



Rotating Apprenticeships

Growing a Local Food System

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In the times we live in, environmental, economic and energy transitions demand that we create a local food system to ensure Community Food Security. More farmers and more people mastering the practice of growing food are key to community resilience. Through the sharing of those who are knowledgeable about how to grow food with those who want to learn. The old, the young, from the west and south sides of Chicago on down through the southeast suburbs on into Pembroke farms from spring planting into harvest time, farmers, students, friends and families will cultivate community through food.



History & Need

Distinct from how most of us lived over 70 years ago, local farmers are now few and most of the population does not know how to grow food. Currently, most of us rely solely on a global food system to meet our nutritional needs. Inside this commercial agricultural system, it takes 10 kilocalories of fossil fuel to make 1 kilocalorie of food. Most of our food travels on the average, 1 to 4,000 miles to get to our plates. Recurring climate disasters affecting food production worldwide begs the question of what to do?... We all must eat. Urban agricultural movements complete with a community craze for “local farmers markets” and “community gardens” has spread throughout the United States, including the food desert communities in Chicago as a possible solution. Such was the case when Trinity United Church of Christ requested Black Oaks Center (BOC) assist in organizing a farmers market in 2009 and 2010 featuring the black farmers of Pembroke. The 2009 annual summer market was very fulfilling but in the spring of 2010 a tornado flooded the farmer’s fields. This was followed by a summer drought. Crops were damaged with little to no resuscitation. The harvesting of local food was slim. Our goal of growing 1.5 times more food than in 2009 was far from reached. Climate conditions unveiled the vulnerability of whatever framework towards the possibility of a local food system. It also disclosed simple, fixable obstacles to more productive yields: our elder farmers need young hands that are willing to work, minds hungry to learn, workable equipment to trench their fields, access to wells and irrigation. Rising fuel cost and food cost has us on a timer. The production of local food to weave a network of community gardens, suburban plots and rural farms to form a community based local food system must be done. Whether or when grant funding comes, we all must work with the resources we have to ensure community food security. Our greatest asset is each other.



What is the Rotating Apprenticeships?

The Rotating Apprenticeship is the collective sharing of land, knowledge and skills with those who want to learn. A skilled hand teaches the helping hands on front, back or side yards in Chicago, an empty lot in the southeast suburbs and the rural farms of Pembroke. Once a piece of land is registered in the Rotating Apprenticeships, it is evaluated for its strengths and needs, what can best be grown given the sun exposure, access to water, soil conditions, physical benefits and constraints. When planning and preparation for edible landscape installation is completed, a list of seeds, plants and soil amendments available through the **Edible Plant Nursery** as well as equipment, tool and supplies will be generated and secured. After the land evaluation is done and material resources have been secured, a **CommUnity Planting Party** will be scheduled and promoted both online and through social networks. Rotating apprenticeships enrolls; the skilled and the learners, as well as members of the family, school, church, temple, mosque or partner organizations and business will participate in the CommUnity Planting Party. This is where the cultural community exchange will take place. Once installation is complete, land owners will have the choice of maintaining the crops and gardens themselves or signing up for the Healthy **Food Hub Edible Garden Services** to ensure weekly maintenance. Throughout the growing season, mini classes and workshops will take place on the various lands that are being networked through the Rotating Apprenticeships. Composting and teas, mulching, organic pest control and plant care, care of fruit trees and bushes, pruning, grafting, medicinal herbs will be taught by experienced farmers and gardeners. Canning, dehydration, cold storage as well as seed saving are an overview of some of the valuable skills that will be shared during the Rotating Apprenticeships. Harvested plants through the Rotating Apprenticeship networks will have the choice of being sold to the Healthy Food Hub. Partner institutions will be encouraged to establish a **Healthy Food Hub** at their locations to offer a wider variety and volume of local food during their community market days. With proceeds from fund raising and the beginnings of a local food economy, investments in high tunnel and hoop house production will allow the network to partake of an extended growing season. Tours to communities in Illinois that are further along in local food system building will take place as well as renewable energy and sustainable building opportunities at the Black Oaks eco campus.

Rotating Apprenticeships Regions



Chicago Region includes the food desert communities on the south and west sides of Chicago. The land donated is predominantly residential lawns of Healthy Food Hub CSA members. Collaborative organizations include:

- Agricultural High School
- Betty Shabazz International Charter School
- Camp Butterfly
- Chicago State University
- Eden Place
- Kennedy King Community College
- Kwame Nkrumah School
- North Lawndale Schools
- Village Leadership Academy
- Whitney Young High School

Teaching Institutions still defining the partnership

Learning Institutions still defining the partnership



The Central Region is suburban townships that lay between and around the I-57, 394 and 294 corridors. Many of these towns, once booming economically during the industrial era are in search of redefinition and economic opportunity

- Build Our Own Community, Dolton
- Chicago Heights
- Dixmoor
- Glenwood
- Harvey



The Southern Region is predominantly rural farms of the black farmers of Pembroke Township. This is where the most land is and this is where the Black Oaks 40 acre campus is located.

- Anthony Farm
- Basu Natural Farm
- Black Oaks Center for Sustainable Renewable Living Eco Campus
- Boots and Saddles Riding Ranch
- Elison Farm
- Iyabo Farm
- Ivy Farm
- Nazir Farm
- Rohoboth Church Blueberry Patch
- Runaway Buckers Farm
- University of Illinois Extension

Fundraising

The Rotating Apprenticeships is an opportunity to cultivate more than fresh fruits and vegetables; above all, it is an avenue to build community wealth through social capital. The funds needed for collective gardens owned by schools, religious or civic organizations will have an opportunity to raise monies for their garden needs by selling organic seeds. The seed selections can go into the garden. They can be used for individual gardens. Proceeds will allow for purchasing of plants from the **Edible Plant Nursery** as well as soil amendments. Funds and contributions will be needed for a shared equipment and tool share that BOC will maintain.

Edible Plant Nursery

High quality plants and soil amendments will be made available Will be maintained at the eco campus in Pembroke Illinois and will house an array of non GMO and organic seedlings, medicinal herb plants, flowers, fruit and nut trees as well as bushes. Proceeds will go towards the funding of a local food system to build a local food economy

2011 Implementation Timeline

March-April

Fundraising with partner institutions: Seed Sales

Enroll land and participants in the Rotating Apprenticeships

Complete Land Evaluation Registration of all Rotating Apprenticeship lands in all 3 regions

Complete Landscape Planting Plans and material resource list for all lands in the 3 regions

Establish the Edible Plant Nursery and seed starts

Perfect 30-60 day composting techniques

Schedule CommUnity Planting Parties for all registered lands in the local food system network

May-June

Fundraising Sales from Edible Plant Nursery and seed sales

Community Planting Party Installations

Schedule mini classes and workshops in gardens and at farms

Plant Maintenance

Tours

July-August

Plant maintenance and harvesting to go to market

Mini classes and workshops gardens and farms

Install fall plantings

Tours

September-November

Harvest to Market

Food Prep, Canning and low energy storage

Plant care, fall and winter crops

Building a Local Food System Harvest Celebration