what makes this one unique is that all of the produce is grown within the vast urban landscapes of Sector 10. The fresh organic produce is harvested throughout the growing season by local youth who live in the neighborhood. They work together to cultivate the land and sell the produce, and in return they gain an experience that many jobs could never offer.

For Anthony Hall, a 10th grader at East High School, working at the market has provided him with hands-on experience in both life and in gardening. Anthony's job has given him the opportunity to meet and interact with different people every week, teaching him about

communication and working with customers, skills sure to be valuable in future jobs. Like Anthony, Amanda Quiñones, a 9th grader at East High, enjoys working at the market because she gets to meet new people in the community. When Amanda turns 15, she

wants to get a job at Wegmans, and she's confident that this job has prepared her for that goal.

Matt Howard, a 9th grader at the Charter School of Science and Technology, has gained something else by working in the market. He's learned about produce and agriculture, and the market offers a chance to see "what other people are doing with their produce." One thing Matt likes is the opportunity to talk with customers and share his recipes, often learning new ones in return.

GRUB cultivates not only produce, but also the minds and skills of the youth it employs, allowing them to grow as both human beings and workers, and planting the seed for their future success.



Youth entrepreneurs Amanda Quiñones and Matt Howard sort grapes at the GRUB stand in the Rochester Public Market. Both Matt and Amanda get up early every Saturday to work at the stand.



## Who We Are

Since 1999, the Greater Rochester Urban Bounty (GRUB) has been farming in the northeast sector of the city during the summer months. Our produce is grown without pesticides or chemicals and we use only natural fertilizers.

We are actively involved in our communities by supporting economic development, sponsoring neighborhood events and providing employment opportunities.

## Why Become a Buying Club Member?

### As a member:

- ✓ You receive quality, seasonal produce for less than you would pay at the grocery store. What a bargain!
- ✓ Our produce is **VERY FRESH**. For you, this means great taste, high nutritional value, and a longer life in your refrigerator.
- ✓ While most produce is grown so it can be shipped long distances, ours is grown for maximum flavor. Where else can you buy produce grown in the City of Rochester?
- ✓ You know where and how your food is grown. You are welcome to visit the farm at 126 Sanders Street and talk with the farmer.
- ✓ You receive recipes, cooking and storage suggestions.
- ✓ Your financial commitment helps support a local business and the residents it employs.

## Vegetable Availability

	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.
Apples			x	x	x	
Asian Greens	x			x	x	x
Basil		x	x	x		
Beans		x	x	x		
Carrots		x	x	x	x	x
Cherries		x				
Cilantro	x	x	x	x	x	
Collards		x	x	x	x	x
Cucumbers		x	x	x		
Eggplant		x	x	x	x	
Grapes			x	x	x	
Lettuce	x	x	x	x	x	
Melon			x	x		
Mulberries		x	x			
Okra			x	x	x	
Onions			x	x	x	x
Parsley		x	x	x	x	x
Peaches			x	x	x	
Pears			x	x	x	
Peppers, hot		x	x	x	x	x
Peppers, sweet		x	x	x	x	
Rhubarb	x					
Scallions	x	x	x			
Spinach	x				x	x
Summer Squash		x	x	x	x	
Swiss Chard	x	x	x	x	x	
Tomatoes		x	x	x	x	
Turnips	x			x	x	x
Winter Squash					x	x
Zucchini		x	x	x	x	



## Greater Rochester Urban Bounty

### Fresh Produce Buying Club



### Farm-Fresh Produce from Rochester





## A Farm in the City

Living in a city, we seldom experience the earth in its natural form. Yet with almost four acres of farmland partially owned and fully operated by the North East Neighborhood Alliance Community Land Corporation (NENA-CLC), we now have a peaceful city haven.

We also have a precious resource: a city farm filled with pesticide-free fruits and vegetables located only blocks away from the downtown Rochester Public Market.

Vegetables from the gardens are so fresh they often go from farm to table in a matter of hours, as opposed to most fruits and vegetables that are transported an average of 1,500 miles.

## What is a Fresh Produce Buying Club?

### Members

Members buy shares for the 22-week harvest before the season begins. In return, members are guaranteed a basket of fresh, locally grown vegetables and fruits each week.

The Fresh Produce Buying Club is a part of the network of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms that promote organic, pesticide-free and environmentally friendly farming.

### The Harvest

Each week's share of produce includes a variety of vegetables that we grow in our neighborhood gardens. We offer a large variety of vegetables, fruits and herbs. A single share of 4-6 items per week is enough for 1 or 2 people; a family share of 8-12 items per week is enough for a family of 4.

### The Process

Shares are planned according to each week's harvest. Each member chooses their pick up location for the season - either Thursdays at the Vineyard, Saturdays at the downtown Rochester Public Market, or home delivery\*.

### Payment

Several payment plans are available including: payment in full, monthly payments, scholarships, and work scholarships.

### SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE

Please contact Sharon Rosenblum, GRUB Administrator (544-0140) for an application.

## Join Today

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Street: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Work Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

### Choose your 2004 Membership Level

\_\_\_ FAMILY MEMBERSHIP \$300

For the equivalent of \$13.64 a week, a family gets \$20-25 worth of produce a week.

\_\_\_ SINGLE MEMBERSHIP \$175

For the equivalent of \$7.95 a week, an individual gets \$10-15 worth of produce.

### Choose a PAYMENT PLAN

\_\_\_ Full payment enclosed

\_\_\_ Two payments: ½ due May 31, 2004  
½ due July 15, 2004

\_\_\_ Monthly payments: We will be happy to set up a pay schedule to meet your needs. Five monthly payments will be due the first of each month beginning June 1, 2004.

\_\_\_ Home delivery\* is available for the season for an additional fee of \$3 per week (\$66).

Total Amount enclosed: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**Make Checks Payable to:**  
North East Neighborhood Alliance

**Mail to: GRUB** 1499-1501 Clifford Avenue,  
Rochester, NY 14609