



URBAN TREE CONNECTION

2017 Organizational Highlights

Urban Tree Connection's mission is to work with residents in Philadelphia's historically marginalized urban communities to transform abandoned open spaces into safe and functional places that inspire and promote positive human interaction.

Neighborhood Foods Farm: All of our produce is grown without harmful chemical inputs, so that we can produce the healthiest veggies for our neighbors! This growing season, we enhanced our sustainable growing practices by incorporating a vermicomposting system (*using worms to turn organic waste into quality compost material for crops*); we built a pollinator wall which allows our plants to fruit faster and promotes a thriving ecology; and we launched a seed-keeping project that also enhances pollinator habitats as more crops go to flower and seed and increases the quality of our crop yields as saved seeds are locally adapted.



With support from our funding partners, we restored part of our retaining wall that had been falling apart due to water run-off and soil erosion. In addition to restoring the wall, we built a pollinator habitat to attract beneficial insects and promote a rich ecosystem at the farm. Our pollinator wall is filled with dry fennel, old tree bark with holes, twigs, bamboo, pine cones, sheet moss, green Spanish moss and homemade insulation units made from recycled materials to keep the insects warm and cozy.

In 2017, we learned how to become seed-keepers! We partnered with the Philadelphia Seed Exchange (PSE) and four other urban farms in the city to save culturally relevant seeds to our respective communities. The project included:

- Participating in 3 sessions with PSE to increase our capacity to keep seeds, including a hands-on learning retreat. We successfully learned isolation and processing techniques, and shared rich cultural stories of our seeds/crops
- Identifying and keeping seeds for five crops from the African diaspora: *Sorghum, Purple Sweet Potatoes, Red Okra, Asparagus, and Paul Robeson Tomatoes.*
- Hosting 3 community workshops and a culminating event teaching community members and young people about seed-keeping.



As a result of this pilot project in the long term, we are prepared for and committed to seed-keeping, scaling our efforts to save more of our own seeds. UTC's Paul Robeson tomato seeds are currently available for sale through TrueLove Seeds' catalogue:

<https://trueloveseeds.com/collections/urban-tree-connection>.



URBAN TREE CONNECTION 2017 Organizational Highlights

Community-Led Markets: Produce grown at Neighborhood Foods Farm was distributed (May – October) through regularly scheduled markets at our farm, First African Presbyterian Church, West Philly YMCA, North Philly YMCA, and Rittenhouse Square, and through a weekly Community-Supported Agriculture program. We aim to primarily serve families with limited incomes by offering our produce at affordable prices and encouraging the use of subsidized payments (SNAP/EBT/Senior vouchers/Philly Food Bucks).



Each of our markets are operated by community members. We trained 23 neighbors and youth in *Sales and Merchandizing, Food Handling and Safety, Community Engagement, and Sustainable Market Development*; and hired 5 community members to run the markets.

This summer, we partnered with Mill Creek Farm, Vetri Community Partnership, Community Solutions CDC, and State Representative Morgan Cephas to increase food access for seniors by hosting a pop-up market at Shepard Recreation Center. FMNP vouchers were distributed to seniors to buy produce from the farm stands. The success of this market led to the implementation of a series of pop-up markets through November, and collaborative efforts with local institutions in Haddington to build upon.



In addition to providing access to healthy food in food insecure neighborhoods, our markets promote local food production, health and wellness, and community engagement. We create a space for neighbors to interact with the farmers who grew their food, share recipes and health tips with one another, and we encourage participation in our community gardening and educational programs.

In 2018, UTC will be focusing our food distribution to primarily serve Haddington. We want to further increase our impact in our most immediate neighborhood as we aim to build a local sustainable and equitable food system!



URBAN TREE CONNECTION

2017 Organizational Highlights

Community Education Programs & Events



UTC's Teen Apprenticeship Program: Our goal this year was to cultivate youth leaders engaged in the work of agroecology, urban agriculture and community cultivation through participation in farming and foraging, farm stand management and community education and outreach. Self-determination and food and land sovereignty were the foundation from which we challenged our youth to consider what an ideal community would be, and to use what they learned to manifest some of these things in their own communities.

The season began in June with 12 youth, integrating them into all aspects of our core work.

Apprentices held one of three positions: Neighborhood Foods Farm Apprentices assisted in all aspects of farm operations from planting to weeding to harvesting and packaging for farmer's markets. Apprentices helped launch a seed-keeping project to increase our sustainability efforts at NF farm. Farm-stand Apprentices participated in market setup, sales, and breakdown at four community-based farm stands, developing skills in management, product knowledge, customer communication and outreach. Community Education Apprentices led and co-facilitated 10 multi-generational community education workshops, community outreach, event planning, and community garden cultivation and maintenance. Every Thursday during the summer, youth Apprentices came together to prepare community meals with the food they grew, and discussed food and environmental justice issues.

