



A HARTFORD FOOD SYSTEM PROJECT

2011 Program Report

Since its establishment in 1978, Hartford Food System, Inc. (HFS) has been committed to providing long-term and sustainable responses to food-related issues throughout Hartford. Through non-emergency and system-based strategies, HFS can comprehensively address complex problems of food security. Our mission is to address food security problems that affect disadvantaged members of our community. Partnering with several allies, HFS aims to implement programs that increase the understanding of food security problems while improving access to nutritious and affordable food. In addition, HFS helps consumers make informed food choices while aiming to advance responsible food policies at all levels of government.



Our work is based on the following strategies:

- Increase access among low-income people to normal, non-emergency sources of food.
- Deepen the connection between food consumers and the sources of food production.
- Advance policies to improve the affordability and quality of food in urban areas.

Grow Hartford, which recently completed its eighth season of urban agriculture in central Hartford in 2011, is the largest HFS program. It is composed of three core programs: youth education, community outreach and food production. Through these initiatives, Grow Hartford is expanding the supply of fresh produce in Hartford's inner city while transforming formerly vacant lots into vibrant, productive assets in the surrounding neighborhoods.

Grow Hartford's objectives include:

- Promoting sustainable and equitable food system in Hartford by supporting grassroots activism and youth leadership through agriculture.
- Encouraging healthy lifestyles and community action related to food security, sustainable agriculture, and the environment.
- Restoring the link between people and agriculture by encouraging involvement of low-income urban youth and families in food production.
- Fostering responsible stewardship of urban land by using organic farming methods and revitalizing vacant lots.





Youth Education

The Grow Hartford Youth Crew is the centerpiece of our youth education strategy. During the summer of 2011, under the tutelage of youth coordinator Sharon Lewis, Grow Hartford hosted 15 Hartford teenagers. Our youth participants completed an agriculturally based educational component as well as earning a salary for their hands-on urban farm work.

The Youth Crew also participated in the Hartford Food System's North End Farmers' Market at the North End Senior Center. Strong connections were forged as youth and adults were brought together at this vital hub in the local community. When our summer program was complete our Youth Crew members left with valuable knowledge to help them make important healthy eating choices.

By re-vamping the curriculum for the program, Ms. Lewis was able to combine hands-on experience and food-related issue documentaries for a comprehensive summer experience. On July 17th, the youth program took a field trip to F.R.E.S.H. New London, a farm run and managed by New London teens that grow and distribute fresh food to people in need. The day included visiting an animal refuge that is home to many exotic birds and other animals.

The F.R.E.S.H. Crew entertained us with dances and nutrition presentations and treated us to a healthy lunch prepared by the youth. The Grow Hartford youth really enjoyed the visit! In addition to field trips, and hands-on experience within Hartford, on Fridays the youth group took a break from their garden sites to watch films that emphasized healthy eating and nutrition. We watched videos that highlighted obesity in America and the business and culture of the fast food industry (Super Size Me), exposed the business relationships that put profit before consumers, the environment, and worker safety (Food, Inc.), and enlightened us about genetically modified corn, the make-up of almost every product in grocery stores and the link between it and many of today's chronic diseases (King Corn). Viewing these films changed the way the youth were thinking about the food they consumed.

All in all, the summer of 2011 proved to be another successful year for the Grow Hartford Summer Youth Crew!

Community Outreach

Along with Grow Hartford's efforts with young people, our community outreach promotes the well-being of Hartford residents of all ages. Our growing sites have been established in the heart of residential neighborhoods for that very reason. A primary strategy for adult outreach has been through the Grow Hartford Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program, which sponsored its fourth season in 2011. The CSA is a popular model at many suburban farms that sell produce to the public. CSAs allow families to pay for a share of the harvest at the beginning of the growing season, usually at a cost lower than market rate. However, due to economic restraints and travel distance, inner-city residents seldom have an opportunity to participate as CSA members at suburban farms. The Grow Hartford CSA addresses this gap, giving lower income Hartford families a chance to buy shares of locally grown produce in their own City.



