



Illinois Small Farm News

Landwise—Featuring Innovative Illinois Farmers

Hoop Dreams—Resource Center City Farm *Jason Peterson*

Cabrini-Green has long had a reputation as one of the most disadvantaged neighborhoods in Chicago, an area dominated by drug dealers, gang activity, and litter-filled, vacant lots. However, when Ken Dunn looks at Cabrini-Green, he sees untapped resources and a chance for growth. Growth as in gardens, that is.

“The devastated and neglected communities in Chicago have plenty of vacant land and plenty of people who need work. I thought it would be intriguing to put those two elements together to increase employment and beautify Chicago’s neighborhoods,” says Dunn, founder of the Resource Center, a Chicago non-profit organization.

The Resource Center operates City Farm, a project that transforms vacant lots in poor Chicago neighborhoods into small, inner-city “farms,” producing vegetables at cheap prices for the local community. In 2004, they received a SARE grant to experiment with low tunnels, which are miniature hoop houses that extend the growing season.

The hoop structures were just the latest improvement to an operation that has its roots in the 1960s, when Dunn left his family farm in Kansas to study philosophy at the University of Chicago.

“The thing about philosophy is that it’s not just about reflecting on things, but changing them,” Dunn says.



Crops growing in easy view of downtown Chicago
Photo by Janel Dzieszinski

Dunn decided change was needed in Chicago’s poorest neighborhoods, and began restoring vacant lots in cooperation with the city. In 2000, this work officially became known as City Farm. Today, City Farm

operates three inner city farms, two of which they own—a 1-acre farm and a one-third acre site. In addition to the permanent farms, they have a temporary site at Division and Clybourn Avenues, located right between Cabrini-Green and the highly affluent Gold Coast.

Although City Farm works in some fairly rough areas, Dunn says they have not had any serious safety problems. The workers get started at 6 a.m. and finish up around 3 p.m., before gang members and drug dealers come out on the streets.

Over the years, the city has allowed City Farm to use, for no charge, numerous temporary sites; but these farms can fall victim to their own success. If the farm helps to make the neighborhood a more attractive place to live, developers may determine that a stronger financial incentive exists to build in the neighborhood; consequently, the farm will have to leave and the developers will build over the farm site.

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Resource Spotlight: Illinois Direct Farm Business

Provides online legal information for anyone interested in direct farm marketing in Illinois.

The website includes information about setting up and operating the direct farm business, as well as state and federal regulations.

www.directfarmbusiness.org/



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Resource
Spotlight:
Alternative
Farming Systems
Information
Center (AFSIC)

The Alternative Farming Systems Information Center (AFSIC) is one of several topic-oriented information centers at the National Agricultural Library (NAL).

AFSIC specializes in locating and accessing information related to alternative cropping systems including sustainable, organic, low-input, biodynamic, and regenerative agriculture.

AFSIC also focuses on alternative crops, new uses for traditional crops, and crops grown for industrial production.

afsic.nal.usda.gov/nal_display/index.php?tax_level=1&info_center=2

SARE Corner

Information and Resources about the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program

NCR-SARE Announces 2009 Farmer Rancher Grant Call for Proposals

The 2009 North Central Region - Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program (NCR-SARE) Farmer Rancher Grant Call for Proposals is now available online at <http://sare.org/ncrsare/cfp.htm>.

Farmers and ranchers in the North Central Region are invited to submit grant proposals for projects to explore sustainable agriculture solutions to problems on the farm or ranch. Proposals should show how farmers and ranchers plan to use their own innovative ideas to explore sustainable agriculture options and how they will share project results.

Projects should emphasize research or education/demonstration. Grants can range from \$6,000 for individual farmers up to \$18,000 for groups of 3 or more farmers. NCR-SARE expects to fund about 50 projects in the twelve-state North Central Region with this call.

The deadline for proposals is **Thursday, December 3, 2009 at 4:30 p.m.**

For more information, contact Joan Benjamin, NCR-SARE Farmer Rancher Grant Program Coordinator, at

jbenjamin2@unl.edu, (402)472-0809 or (800)529-1342. Or contact Deborah Cavanaugh-Grant, Illinois SARE Coordinator, at cvnghgrn@illinois.edu, (217)968-5512.

