

Progress Report

Title:	Urban Oasis Beginning Farmer Training Program		
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Program Code: BFRDP**Program Name:** Beginning Farmer and Rancher**Project Director**

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{NO DATA ENTERED}

Co-Project Directors

{NO DATA ENTERED}

Departments

{NO DATA ENTERED}

Non-Technical Summary

Over the last century, we have radically altered the way food is produced and distributed. The transformation of our food and agriculture system is fundamentally affecting the health of the planet and its inhabitants. Health care leaders have recently started recognizing the need to address the whole food system as means to improve individual, public and global health above and beyond basic nutritional factors to included ecological and financial health. Many communities in Atlanta face significant social and economic barriers, including high unemployment and underemployment as well as low access to quality food. Truly Living Well (TLW) will utilize this grant to enhance our Urban Oasis Farmer Network, to improve access to economic opportunities and healthy food, to strengthen food security and combat growing health concerns, food literacy in these communities well as increase wealth and income through viable urban farm enterprises B. Statement of Need Although USDA guidelines recommend the consumption of fruits and vegetables as part of a balanced diet, the food system falls drastically short of providing enough fresh fruits and vegetables to meet their recommendations. These issues are exacerbated by the fact that low-income communities are often situated in food deserts, where healthy food options are unavailable and fast food abounds. Diet has traditionally been considered at the individual level and interventions to improve diets and related health outcomes have largely targeted individual knowledge, attitudes and behaviors. However, diets are influenced by multiple factors, including prices, employment levels, availability and convenience. We believe the relatively recent focus on healthy food systems is full of opportunities. Urban centers such as Atlanta have higher than average unemployment and neighborhoods full of vacant space that can be put to productive use. There is a significant opportunity to improve the health of communities by growing businesses and jobs in agriculture through the expansion of the production and distribution of healthy foods, particularly in urban areas. C. Approach and Business Model Much of farming like most other industries has substituted labor for capital. Farmers are now managing chemicals and methods to overcome natural systems as opposed to managing the biological assets of their farms and using less capital intensive assets. TLW leverages a philosophy that imitates natural processes while utilizing techniques that require low fixed costs and emphasize a return to smaller diverse farms that are in or close to communities. Through its Urban Oasis Beginner Farmer Enterprise Program, TLW provides an infrastructure to increase access to healthy food and create economic wealth that stays within communities through urban farming. By growing food locally and developing markets close to where the food is grown, communities will have access to fresh healthy food and invest dollars directly back into their community.

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Accomplishments**Major goals of the project**

The Metro Atlanta area has 1.2 million acres of vacant lands and plots, as confirmed by the Chamber of Commerce's Metro Atlanta Quality Growth Task Force.⁵ The Atlanta Local Food Initiative estimates that shifting 23,000 acres into cultivation would provide vegetables for the 4 million residents of Atlanta.⁶ Considering these challenges and opportunities, the Urban Oasis Beginner Farmer Enterprise Program will create sustainable income opportunities through urban farms, which are accessible to low income communities. Truly Living Well's long-term goals for the Urban Oasis Beginner Farmer Enterprise Training, Internship, and Incubation program are: 1. Increase economic prosperity for low-income communities through viable self employment and employment opportunities in urban farming; 2. Increase access to and consumption of healthy, local food for all income levels in Metro Atlanta; 3. Implementation of a comprehensive beginner urban farming training program and support network that results in increased production of healthy food, without use of petro-chemicals; and 4. Development and use of accessible business models and tools for beginner urban farmers. Objectives: These goals will be achieved through: 1. Enhance programmatic design of the of Urban Oasis program to be responsive, effective, and attractive to the training and support needs and livelihood goals of low-income, beginner farmer trainees and participants; a. Stage 1: Enhance existing The Urban Oasis Beginner Farmer Training is a 12-week intensive course. b. Stage 2: Add The Urban Oasis Farm Enterprise Internship is a 12-week internship on a working urban farm. c. Stage 3: Add The Urban Oasis Farm Enterprise Incubation program is a 12- month mentorship with technical assistance focused on starting and growing an urban farm. 2. Expand the number of participants in the Truly Living Well's Urban Oasis Beginner Farmer Training; 3. Incorporate business training and mentorship into all three stages of the Urban Oasis program; 4. Adapt and launch the Urban Oasis Farm Enterprise Internship program and Incubation program for low-income residents; 5. Facilitate access to available, urban land from the City of Atlanta for participants in the Urban Oasis; 6. Facilitate access to markets, client bases, and marketing strategies for participants in the Urban Oasis Farm Enterprise Advanced Internship and Farm Enterprise Incubation programs; and 7. Enhance Truly Living Well's ability to provide aggregator, group storage, and group marketing services to assist beginner urban farmers to access markets and generate revenues As a result of achieving these objectives and associated outcomes, 75 individuals will participate in the Urban Oasis Beginner Farmer Training, and 50 (of those 75) will participate in the Urban Oasis Internship and the Urban Oasis Incubation program.

