

International Peace Farm @Akron Zoo

Hewa Bora “Fresh Air” Farm

Business Plan

Prepared by Shanti Community Farms
April 2022

DESCRIPTION

A major urban agricultural training facility for economic development and education. Starting a new urban farm adjacent to the Zoo for the neighborhood community, the African and Bhutanese immigrant families steeped in agriculture and the new I Promise Village residents. The farm’s crops will be produced from the representative immigrants’ native seed as well as traditional American crops grown by neighborhood residents.

- Neighborhood residents will be provided with 10’ x 20’ garden plots available, some in elevated containers.
- African/Congolese farm families growing native seed crops, including maize, peanuts and langa langa (amaranthe).
- Bhutanese/Nepali families growing native seed crops, including mustard greens, hot peppers and snake gourd.
- Once the I Promise Village is completed, members of that community will also participate in the urban farm experience.

Mission & Goals

Economics: Increase incomes of the farming families involved and alleviate their household expenses. Provide a flexible source of income for gardeners and cut family food costs. Provide job training and facilitate food entrepreneurship.

Provide affordable land. Cost of buying local farmland is prohibitive due to high cost so co-op leasing of vacant land is a means to provide affordable farming.

Only one out of six immigrant farm families have personal vehicles available to transport out to the farmsite. To alleviate transportation issues, transport options will be provided to and from farm sites with shuttles, bus tickets, and carpooling. The farm is adjacent to a major bus route.

Nutrition: Provide affordable fresh fruits and vegetables for immigrant families as well as local neighborhood families.

Immigrant and Local Neighborhood families: The urban farm site is located in a food desert. Both types of families need increased access to healthy and locally grown food.

Having space to grow and share food is especially important in disinvested and underserved neighborhoods, where finding affordable fruits and vegetables can be challenging.

<https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas/go-to-the-atlas/>
<https://goodplaceakron.wordpress.com/2014/01/10/food-deserts-in-summit-county/>
<https://thedevelopstrip.com/2019/09/19/for-akronites-in-food-deserts-finding-and-preparing-healthy-food-is-an-ongoing-struggle/>

Immigrant families: Increased access to the food grown and consumed in their respective home countries being able to continue the diet which they are familiar with.. Even though there may be a dramatic climate change from their home country, much of the native seed can still be successfully planted and harvested in Northeast Ohio during the growing season. Native seed is collected and traded domestically and also sent via mail from home countries.

Health: While eating fresh food is beneficial in and of itself, the act of growing that food also boosts physical and mental health. Research shows that working with plants—and putting our hands in the dirt—provides outdoor physical activity, induces relaxation, and reduces stress, anxiety, blood pressure, and muscle tension. Particularly for immigrant farmers who have been displaced from their original occupation of farming on land they owned, it substantially reduces their anxiety and depression.

Cornell University:

<https://gardening.cals.cornell.edu/program-tools/benefits-and-research/key-findings/>
<https://borderlessmag.org/2020/09/03/urban-farm-provides-sense-of-community-for-refugees-during-covid/>

Community Education: Urban farming adds and preserves green space in cities, providing places for neighbors to come together, strengthen bonds, and build community cohesion. Urban agriculture connects people with the earth and the source of their food as well as with each other. What's more, urban farms offer critical opportunities for youth leadership, intergenerational collaboration, and cross-cultural learning.

It brings back the “3rd Place,”--the community house--which has been sorely neglected and removed from our neighborhoods. Our 1st place is the “home,” 2nd the workplace.

With regards to education, urban farming locales can provide safe, comfortable and affordable—even free—community space for English language ((ESL) classes and job skills development as participants work on the farm. We will be using curriculum developed by USDA as well as New Roots for Refugees <https://newrootsforrefugees.org/>.

Culture: Keep agricultural heritage alive for the immigrants because eighty percent of the Congolese and Bhutanese were farmers in their home countries prior to immigration. Produce and distribute culturally important foods that are not readily available in grocery stores, including sourcing hard-to-find seeds for gardeners to grow their own crops.

Environment:

Conservation Law Foundation: *The Power of Urban Agriculture in Transforming a Community*

<https://www.clf.org/blog/the-power-of-urban-agriculture-in-transforming-a-community/#:~:text=Environment%3A%20Urban%20agriculture%20improves%20environmental.sewer%20systems%20and%20polluting%20waterways>

Urban agriculture improves environmental health and climate resilience in the face of increasing storms and heat. Cultivated land absorbs rainfall, preventing stormwater from overloading sewer systems and polluting waterways. Also, by increasing vegetation and tree cover, farms and gardens attract pollinators like bees and keep city neighborhoods cooler, minimizing the health impacts of heat island effect.

