

Bluegrass Local Foods Summit
Urban Agriculture Breakout Notes
April 21st, 2011

Facilitators: Sellus Wilder (Frankfort City Council Member and Mayor Pro-temp); James Coles (Community Ventures Corporation)

Participating: Gayle Boone, Janice Westlund, Patti Meads, Louise Edmonds, Jessica Mansfield, Shannon Baker, Jo Stone (Collaborative Gardens), Deborah Messenger, Cory Johnson, Tara Layne, Dana Peters, Sarah Gardner, Henry Jackson, Claire Carpenter, Chris Muesing, Mary Katherine Miller, Greg Capillo (Kentucky Environmental Foundation), and Kelly Grace

Notes prepared by: Timothy Mayer (Community Farm Alliance, Organizer)

Findings:

- 1) **Loosen restrictions placed on homeowners by Homeowner's Associations that prohibit gardening and other energy saving activities;**
- 2) **Support community gardening ventures by identifying vacant plots within the city that could be cultivated; encourage private land owners to turn over vacant property for gardening by offering them a mixture of tax breaks and other incentives;**
- 3) **Educate people on how to garden and also how to prepare the food (cooking, canning, processing...)**
- 4) **Establish ordinances that are accommodating to small animal agriculture in urban areas;**
- 5) **Reevaluate ordinances pertaining that curb or discourage the use of rain barrels and other water saving practices;**
- 6) **Support for school gardens;**
- 7) **Access to community kitchens and other processing facilities for small producers.**

HOA Restrictions

The discussion started out with a 'bizarre problem:' home owners associations (HOAs) that prohibit gardening and other related agricultural and horticultural activities, e.g. solar panels, rain barrels, vegetable gardens, composting etc... Beginning in the 80's, HOAs began to prohibit these practices. Many homeowners cannot grow in their backyards, even behind fences because it violates the rules of the HOA.

One solution suggested by Louise from Lexington-Fayette Urban County Government (LFUCG): LFUCG buys a considerable amount of property, portions of which could be used for gardening by citizens; however citizens must enter into contract with LFUCG. There is a lot of property available.

It was noted that there is a need in the suburbs for the government to dial back on HOA restrictions. Henry mentioned that deed restrictions are virtually impossible to overturn. The reason for the restrictions is because property owners want to maintain high property values and they fear that poorly manicured lawns and yards will ultimately lower everyone's value. There was a question raised about the ability of a Local Bill of Rights to counteract these restrictions, however it is like that the restrictions would be grandfathered in.

It was stated that suburban poverty is the fastest growing poverty and that HOA restrictions compound the problem by not allowing folks moving out to the suburbs to grow their own food.

(Editor's Note: Henry also referenced a book, "The Edible City," that came out of Berkeley several decades ago that he described as a guerilla style manual for urban gardening. I tried to find it online, but could only find one with the same title about Toronto.)

Community Gardening

In Lexington, the Division of Parks and Recreation maintains a listing of community gardens on its website.

Sellus: Frankfort is making an effort to identify garden space within neighborhoods. There is the possibility of incentives in the forms of property tax breaks for churches and other owners who allow vacant property to be used for gardening. He has found that it is fairly easy to convince people to let the land go to gardening.

James asked if environmental testing was required before the plots could be put into production. Sellus responded that he has a good working relationship with the Franklin County Cooperative Extension Service (CES).

Henry asked if establishing a demo garden for people to learn on had been tried. He also inquired about vandalism at gardens. Sellus responded to the point on vandalism by saying that each garden has two sections; the front section anyone is entitled to plant in and pick from. The back part of the garden is then reserved for those people who work that space. The Commonwealth Garden Network in Frankfort makes it widely known to the neighboring community. To the point on education, they work with KSU and CES. Also, the gardening members work with each other and teach one another skills.

Community Gardening: Education

Participants volunteered educational materials about gardening at this point:

- 1) www.faitheedslex.org
- 2) Google: "Edible Garden series"
- 3) John Walker, a knowledgeable Lexington gardener and gleaner
- 4) Arboretum has a great demo garden
- 5) CES classes are available and helpful
- 6) "Gardening in KY" from CES; downloadable as a PDF file (pgs 17 and 21 are said to be very helpful)
- 7) Jamie Dockery is also a good resource

The need for cooking and canning skills was also brought up. Seedleaf was mentioned as being the closest organization in Lexington that offers training.

Tim mentioned the Louisville-based Stone Soup, a project of the Community Farm Alliance. Stone Soup is a mobile community kitchen that helps people develop culinary skills by pairing community residents with experienced chefs and other volunteers in order to prepare gleaned food from local farms for a

community potluck. There is one potluck for every month of the harvest season in Louisville. This is perhaps a model that Lexington activists could follow.

There was an idea to have farmers hand out recipes with the food they sell at markets.

Small Animal Urban Agriculture

Easing restrictions on small animal ag, i.e. small goats (I forget the breed) could allow people to get milk and be more food secure.

We need to have laws and ordinances in place to support this vision. It was also stated during the conversation on urban animal ag that an urban ag infrastructure needs to include the most vulnerable in the population.

Water

Water is also an important factor. Rain barrels are very helpful; however people have to watch out for regulations around their use. There was also a lengthy discussion on grey water and recycling water, or using dish water and sink water to flush toilets. It was stated that the facility in Bernheim recycles water as does Berea College.

School Gardens

Sellus mentioned that establishing school gardens is a very important component of building long term local food economy. Kids, when they see how food is grown, and get to be involved in the process, really get into eating fresh, healthy food.

Community Kitchens and Processing Facilities

In Frankfort, there is an idea to develop a non-profit community kitchen and processing facility that would serve the schools.

Access to community kitchens is an issue, as is getting certified in canning. There was an idea to use the CTE, or the culinary university and partner with them to show people how to can. Also, perhaps a storefront could be used for microprocessing (an opportunity for business—great entrepreneurial activity)

James also brought up using Rick's place (the man who spoke earlier during the Conference) out on Tates Creek Rd. Workforce Development also has a kitchen. Could we use the kitchen for cooking and processing?