



grow 
HARTFORD
2015 ANNUAL REPORT

HARTFORD 
FOOD SYSTEM
www.hartfordfood.org



OVERVIEW

Grow Hartford, a program of Hartford Food System, completed its twelfth year of urban agriculture and youth leadership development in 2015. This program provides youth leadership education and a working urban farm that produces thousands of pounds of fresh produce for residents of Hartford. Youth input to Grow Hartford's program structure and development has been a key element since the program's inception in 2004. Grow Hartford aims to:

- *Promote a sustainable and equitable food system in Hartford by supporting grassroots activism and youth leadership through agriculture.*
- *Encourage active lifestyles and foster community action related to food security, sustainable agriculture, and the environment.*
- *Foster responsible stewardship of urban land with organic farming methods and the revitalization of formerly vacant lots.*
- *Restore the link between people and agriculture by encouraging the involvement of low-income urban youth and families in food production.*
- *Use the platform of urban agriculture and informed youth leaders to build a healthy food system in Hartford that is responsive to the health and cultural needs of all residents, regardless of income.*



HARTFORD FOOD SYSTEM

Since 1978, Hartford Food System, Inc. (HFS) has been dedicated to addressing problems of food security in Hartford. Our mission is to fight hunger and improve nutrition in our community. Our goal is a healthy, culturally-responsive, just, resilient and sustainable food system that meets the needs of all community members. To help make this happen, we implement programs that improve access to nutritious and affordable food, we help consumers make informed food choices, we advocate for a robust and economically sound food system, and we promote responsible food policies at all levels of government.

Our activities are based on the following strategies:

- 1) *Increase access to normal food outlets.*
- 2) *Deepen the connection between consumers and agricultural production.*
- 3) *Increase community capacity to advocate for a healthy and just food system.*
- 4) *Advance public policies to improve the affordability and quality of food.*



PRODUCTION

Grow Hartford managed four sites in Hartford. The overall yield from all sites was over 20,000 pounds. Despite a dry summer and a late winter, we were able to remain productive through more efficient use of our sites. 70 varieties of vegetables were grown and varied from traditional vegetable varieties to ethnic produce such as callaloo, a popular Caribbean leafy green.

In partnership with Community Solutions, this year marked our fifth year at our Swift Factory site. Swift Factory became our main site this season after transitioning from our previous main site on Laurel Street. This involved moving our propagation greenhouse from Laurel Street to Swift (pictured right) and the intensification of activities on the site, which included market preparation, CSA distribution, and many of our summer youth program's farm activities. In November, we completed a cold storage room at Swift Factory, which will help us better manage our harvests for the upcoming season.

Our site at Main Street continued to be a heavy producer of tomatoes, squash, and garlic. In March, our lease from the City of Hartford was renewed for the site. In August, we held a chef demonstration on our Main Street site as a small fundraiser for the program.

Our sites at Zion and Broad Street provided additional produce for the program, mainly hearty summer greens and eggplant. An additional site on Wethersfield Avenue was explored in partnership with the Chrysalis Center. A small amount of crops was tested and grown on this previously undeveloped site behind Cosgrove Commons near the Wethersfield border.





This season, Grow Hartford focused on selling at two Hartford farmers markets from June to October: the West End Farmers Market on Tuesdays and the North End Farmers Market, another program of Hartford Food System, on Wednesdays (pictured middle left). These two opportunities provided excellent visibility for our program and allowed us to have a greater impact in the city by providing fresh, affordable produce that often traveled less than a mile to each market. Reception by customers continued to be very positive, as we continue to build our customer base and presence in Hartford. We plan on continuing to attend both of these markets next season.



Both markets have the advantage of accepting and doubling all SNAP/EBT (formerly Food Stamps) purchases. With about 40% of Hartford's population enrolled in SNAP, it is important for us to be involved in markets that offer the ability to accept SNAP. While most of the purchases for the season were cash, a third of the sales were either SNAP or Farmers Market Nutrition Program coupons. This year, we also became certified to accept WIC Cash Value Vouchers.