Thirty Hartford families partook in our 2011 CSA from July to September. CSA families developed a direct relationship with the farm staff that grow their food, and enjoyed a diverse mix of organic Hartford-grown herbs, fruits, vegetables, and flowers. In addition to thirty family shares, the Grow Hartford CSA also provided organizational shares to two Hartford non-profits. Each week a share of roughly 75-150 pounds of fresh produce was delivered to Hands on Hartford's MANNA Food Pantry. A second share was provided to South Park Inn, a shelter for homeless men, women and children, located adjacent to our newest growing field.

A new strategy to share Grow Hartford's bounty and to reach out to the community is through attendance at area farmers' markets. In 2011, Grow Hartford's produce was often available for purchase at the North End Farmers Market, the Coventry Regional Farmers' Market, the Billings Forge Farmers' Market, as well as at a special Thanksgiving Harvest Market held at Knox Parks. Attending farmers' markets after the CSA season was completed allowed us to create an extra source of revenue for the program while reaching out to new supporters.



2011 saw the exciting establishment of some new urban agriculture initiatives in Hartford that we hope will be the start of a trend. Partnering with the UConn Health Center, the Hartford Department of Health and Human Services, Saint Francis Hospital and Medical Center and Knox Parks, we created a new food garden at the Burgdorf Health Center, a clinic that provides care to Hartford's underserved population. The food grown at the garden was distributed through the St. Francis Hospital Food Bank at the Burgdorf Center.

Another major effort in 2011 was our taking the first steps in helping to create a new urban farm project on the blighted two-acre M. Swift and Sons factory site in the city's North End. The plan is to eventually restore the factory buildings, which are owned by Community Solutions, and to have artisans, teachers and craftspeople working and living there engaging in various enterprises and supplying local businesses and organizations with goods and resources. This year Grow Hartford established the urban farm at the site. Growing on 1/2 acre, the new urban farm employed a site manager and three farm apprentices from the neighborhood and grew several thousand pounds of fresh produce.



In 2012 Grow Hartford will partner with NENP to help the farm grow into an even more valuable resource for the community and increase the food security of the neighborhood.

Food Production

Grow Hartford's food production program area is focused on creating an environmentally and socially sustainable farm. We believe sustainable agriculture is central to creating an equitable food system with access to healthy food for all people. A new growing field was established this spring at the corner of Main

Street and Park Street in the South Green Neighborhood. A raised bed system was built with the help of volunteers from the community and the Grow Hartford Youth Crew. Long raised beds, a total of 1,120 feet of 4 foot rows now grace the site. The beds produced thousands of pounds of tomatoes, peppers, eggplant and squash. Over the course of the season many neighbors and passersby expressed their approval and excitement with the progress and having Grow Hartford improving the lot, which had sat vacant for so long. The new site gave many families and community groups a chance to get hands on experience with urban agriculture in their own neighborhood.



For farmers in the Northeast, 2011 was an unusually challenging year weather-wise. A dry, scorching summer followed by the fury of hurricane Irene and winter storm Alfred wreaked havoc on farms throughout the region. Seeing many of our neighboring farms losing so much to the weather, we were thankful to have a very good season and to have been able to provide shares for our CSA families for the full scheduled run of the program. In 2011 we grew fruit, vegetables, herbs and flowers on 2.75 acres on five separate fields. Our total harvest was 21,000 pounds. The 2011 crop list included over 100 varieties of vegetables, herbs and flowers including many specialty, ethnic and heirloom varieties.



Other Program Highlights

- On-site donations to neighbors through pantries and soup kitchens.
- Farm partnerships with Holcomb Farm CSA, Chaplin Farms, Urban Oaks Organic Farm and the Community Farm of Simsbury.
- Summer volunteers and visitors from Trinity College, Grace Academy, ConnPirg, Watkinson School, Mi Casa, Burns Elementary and local neighborhoods.
- Community relationships with organizations such as Hartford Public Schools, Knox Parks, Billings Forge Community Works, the Burgdorf Clinic of St. Francis Hospital, Capitol Region Education Council, Faith Congregational Church, Connecticut Science Center, Hartford Catholic Worker House, CT NOFA, Coventry Regional Farmers' Market and The Hartford Childhood Wellness Alliance.



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The mission of the Hartford Food System is to fight hunger and improve nutrition for disadvantaged members of our community through sustainable, non-emergency strategies.
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