



Down to Earth: Reports from the field

Innovative Small Farmers' Outreach Program (ISFOP): West Central Region

Lincoln University Cooperative Extension

Message from the Dean & the 1890 Administrator

It is with great pleasure that we offer the first of many newsletters that the Innovative Small Farmers' Outreach Program will publish. Many of you are not familiar with this recently developed extension program at Lincoln University. It was designed to meet the needs of small farmers and gardeners in selected regions of Missouri and provide one-on-one assistance to the greatest number of families as efficiently as possible. Our emphasis is on limited resource producers located in both rural and urban regions. Our goal is to personally assist producers in developing profitable operations. Our Farm Outreach Workers (FOWs) have been carefully selected and have varied experiences in agricultural systems. Please use their expertise for all of your production and marketing needs. They stand ready to assist you!

Sincerely,

Steve Meredith

Dean & the 1890 Extension Administrator

In The Spotlight:

Hello, from the Small Farm Outreach team! We are working in the area and would like to introduce our program to you. We can keep you up to date with the exciting things area farmers are doing. In this, our first issue of Down to Earth, we introduce Sherri Harvel from the Root Deep Urban Farm in Jackson County, Missouri.

The first time we had the pleasure of touring Root Deep Urban Farm was late in the 2009 growing season, but I could tell something special was happening on this small urban lot.

In a neighborhood whose crime rate is rated 8 (with 10 being the worst), median household income of \$24,479, and 25 percent of the housing units vacant, the last thing anyone would suspect is a productive (continued on Page 2).

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Community Gardens: A Harvest of Hope



Root Deep Urban Farm (continued from Page 1)

urban farm bringing life and fresh food back into the neighborhood. Root Deep Urban Farm is a diamond in the rough and an oasis in a desert of concrete, abandoned buildings and empty lots.

We were caught by surprise when we learned Sherri had no experience growing anything until 1999. That was the year she received a knock at the door from a lady in her neighborhood asking if she would like a space to grow in the local community garden. Sherri dove right in and started growing. By 2001, she was selling at her first farmers market on Linwood and Troost.

“My mother and Grandmother were very excited about what I was doing. They bragged and bragged about it,” Sherri told us. They were very proud of her farming enterprise.

She went on to say, “People kept asking me if I was from the south, because people just didn’t grow food here!”

Obviously, that is no longer the case. Sherri learned a lot of what she knows about farming from spending time at the Kansas City Community Gardens and the Kansas City Center for Urban Agriculture where she rents greenhouse space in the spring to grow her vegetable starts. In 2005, Sherri took a big plunge and purchased an empty urban lot on 18th and College in Kansas City, MO where she now farms.

The farm is no more than a fourth of an acre, but it is very productive. Using organic, sustainable farming practices, she is able to feed her family, support six member CSA, sell at three farmers mar-

kets and share extra produce with the neighborhood. Mostly vegetables are grown on the farm, with the exception of a few productive raspberry and blackberry bushes that line the fence.

Sherri is now able to supplement her income from the farm enough so that she only needs a part time job to support her family.

“The part-time job is a necessity in the winter time when there is no farm income,” says Sherri.



Plans for Community Gardens Underway

Community gardens are bringing seeds of hope to urban communities. The concept of the garden is to provide quality food to gardening participants. As those of us who garden know, there are multiple benefits from planting a seed and watching it grow; food budgets are expanded, there is physical exercise involved and of course, the mental health benefits from just being outside and connecting with neighbors. Less obvious benefits can be

far reaching; bonds forming between gardeners, neighborhood enhancement and even a decrease in crime occurs in neighborhoods where gardens exist. Lincoln currently works with gardens in a number of emerging Community Gardens in the Kansas City metro area.

***Want to start a garden
in your neighborhood?
Lincoln University
Extension can help!***



High Tunnels

In the past year you may have heard the phrase high tunnel mentioned quite a few times. More and more Missouri farmers have learned of the benefits of high tunnels and started to use this simple technology in their operations in order to maximize their crop potential and to extend the growing season.

A high tunnel, sometimes referred to as a hoop house, is simply an unheated plastic-covered temporary structure that provides



*Photo of a Quonset-style High Tunnel.
From www.hightunnel.org.*

crop protection from environmental elements, such as rain, frost and sun. The use of high tunnels in a vegetable operation can provide the opportunity to start crops in the field early and grow them late. There has also been some research conducted by Kansas State University that suggests some small fruits, like raspberries and blueberries, do better in high tunnels than they do out in the open. (continued on Page 3)

High Tunnels (continued from Page 2)

The two main styles of high tunnels are Gothic and Quonset, both having their advantages and disadvantages. While the Quonset-style is loved for its simplicity and easy construction, the Gothic-style high tunnel is praised for its ability to withstand snow loads. Because of the design of the gothic high tunnel, it allows up to 15 percent more room for growing against the inside walls.

No matter what style is chosen, you can design your high tunnel to be movable. A few years ago this idea was not as popular as it is today, but it is now easier to find high tunnels that were designed to be moved. Most movable high tunnels will be constructed on tracks. It can take as few as two people to move a 96-foot tunnel to a new location. The major benefit of having a movable high tunnel is that you can rotate your crops; and, if you are

an organic grower, this is an essential management strategy for keeping down pests and disease as well as maintaining soil fertility.