The NCR has funded more than 700 farmer rancher grants worth more than \$4,300,000 since the inception of this program.

Information about Illinois projects and other info about the Farmer Rancher Grant program can be found at <http://web.extension.uiuc.edu/smallfarm/sare>.

National SARE Summary of Illinois Projects

The National SARE office has prepared 2-page summaries of the work SARE has done in each state and protectorate. Each summary will have info on the number and type of grants SARE has given out in each state, a short article highlighting one project, and some impact statistics. These summaries are designed to serve as handy, comprehensive summaries of all the work we've done on the state-by-state level. Also, each summary will be accompanied by a full list of all the grants funded in each state.

For a more detailed view, visit: web.extension.uiuc.edu/smallfarm/pdf/Advancing_the_Frontier.pdf and web.extension.uiuc.edu/smallfarm/pdf/Illinois_Agriculture_Projects.pdf.

SARE Strategic Farm/Ranch Planning and Marketing Course

Now available: a free online course for agriculture professionals wanting to help clients make better business planning and marketing decisions. Strategic Farm/Ranch Planning and Marketing - produced by SARE - is a self-directed course focused on keeping agriculture operations sustainable and profitable.

Preview the course at <http://www.sare.org/coreinfo/course2info.htm>.

Strategic Farm/Ranch Planning and Marketing adds a second course to SARE's National Continuing Education Program. The first course, Sustainable Agriculture: Basic Principles and Concept Overview is also available.

Both courses are offered through eXtension's online campus at <http://campus.extension.org>.

Organizations and Programs Supporting Small Farms

The Illinois Specialty Growers Association

The Illinois Specialty Growers Association (ISGA) is an "umbrella organization" for the following affiliated associations: Illinois Herb Association; Illinois Irrigation Association; Illinois State Horticulture Society; and the Illinois Vegetable Growers Association. This organization was formed in 1989 to improve the coordination and cooperation among individual associations.

The purpose of ISGA is the promotion and development of the Illinois specialty crop industry. Some activities of ISGA include: promotion of

the fruit, vegetable & herb industry through events such as the Illinois Products Expo and the Illinois State Fair; the annual Specialty Crops, Agritourism, and Organic Conference; and providing legislative representation by lobbying Congress on specific components of the 2008 Farm Bill that will directly benefit specialty growers.

ISGA membership is \$40 and all members are required to join ISGA and affiliate with one or more of the affiliated associations (IL Herb Association (IHA) - \$10; IL Irrigation Association (IIA) - \$5; IL State Horticulture Society (ISHS) -\$30; and IL Vegetable

Growers Association (IVGA) - \$10). There are three classes of membership: Producer, Associate, and Agri-Industry.

The benefits of ISGA membership include: newsletter (3 per year); web site with calendar of events, association information, conference information, etc.; Prairie Bounty of Illinois listing; access to RFD Radio to promote industry; summer field days; and discounted registration fees for annual conference.

For more information contact Diane Handley at (309)557-2107 or by e-mail at handley@ilfb.org or visit www.specialtygrowers.org.



Illinois Specialty Crops, Agritourism, and Organic Conference will be held on January 6-8, 2010 at the Crowne Plaza in Springfield. The conference features three preconference workshops; breakout sessions on Fruit, Vegetables, Herbs, Agritourism, Irrigation, Organic, Labor, and Marketing; and a tradeshow. For more information, visit www.specialtygrowers.org/confagenda.htm.

Everyone involved with City Farm benefits from these lots. Workers get the satisfaction of running a local food system and neighborhood residents have a more pleasant place to live, as well as new job opportunities.

Hoop Dreams...

(Continued from page 1)

The vacant lots are often in bad shape when they start on them, Dunn explains. Before City Farm works on a lot, they seal the ground with a layer of clay and cover it with two feet of compost. To create compost, City Farm collects scraps from nearby cooking schools, restaurants, and hotels.

According to Dunn, the farms sell half their produce to high-end restaurants in Chicago, which pay a considerable price for high-quality, organically grown product, particularly tomatoes. This income makes it possible to sell the other half of their produce to the local neighborhood at prices that low income residents can afford.