The launch of the Hartford Mobile Market, also operated by Hartford Food System, provided us with another exciting opportunity to deliver Grow Hartford vegetables to Hartford residents. The 40-foot mobile market is able to reach areas of the city with limited healthy food access. The annual Hartford Harvest Market provided us with an additional outlet for fall sales and promotion of our programs. We also provided produce for fundraisers benefitting Hartford Food System at Flatbread Company in Canton, a Farm-to-Street event in downtown Hartford, and a fall fundraiser at Real Art Ways in Hartford.



This season's Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program lasted for 16 weeks from June to October, an increase from 12 weeks as done in previous seasons. Each week, almost three dozen families and individuals picked up approximately \$30 worth of vegetables. Shares were offered at \$425 for market-rate shares and a subsidized \$100 share for low-income eligible customers. Our ability to accept SNAP helped the affordability of the CSA as well. Reception to the CSA was very positive, with most members stating that they would return for next season.



COMMUNITY



Grow Hartford engaged with several community partners throughout the season. Over 100 volunteers helped with the farm this season. In addition to many individuals and CSA members, several groups, including a delegation from the South Korean Department of Agriculture, fellows from Adamah Farm in Falls Village, Gardening the Community in Springfield, and students from Trinity College (pictured bottom left) visited and assisted with the farm throughout the season. We would like to increase volunteer involvement to help maintain the farm more effectively, but also to engage the community in a more meaningful way.



Our youth program engaged 9 Hartford youth in farm activities and education during the summer. For five weeks, the youth assisted with maintaining the farm, which included weeding and planting of crops for the fall. Our youth leaders conducted several activities that educated the youth on food access and food system issues. With help from Blue Earth Compost, the program culminated in the construction of a static aerated pile composting system at Swift (pictured top left).



Grow Hartford was involved in several events and educational opportunities throughout the year. We tabled and led hands-on activities at an Earth Day event at the Hartford Riverfront (pictured middle left). Grow Hartford's farm manager was a panelist at a youth led action forum on school food led by the Connecticut Food Justice Youth Corps, attended a career day at West Middle Community School in Hartford, and led multiple workshops at NOFA conferences about urban farming and food access. This summer, we collaborated with Capital Community College and Knox to create a 13-week urban farming certificate course for Hartford residents. The course focused on production, marketing, and business development for urban farms.

We are grateful for many donations that helped to assist the program. This season, we received seed donations from Hartford area seed companies, NE Seed and Comstock Ferre, as well as a 12-inch steel broadfork from Meadow Creature. These donations helped to lower the cost of production, which allowed us to offer more affordable prices for our customers.



LOOKING FORWARD TO 2016

With no major transitions or building projects planned for the 2016 season, we look forward to focusing all of our energy on our sites to exceed our market and production goals. Next season, we are planning to expand the size of our CSA by sourcing more produce from local, Connecticut farms. This model is common on urban farms, which will allow us to expand the reach of our CSA beyond our production capacity as well as allow us to focus on more space efficient crops. The dry summer revealed gaps in how we handle irrigation on the farm and we will amend this through better use of drip-tape irrigation systems. We will also engage more volunteer help to increase the amount of labor and community engagement on the farm.

Hartford Food System received multiple grants to expand and explore new opportunities in the coming year. In 2015, Hartford Food System, partnering with Community Solutions, Billings Forge, and reSET, was awarded second place in the City of Hartford's Strong Cities, Strong Communities (SC2) Challenge to develop a new food innovation center in Hartford at Swift Factory. We also received a Specialty Crop Block Grant from the Connecticut Department of Agriculture to explore the economic viability of ethnic crop production and marketing in the region.

Despite several challenges, Grow Hartford's season was still very successful. Next season, we look forward to strengthening relationships with partners and community members, and deepening our connection with neighborhoods in the city. With a strong foundation to launch us into next season, we look forward to growing more and making an even greater impact in 2016.