In this age of COVID, how will the International Peace Garden (IPG) address protocols and manage the pandemic?

As community gathering places, urban farms play a vital role in crises like the one we face today in the coronavirus pandemic. International Peace Garden is mobilizing to address immediate food security needs for its member families. Safety protocols of social distancing and masking are in place. All members will be encouraged to get vaccinated.

How will the business be organized? Who are the members of the business planning team? Partnerships?

Planning & Management Team

Tom Crain, Shanti Community Farms
Bhakta Rizal, Shanti Community Farms
Lulacha Ibolecho, Shanti Community Farms
Kyengye Elale, Shanti Community Farms
Landscape Specialist, Akron Zoo Appointee
Sustainability Specialist., Akron Zoo Appointee
Business Officer, Akron Zoo Appointee
Marketing Specialist, Akron Zoo Appointee

African Immigrant Farmer Families (6-12)

1. Wina Mlondani family
2. Lulacha Ibolecho family
3. Fatuma Oonda family
4. Mkwala Kilozi family
5. Kalenga Namungandika family
6. Mlubu Mwakajana family
7. Malanga family
8. Rebeca Malanga family

9. Biangwa amisi
10. Makabo mtabala
11. Kaleba fabiala
12. Marie naabwe

Bhutanese Immigrant Farmer Families (6-12)

1. Shakar Poudel family
2. Geeta Rizal family
3. Monarath Khanal family
4. Bhim Rai family
5. Thali Maya Tamang family
6. Renuka Subba family
7. Indra Magar family
8. Bishnu Magar family
9. Maya Magar

Neighborhood and I Promise Village Families (6-12)

LeBron's commitment to his kids in Akron is taking another monumental leap forward with this week's announcement of the I PROMISE Village by Graduate Hotels. Located between the Zoo and Urban Farm and I PROMISE School, the Village is being built from the ground up along Maple St for I Promise School families faced with challenges they may be facing including homelessness, domestic violence, and other unforeseen circumstances. The Village is intended to provide immediate shelter, safety and support so that students are still able to attend school as we assist the family with a long-term plan for their future success. Families will be able to participate in the urban farm with all of the benefits provided.

Partners

Lead Organizations

- Akron Zoo
- Shanti Community Farms

Agriculture/Local Food

- Let's Grow Akron
- Summit Food Policy Coalition
- OSU Ag Extension Summit County

Education

- Kent State University
- University of Akron
- Akron Public Schools
- Project LEARN of Summit County

Business Consulting

- Summit County Small Business Administration
- SEED Legal Clinic Univ of Akron

Immigrant Advocate Services

- ASIA Services
- International Institute of Akron
- Global Ties

- Bhutanese community association of Akron

What are the potential risks to the successful start up of the farm?

- Having the right tools
- Adequate and consistent number of farmers
- Climate
- Renting the essential farm equipment.
- Vandalism of property and crops
- Adequate and affordable water access for irrigation.
- Contaminated soil raising costs due to necessity for container gardening.

What products or services (in a general sense) do you expect to provide?

First the produce is primarily to feed the family of the growers and fellow members of the immigrant community and

(2) Farmers market for the general public in West Akron location for the months of June and July: St Vincent Church and School or Chin's Place are possibilities, then Akron Zoo for other summer months.

(3) Educational platform for how to eat properly. Cooking classes could be conducted by the farmers themselves with translators to teach healthy eating habits and practices inherent with immigrant's diets and cooking practices that should be passed on to Americans.

(4) Farmers need to be educated in food safety practices. The class is free and held pretty frequently throughout the state. This will be crucial so consumers are kept safe.

PRODUCTS

PRODUCE

- Amaranth/Langa Langa (African)*
- Asongo(African)*
- Basil
- Berries
- Beans (Asian–long and short)*
- Beans (African–kidney, mung, black bean)
- Cabbage
- Cardamom
- Cauliflower
- Cilantro
- Cucumber

- Dill
- Eggs plants (asian)
- Keto
- Mint
- Maize Corn (African)*
- Mustard Greens (Asian)
- Okra
- Parsley
- Peanuts (African)*
- Peppers-Hot (Asian)
- Potatoes
- Saffron
- Sage
- Snake Gourd (Asian)
- Spinach
- Squash
- Tomatoes

BAMBOO

- Fences and Gates
- Mats
- Pergolas
- Pots
- Stakes
- Tiki Torches
- Window shades

MISCELLANEOUS

- Native seed packets
- Jewelry
- Apparel
- Accessories
- International homemade snacks

SERVICES

- Farmers Market (June-October)
June-July @ Highland Square/West Hill location +++*depending on outcome of initial months, High Sq/WH farmers market location may also continue through October*, August-October @Akron Zoo
- Yard Corps
- A Golden Time Picnics
- English Language Classes

What is the size and geographic location? Who are your target customers? What customer or market needs will your business address?

