

Developing new farmers at Cultivate Kansas City

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Cultivate Kansas City is a locally-grown non-profit working to grow food, farms and communities for a healthy local food system. Cultivate Kansas City (formerly the Kansas City Center for Urban Agriculture) was founded in 2005 with the goal of promoting urban agriculture. In the years since then, Cultivate Kansas City has become an advocate, educator, and activist in support of production of fresh, nutritious produce in city neighborhoods across the metro area. We have grown from two staff members with a \$80,000 budget to our current staff of 20 year-round and seasonal employees, one 3-acre production/demonstration farm, one 8-acre training farm, the city's first permaculture food forest, a third 1-acre farm in the works and a \$1.3 million budget. One of the primary missions of the organization is to promote and support urban farmer development both through specific programs with targeted grower audiences in addition to advocating for, and promoting urban farmers and local food among the public. The Gibbs Road Farm is a fully-operational commercial 2-acre certified organic production farm that demonstrates urban production and provides training for Growing Growers apprentices, staff and field crew members annually. 40% of the crew go on to become farm owner-operators, growing food across the city and throughout the metropolitan area. The Juniper Gardens Training Farm is a partnership with Catholic Charities of Northeast Kansas and the Kansas City, KS Housing Authority. It is located in downtown Kansas City, KS in the middle of Kansas' oldest and largest public housing project. The four-year farm incubation program assists re-settled refugees in starting independent farm businesses on ¼ acre plots and provides four years of production, marketing, and business management skills through workshops and one-on-one training from trained staff. Since 2008, seventeen students have graduated; and 15 are currently farming, 9 of them on land they purchased and own. Our Metro Farms and Food Systems staff work with growers and food projects across the metro area, providing farmers with technical assistance on everything from land access to production to financing and working with other non-profit organizations. Through that work, 70% of urban farmers work with Cultivate KC to help them start, grow, and strengthen their farm businesses and dozens of community-based projects have been developed and launched. We will present an overview of how Cultivate has organized its farmer development activities and how we have, through strategic partnerships and collaborations, increased the amount of food produced, distributed, and eaten in the metro area.