The SARE grant made it possible for City Farm to build 12 low tunnels in 2004, each one of them 30 feet long and 7 feet wide, says Tim Wilson, general manager of urban agriculture for the Resource Center.



Inside a hoop house
Photo by Janel Dzieszinski

These hoop-like structures are roughly hip height, standing 3 feet tall at the apex. They are held up by PVC pipe, curved like ribs and anchored in running

boards. They use clear plastic for the cover, the lightest overwintering plastic available. To help maintain warm enough temperatures and fight off wind, they use a double-cover system. Inside the low tunnels, they use smaller hoops, which provide another level of protection for the vegetables.

City Farm mainly grows winter lettuces in the low tunnels, Wilson says, but they also grow other small greens, such as arugula, claytonia, and mizuna.

"The city is also a winner," Dunn says. "The city provides their lots for our use for no charge, but we provide beautification and protection at no charge."



Rare green Indian corn at a farm stand in Highland Park, Illinois, October

Photo by Jason Cordell (iStockphoto) www.visualjason.com



University of Illinois Extension Small Farm Program

www.extension.uiuc.edu/smallfarm



Helping you put knowledge to work.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact Deborah Cavanaugh-Grant at (217)968-5512, cvnghgrn@illinois.edu.

University of Illinois - U.S. Department of Agriculture - Local Extension Councils Cooperating

University of Illinois Extension provides equal opportunities in programs and employment.

If you need a disability accommodation to participate in any University of Illinois Extension program listed in this newsletter, please contact Deborah Cavanaugh-Grant at (217)968-5512, cvnghgrn@illinois.edu.

Calendar

September 22, 2009
Sustainable Agriculture Tour
Location: River Front Berry Farm, Martinton, IL
Visit: web.extension.uiuc.edu/smallfarm/ag_tours.cfm

September 30, 2009
Cover CropEconomics: Utilizing Cover Crops in Conventional Cropping Systems (Part III – A Three-Part Telenet Series)
Time: Noon-1:15pm
Contact: Earl Allen, U of I Extension, Fulton County Director, at erallen@illinois.edu or 309-547-3711
Visit: <https://webs.extension.uiuc.edu/registration/?RegistrationID=3169>

October 3, 2009
Farm to Fork Symposium
Location: Chicago Botanic Garden (Alsodorf Auditorium at the Garden's Regenstein Center), Glencoe, IL
Visit: www.chicagobotanic.org/school/symposia/farmtofork.php

October 20-22, 2009
12th Biennial Governor's Conference on the Management of the Illinois River System
Location: Hotel Pere Marquette, Peoria, IL
Visit: <http://www.conferences.uiuc.edu/conferences/conference.asp?ID=413>

November 5-7, 2009
17th National Small Farm Trade Show & Conference™
Location: Boone County Fairgrounds, Columbia, MO
Visit: <http://www.smallfarmtoday.com/tradeshows/index.html>

January 6-8, 2010
Illinois Specialty Crops and Agritourism Conference
Location: Crowne Plaza Hotel and Convention Center, Springfield, Illinois
Visit: <http://www.specialtygrowers.org/confagenda.htm>

February 25-27, 2010
Organic Farming Conference
Location: La Crosse, WI
Visit: www.mosesorganic.org/conference.html

Additional events may be found on University of Illinois Extension's small farm website at: <http://web.extension.uiuc.edu/smallfarm/events.cfm>

Illinois Small Farm News is published by University of Illinois Extension's Small Farm Program. This newsletter is designed to inform its readers (both the commercial small farmer as well as the small acreage landowner) about the latest small farm programs and about people and activities in the state of Illinois, as well as in the Midwest region and our nation. Edited and produced by Deborah Cavanaugh-Grant; layout by Stacey Thomas and designed by Kyla Kruse.

University of Illinois Extension is the flagship outreach effort of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, offering educational programs to residents of all of Illinois' 102 counties—and far beyond.

Through learning partnerships that put knowledge to work, U of I Extension's programs are aimed at making life better, healthier, safer and more profitable for individuals and their communities.