FARM PARCEL BOUNDARIES

The lots run along two blocks of Edgewood Avenue incorporating the cross streets of Monroe St, Chestnut St, Bishop St. Specific Edgewood addresses include 535, 537, 541, 543, 547, 551, 555, 559, 565 (between Bishop and Monroe), and 601, 605, 609, 613, 615, 619 (between Monroe and Chestnut). There are two fire hydrants located strategically within this footprint.

In addition to crop production facilities, an educational facility including a class room and restrooms will be constructed on the site within the first five years.

In addition, a free standing farm stand and shelter will also be provided on the side with an enclosure added in the second year or third year.

40 foot x 40 foot Storage shed of tools and other equipment will be on shelves and benches constructed

Primary market area includes downtown and neighborhoods within approximately 2.0 miles of the growing center

How will the business operate? How will the product be distributed (farm stand, deliveries)?

- Crops will be grown from May-October
- Produce will be provided to the growers' families
- Farmers Market 3 Locations: Directly on farm via farmstand (May-October) and Highland Square/West Hill (June-July); and possibly on occasion inside Zoo (August-October).
- Community group volunteers will distribute to local churches, senior centers, and youth groups.
- English language classes will be held in farm building
- Catered picnics (A Golden Time) will be held on farm property and external locales on private premises for groups

What are the measurable short-term goals (1-5 years)?

- Number of farming and peripheral services participants including youth exceeding 100.
- Amount of savings on monthly grocery bills of farm families increased by at least 20 percent. .
- Amount of additional household income generated from produce sales at farmers market, CSA and/or personal sales by at least 20 percent.

- Educational achievement in both agribusiness, entrepreneurship and English learning by spawning ten new businesses within 5 years.
- Mental and physical health of farming participants improved by 25 percent.
- Prevent runoff and eliminate chemicals needed for landscape upkeep.
- Educational facility including a classroom and restrooms
- Soil testing for contamination—getting the soil to full balance and fertility measurements for maximum crop yield.

What are the long-term goals (greater than 5 years)?

- Provide temporary housing for farm participant families.
- Adjacent building for classrooms, meeting space, restrooms, storage and office.
- Provide e-bikes and trailers
- Purchase large equipment including tillers, trucks and tractors
- Provide consulting services

What approach will you use for promotion?

During the first year, the surrounding neighborhood and participating organizations will be asked to be involved in a number of promotions: berry planting, and opening ceremony, web promotions, database management, marketing communications and program participation.

- The produce would be under market cost.
- Students and artists from the surrounding neighborhood will be asked to create the signs with materials donated
- Social media –Facebook, Instagram, Twitter– will be coordinated with Shanti Community Farms website and Akron Zoo website

What type of water supply (e.g., city water, well) and irrigation system will be used (e.g., tile drains, drip zone irrigation, sprinkler systems)?

Water is supplied by the municipal water system via fire hydrants. Plant irrigation will initially be accomplished by hand watering using a water spigot, hose and nozzle. Once there is a better understanding of the quantities of water needed other methods of watering such as drip irrigation will be evaluated. Rain barrels will be installed to catch rain off the roof of the shelter building and supply shed

What waste handling and disposal will be required and how will it be accomplished?

Organic waste such as crop residues will be composted on the site. Recyclable materials such as plastics, paper, and cardboard will be recycled. Extra crops that are not sold will be donated to community food centers. Disposal wastes will be minimized.

How will security for the property, equipment, and crops be accomplished (e.g., fencing, cameras)?

The property must be fenced around its perimeter. A locked access gate for large to enter the site and walk gates for customers and workers to enter the site.

What crop management alternatives will be implemented (e.g., weed, pest and disease control)?

All crop production will use sustainable growing methods and/or follow permaculture principles/agriculture practices to meet the criteria of a certified organic crop production facility. Organic pest management practices will be implemented to develop and maintain healthy soils and strong plants that can withstand pests and encourage beneficial insects by creating environments that attract them. Crop selection will focus on biodiversity in the crops and crop varieties that are resistant to pests and diseases. Also, there is a need for less ongoing equipment when pursuing no-till practices. In this, you till once, and keep applying organic waste to build up the soil.

Selected approved substances will be used when necessary.

Key Activities Calendar

2022

March

- Determine first set of vacant lots to farm
- Gather fencing materials and measure cropland parameters
- Soil testing

April

- Groundbreaking

- Temporary Shed construction
- Farmstand and Shelter construction
- Fencing set up

May

- Remove sod and soil tilling
- Container construction (if soil contaminated)

June-October

- Farmers Markets
- Golden Time Picnics
- English and Entrepreneurial Classes