Grow Dat Youth Farm Quarterly Update

Summer 2012

Observing the fields, photo by Dacia Idom

Reflections from the Farm

Letter from Grow Dat Co-Director, Johanna Gilligan

2012 has been, thus far, an amazing year at Grow Dat; a year that has brought incredible change and growth to our organization. Although it would be impossible to tell all the beautiful stories of the last six months, we wanted to give you an idea of some of the things we have accomplished since the start of the year.

In January we hired our first Assistant Crew Leaders (ACLs), graduates from last year's program who came back a second year to help guide a new group of young adults through the five month program. Together, with our ACLs (Muffin, Ace, John and Martin), our staff welcomed 20 students into the program in February. These students were selected from our five partner schools (both public and private) and formed a diverse team, from different neighborhoods and walks of life, who would work together for the next five months to grow food for their community. This spring we harvested our first crops from our farm site in City Park. Each week students came to work one day after school and every Saturday. Some days they harvested and prepared produce for market, other days they weeded, diligently guarded our crops against bugs or spread compost to spur growth. They became enmeshed in the work of farming, sending picture messages of carrots they had harvested to friends and proudly declaring that they were making history by becoming the first in their family to farm.

Harvesting blueberries at Pearl River Blues Blueberry Farm

Crew members ran our market stand at the Sankofa farmers market, taking great pride in selling food they had grown. A spirit of friendly competition emerged as different crews would work hard to sell out at market, using their charm and delicious free samples to engage customers. They also donated much of the food they grew. Every youth had the opportunity to prepare and serve produce they had grown at the Crescent City Cafe, a free monthly breakfast hosted at Rayne Memorial church. Over three months they served over 300 meals and learned important, and sometimes surprising, lessons about what the face of hunger in our community looks like.

Though this year was deeply rewarding it definitely was not always easy. In our first week of planting the farm, we lost 60% of 1,000 swiss chard plants to cut worms. However, cycles of life and loss on the farm provided important lessons for problem solving, resiliency, and perseverance. Sadly, many hardships were more serious than crop loss, as the all-too-prevalent violence of our city touched many of our crew members and staff this spring. Through the loss of family and close friends, we supported one another and forged deep bonds. As they left work crew members would often say to staff and to one another, "Thank you, I feel better now than I did when I got here." Like the integrated ecosystem we developed in our fields, we learned to trust and rely on one another, understanding that our strength as a community was what allowed to us to each thrive individually.

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Grow Dat is founded upon the idea that young people, brought together across race and class lines and engaged in the meaningful work of growing food, will develop leadership skills that enable them to solve the many problems we face as a community. We are engaged in a great experiment to find out if we can use this important work to transform the lives of young adults. I think this quote, along with the data you will find embedded in this document, provides us with an answer:

I recommend this program to students. I suggest Grow Dat go to a number of high schools because I feel like every teenager needs this experience. Cause you're not just learning about food, but you're also learning about yourself. You know a man goes to the military, and he finds his manhood? I feel like I found my teenage-hood here. I really discovered who I was and I became more confident in what I'm able to do. It's really a life-changing experience....through the work of food.

Thank you for your support,
Johanna Gilligan

How We Grew:
Results from our Second Year

Job Skills Training

- 100% of youth report significant development of leadership skills, with increased abilities to speak in public, share opinions in a group, provide instructions to others, and interact with people from different backgrounds
- 100% of youth made at least one new friend from another school
- 88% of youth said they had changed their eating habits as a result of participating in Cooking and Nutrition classes
- 100% of youth said that participating in Grow Dat will positively effect their potential as a employee in other settings in the future

Swimming at Bogue Chitto State Park

Our Farm and Food Access in New Orleans

Sharing watermelon juice and doing cooking demos at our Pop-Up Farmer's Market

- 7,250 lbs of food was grown and harvested on our farm
- 2,750 lbs of our harvest was donated to address hunger and food insecurity in New Orleans
- 100% of youth took home our produce and shared it with their friends and family
- $13,500 was raised from produce sales at local
- restaurants and farmer's markets

Hear from Grow Dat Youth

"I feel that when someone wants you to succeed besides yourself it can really help you get there."

"I think this program made me more open minded and encouraged me to step into more environments outside of my comfort zone and circle."

"I encourage beaucoup people to do this. How many teenagers do you know in New Orleans who can grow their own food and cook?"

"Everybody's got their own story and it's always good to hear what people gotta say. That's the biggest lesson I got from this program: that everybody is human and everybody has their own separate theme."

"My family was really supportive -- they love the way that I come back with fresh produce."

Selling our produce at Sankofa Farmers Market

Youth working on the farm

Partners

Grow Dat Youth Farm is currently being incubated by Tulane City Center and works in partnership with:

Center for Public Service at Tulane University
City Park
Crescent City Cafe
De La Salle High School
Gaea Engineering Consultants
Hollygrove Market and Farm
Joseph S. Clark High School
Louisiana Outdoor Outreach Program
New Orleans Charter and Mathematics High School (Sci High)
New Orleans Food Co-Op
New Orleans Food and Farm Network
New Orleans Outreach
Sankofa Community Development Corporation
Second Harvest Food Bank of Greater New Orleans and Acadiana
The Net Charter High School
Warren Easton Charter High School
Whole Foods

Funders:

Blue Cross Blue Shield
Chegg
ConAgra Foundation
The Gould Family Foundation
The Greater New Orleans Foundation
Maziar Behrooz
John and Anne Mullen
Rockefeller Foundation
Emerging Philanthropists of New Orleans
Anonymous Donors

National Partners:

Urban Roots (Austin)
The Food Project (Boston)

Press

WWL
"Quiet Heroes build farm in heart of the city"
April 17, 2012
http://www.wwltv.com/video/featured-videos/Quiet-Heroes-build-farm-in-heart-of-city-147835715.html

NPR: WWNO
"Community Impact Series: Grow Dat Youth Farm"
Ian McNulty
June 23, 2012
http://wwno.org/post/community-impact-series-grow-dat-youth-farm

WGNO
"Teen Farmers Growing Organic Produce"
June 8, 2012
http://www.abc26.com/news/newswithatwist/wgno-teen-farmers-growing-organic-produce-20120609,0,2022260.story

Architecture Daily
"The Grow Dat Youth Farm & SEEDocs: Mini-Documentaries on the Power of Public-Interest Design"
Vanessa Quirk
June 22, 2012
http://www.archdaily.com/245235/the-grow-dat-youth-farm-seed-ocs-mini-documentaries-on-the-power-of-public-interest-design/

Welcoming guests for our first Community Lunch in our Outdoor Classroom

Join Us!

To donate, volunteer or learn more, visit us online at www.growdatyouthfarm.org or contact Program Specialist Jeanne Firth at jeanne@growdatyouthfarm.org