Here are few accomplishments of our Apprentices from the season:

- ▶ Operated their own farm stand at the annual Youth Grower's Market, with vegetables they grew.
<http://philaparkandrec.tumblr.com/post/164459815574/youth-growers-market-at-rittenhouse-square>
- ▶ Attended the Mid-Atlantic Agroecology Encounter in Maryland, and facilitated a workshop on community building.
- ▶ Led a segment on WPEB's radio show's "Did You Know," sharing nutritional facts about crops they grew.
- ▶ Attended the Philadelphia's Food Policy Advisory Committee's Strategic Planning session for Urban Agriculture, advocating to resource existing community gardens/farms.
- ▶ Helped launch our seed-keeping project and led 2 seed-keeping demos for local gardeners.





URBAN TREE CONNECTION

2017 Organizational Highlights

Summer Cooking Series & Community Classes: UTC partnered with Better Tomorrows of Haddington Townhomes for a summer cooking series for their internationally themed summer camp. Our youth Apprentices assisted in teaching four hands-on cooking classes for children aged 6 to 17. Each week we saw at least 15 and up to 28 children. Hawaii, Japan, Egypt, and Brazil were the focus of our menus, and the campers prepared their meals with vegetables and herbs from the UTC's Memorial Children's garden.

We also hosted a series of health and wellness classes focusing on a variety of topics from fresh juice preparation, cooking from the African diaspora, to whole grain baking and salad making with produce and herbs from our farm and garden sites.



At the end of 2016, UTC & Neighborhood Foods Community Group were selected by the Philadelphia Area Cooperative Alliance to participate in its 20 Book Clubs-->20 Coops Initiative. We formed a Learning Circle to explore cooperative business economic strategies. During our six months of study, we learned about the history of Black cooperatives in the U.S. This opportunity introduced us to key cooperative principles that will continue to shape our work moving forward.

End of Season Harvest Party: We wrapped up our season with our annual Harvest Party at Pearl Street Children's Garden on October 31st. Neighbors prepared dishes using produce from our final harvest, and we shared a community meal together to some excellent music provided by a local DJ. UTC's Educators and youth Apprentices turned our garden shed into a haunted shed, and our Children's garden into a scavenger/foraging hunt. Our 'scary scientists' made slime and 'smoke' (using dry ice) with the children.





URBAN TREE CONNECTION

2017 Organizational Highlights

Community Gardens & Volunteer Support: This season, community leaders primarily managed three of our community gardens, with UTC providing resources such as plants, seeds and volunteer support. Our Girarden, Queens, and Pearl Street - Conestoga community-led gardens continue to be thriving spaces for active community gathering and growing together.

UTC has a rich network of volunteers that visit each year providing support with garden maintenance, trash collection, and special projects. Our volunteers share our values of wanting to increase the health and wellness of the broader Haddington community.



Advocacy & Collaborations: UTC along with other government agencies, non-profits, and growers across the city participated in Philadelphia Food Policy Advisory Committee's (FPAC) Strategic Planning sessions for Urban Agriculture. UTC's Staff, community gardeners and youth Apprentices actively participated in the conversation, offering a community-based perspective; underscoring the need for land security, resources, and support for urban farms and gardens. These sessions will result in recommendations that will help shape Urban Agriculture citywide.



We continue to collaborate and build partnerships both locally and state-wide, which include:

- Soil Generation: Threatened gardens campaign; Land Bank Disposition Hearings, Urban Ag policy
- PA Women's Agricultural Network: Rural & Urban Women Farmers project
- South-West West Agricultural Group: coordination of youth work such as Youth Growers Market, Youth Conferences
- The Food Trust & Farm to City: farmers market initiatives



URBAN TREE CONNECTION

2017 Organizational Highlights

Looking Forward: UTC is currently in the process of consciousness-raising at all levels of the organization, from Board and Staff to community members and youth, to develop shared alignment in why we engage in land reclamation and food work. We are grounding our understanding of our work in the historical legacy and growing inequality around food and land access that strips communities of power, particularly those that are working class, poor, Black, and people of color.



This framework helps us to better understand the material conditions of Haddington, a vibrant Black working-class neighborhood in West Philadelphia that faces critical challenges such as poverty, food insecurity – and chronic health conditions related to these factors. Our consciousness-raising efforts are to develop a racial and economic justice perspective, and to root our work in equitable programming and practices.

These efforts will be further advanced as we go through a participatory strategic planning process in the spring of 2018. One of the goals in this planning process is to develop a shared and collective vision of our work, and a blueprint for building a locally-controlled, sustainable and equitable food and land steward system in Haddington.

We believe that community gardens and farms can be a tool for building healthy neighborhoods and community power in areas that have long been neglected, particularly when food production and distribution processes are democratized, and when community is leading the efforts.

To get there, we are adopting the following strategies for social change:

- Building a locally controlled food system that uses a collective decision-making process and uses sustainable growing practices.
- Creating and implementing alternative socio-economic practices and projects with direct community participation and leadership (i.e. cooperatives, land trusts).
- Cultivating multi-generational leadership and human development in relationship to building a local food system and community land management.
- Build UTC's internal organizational capacity & strengthen urban agriculture in Philadelphia.