What was accomplished under these goals?

During this grant reporting period 31 people successfully completed TLW's Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Training Program. This is particularly significant as the demand for local food production has increased in the Georgia market. Since 2008, the number of new farmers markets has grown by 263%. Preliminary results indicate that 81% of graduates are currently farming; 14% have started a farming business through which produce and food products are aggregated or vended through Truly Living Well Farmers Market. About 52% of growers indicated a desire to farm but did not have adequate resources to begin a farm operation.

Trainees in this cycle participated in hands on experience and exposure to all aspects of farmers market management. This included harvesting, food safety, storage and prep, as well as customer service, sales and marketing. These skills increased their ability to access markets, connect with potential clients and improve options for generating revenue.

From 2011 to 2013 TLW Market sales have increased by 68%. Added value product receipts have increased by 75%. TLW profits have increased due in part to the inclusion of new urban growers in food production and the development of added value products.

What opportunities for training and professional development has the project provided?

Challenges in self agency have impacted the ability of some of the participants to effectively utilize the training resources. This occurrence created an opportunity for TLW to provide training for staff and participants in conflict resolution, effective communication strategies, and performance measurements. TLW contracted with a Cultural Proficiency & Organizational Training Consultant to develop professional and interpersonal skills that promote success in the workplace.

How have the results been disseminated to communities of interest?

The Urban Grower Program success was featured at the 2013 Georgia Organics Conference in Atlanta, Georgia. In addition, the program results have been distributed via presentation to the Atlanta Local Food Initiative Meetings where local food stakeholders report advancements; Fulton County Commissioners Assembly on Environment; Georgia MicroBusiness Conference.

What do you plan to do during the next reporting period to accomplish the goals?

TLW will restructure the mentorship/incubator phase to create more structured business learning opportunities for participants. Past evaluations identified a need to increase business development resources to improve outcomes for beginning farmers. The Workshop Series will be open to all past participants and will be conducted by business partners in respective areas of expertise. These categories include: non-traditional funding, growing your labor force; effective marketing, land

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acquisition, accounting/record keeping, establishing relationships with businesses and community partners, sustainable expansion and diversified income.

Participants

{Nothing to report}

Target Audience

The Urban Oasis Training Program targeted low-income and socially disadvantaged persons. During this reporting period, 57% reported living significantly below the poverty line for one person households; and 30% reported income at or below the poverty line; 25 were female and 22 were male. About 66% or 31 of the 47 participants identified as socially disadvantaged African Americans.

Products

{Nothing to report}

Other Products

Product Type

Educational Aids or Curricula

Description

Urban Grower Curriculum was developed to aid in training new growers. The Curriculum was revised during this reporting period to increase facilitation of learning, retention and integration of business principles. Each participant was provided a copy to utilize during the training sessions and to serve as a resource guide after program completion.

Changes/Problems

{Nothing to report}