

# Healthy Food Grown in Hartford's Neighborhoods



A **HARTFORD FOOD SYSTEM** PROJECT

## 2010 Program Report

Founded in 1978, Hartford Food System, Inc. (HFS) is dedicated to long-term, sustainable responses to food problems in Hartford *through non-emergency and system-based* strategies that can comprehensively address complex problems of food security. Our mission is to address food security problems for disadvantaged members of our community. Partnering with many allies, we implement programs that increase understanding of food security problems, improve access to nutritious and affordable food, help consumers make informed food choices, and advance responsible food policies at all levels of government.

Our work is based on reinforcing 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.



*Our farm sites serve as outdoor classrooms to learn hands-on about making healthy food choices, understanding the food system and understanding how agriculture and food choices affect our community.*

Our largest program is Grow Hartford, which recently completed its seventh season of urban agriculture in central Hartford in 2010. Grow Hartford is composed of three main program areas: youth education, community outreach and food production. Through these activities, 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.

The general objectives of Grow Hartford 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.
- Fostering responsible stewardship of urban land by using organic farming methods and revitalizing vacant lots.
- Restoring the link between people and agriculture by encouraging involvement of low-income urban youth and families in food production.

In 2010, Jerica Sandiford served as the summer Grow Hartford Youth Coordinator, a position she held for four seasons. Ms. Sandiford worked at the project since its inception, initially as one of the youth participants. In September, Ms. Sandiford left the organization and has been replaced by Sharon Lewis who is very experienced in youth development. Rodger Phillips, a Hartford resident, continues as the Grow Hartford urban farmer. He is supported by capable seasonal assistants.

### **Youth Education**

The Grow Hartford Youth Crew is the centerpiece of our youth education strategy. In summer 2010, we hosted 25 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.



In addition, we engaged 12 younger Hartford students (8 to 13 years old) in a pilot program that incorporated vegetable gardening and nutrition education as part of a Summer Recreation program. Over the course of seven weeks, we worked with the students to "Grow a Pizza" with a harvest lunch at the end of the program prepared with and by the youth.

### **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 third season in 2010. 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.



Twenty-six Hartford families from many varied backgrounds partook in our 2010 CSA from July 15 to September 30. CSA families developed a direct relationship with the farm staff who grow their food, and enjoyed a diverse mix of organically Hartford grown herbs, fruits, vegetables, and flowers.

A new partnership was forged with a downtown apartment building, the Hollander, managed by the nationally recognized non-profit housing developer Common Ground. Five CSA member families who live in the Hollander had their weekly shares of produce delivered to their building. To make the weekly delivery, we used our zero emission service vehicle; a rebuilt 1950's forward load carrying cargo bike.

In addition to 26 family shares, the Grow Hartford CSA also provided organizational shares to two Hartford non-profits. Each week a share of roughly 150 pounds of fresh produce was delivered to the Catholic Worker House in Hartford's North End, which in turn distributed the food to seniors in need at no cost. A second share was provided to Billings Forge Community Works, which used the fresh produce in The Kitchen @ Billings Forge for culinary training classes for residents.

### 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.

Year 2010 was one of the warmest growing seasons on record; it was a good year for most growers in the Northeast. Long stretches of hot weather with no rain had adverse affect on cool weather crops that had done well in previous years, while warm weather loving crops like melons, tomatoes and squash thrived and exceeded our estimated yields.



In 2010 we grew fruit, vegetables, herbs and flowers on 2.25 acres on four separate fields. Our total harvest was 14,010 pounds compared to just over 7,000 pounds in 2009. The 2010 crop list included over 100 varieties of vegetables, herbs and flowers including many specialty, ethnic and heirloom varieties. We installed four asparagus beds and two rhubarb beds which, when established, will provide yields for years to come. Additionally, a new crop grown in 2010 was spring wheat. The wheat was harvested, milled into flour and baked into bread which was shared with the community at the end of season event on Broad Street. A collaboration of local artists and families dubbed *Bread Cycle Works*; built bicycle powered farm equipment to cultivate, thresh, mill and transport the wheat. Grains will appear again in our fields in 2011.



## Future Plans

Grow Hartford has seen consistent growth since its inception. While agricultural production is never a certainty, we hope to maintain and even deepen our roots in the community as we move forward into 2011. Having gained support from the City of Hartford for an expansion onto a new piece of land in the South Green neighborhood we are looking at exciting opportunities for new youth programming and new ways to engage the community into the life of the urban farm. As a part of new youth programs, we believe we have the potential to effectively reach younger children with the health and wellness aspects of Grow Hartford and to collaborate on and expand our existing partnerships.

## Other Program Highlights

- On-site donations to neighbors and 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 Foundation, 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

# HARTFORD FOOD SYSTEM

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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