There are many plans online and companies that sell high tunnels, so the cost for a tunnel can vary quite a bit. The cost for an average size high tunnel (20 feet wide x 10 feet tall x 96 feet long) including plastic and the other materials needed for construction can range from \$0.75-\$2.50 per square foot. Other costs to consider are: end walls for the tunnel, labor, shipping, irrigation equipment, soil amendments (if it's not movable), new plastic every 3-5 years and replacement parts.

High tunnels are a very useful tool in making the most out of your acreage. They can also make you a more consistent producer. You will have vegetables

sooner and longer in the season than everyone else, which could result in a more loyal customer base. Some growers are able to pay for their high tunnels within three years.

If you are interested in a high tunnel for your operation, there are some excellent resources available on the internet. One of the best sites is www.hightunnels.org. They have a listserv you can join and connect with farmers who are using high tunnels. They will share knowledge and ask questions to their peers that you can utilize. Two more useful web addresses to look at are :

<http://extension.org/article/18622>

<http://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/PDF/seasonext.pdf>

Grow Your Farm Course

Recently the Lincoln University Cooperative Extension (LUCE) and the University of Missouri's (MU) Extension offices teamed up to offer the Grow Your Farm business planning course for beginning farmers. It was a ten session course, alternating between Higginsville and Warrensburg. It offered valuable information and guidance on writing a business plan and putting your farm enterprise ideas down on paper.

We had ten farms that participated in the course, most of which are new and beginning farmers. There were a few experienced farmers wanting to try new enterprises.

We started the course off with a session led by Debi Kelly from MU, who is co-author of the Grow Your Farm curriculum. Participants had the opportunity to think about how their values fit with what

they wanted to accomplish with their farming enterprises. Writing mission statements for their farms helped them gain more clarity into the direction they wanted to go.

Since that first session, we have had guest speakers from LUCE, MU Extension, the Farm Service Agency (FSA), the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) and farmers who shared their personal experiences and struggles with the participants.

Farm visits were also part of the course. The participants had the opportunity to visit Breezy Hill Farm, a pastured beef operation, and the Fahrmeier Farm, a diverse farm that has a winery, does greenhouse production and large scale vegetable production—some of which is produced in high tunnels.

These farm visits were a valuable way for

participants to see the potential their own farms could reach, hear about real life struggles on the farm and experience a diversity of farming styles. These farm visits were very informal and the participants had the chance to ask any and all questions they might have.

In our tenth and last session, the participants shared the farm plans that they had been working on since the course began nearly two months before. This was their moment to share their own farm plans and express these into words, which was a very important step in making their dream a reality.

Please contact ISFOP, if you would like more information on the next Grow Your Farm course.

Katie Nixon: (816) 809-5074



ISFOP



If you are a small farmer and have a need for information, please contact one of the following Farm Outreach Workers. These people live and work in your community. They can provide information on ways to better manage your resources, reduce expense and increase income. They can also provide information on other available programs and resources that may increase your income and overall quality of life for your family.

You are eligible to participate if:

- Your family lives on a farm, rural or urban.
- Farm products or income from the farm are necessary for you to live where you do.
- Your family provides the management and most of the labor for your farm.
- Your total annual family income is less than \$50,000.

Resource Corner:

- Farmers markets all over the region will start opening up. Find a market to sell at by going to: <http://agebb.missouri.edu/fmktidir/>
- For workshops in the coming months on Pest, Disease and Weed Management, Equipment for Vegetable and Fruit Growers, Post Harvest Handling for Quality and Safety and more look up: www.growinggrowers.org
- In May look for Women in Boots & Blue Jeans: Ag Risk Management Conferences 2010 in Mt. Vernon, MO and St. Joseph, MO
- May 1 - SW Missouri Goat Conference, Anderson, MO

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- ◆ Vonna Kesel, program secretary

Meet the ISFOP West Central Region Outreach Team

Katie Nixon is the Regional Small Farm Specialist. Katie spends one half her time coordinating the work of ISFOP throughout the West Central region and the rest of her time as the Farm Outreach Worker (FOW) for Jackson County. She is based in Kansas City and works one-on-one with farmers, both rural and urban. Her work in Jackson County focuses primarily on urban agriculture where she works directly with a diverse array of populations through hands-on workshops.

Jeff Yearington is the FOW for Cass and Johnson Counties and a small farmer. Jeff and his family live near Freeman, MO. He has an extensive small farm background producing and marketing vegetables, meat goats and other small farm and value-added products. Jeff enjoys working with other

small farmers and gardeners to help them reach their goals.

Jim Pierce is a Farm Outreach Worker for Clay and Platte Counties. He brings his long experience and understanding of raising vegetables and apples for the local markets, starting and operating greenhouses for profit. He is an entrepreneur at heart and has all kinds of money-making ideas that he is more than willing to share with others

Susan Jaster is the FOW for Lafayette and Ray Counties and has worked in the commercial dairy industry from 1980-1999 in Arizona and Missouri. She and her family still own replacement heifers. Over the years she has been employed as a radio announcer and has served as a 4-H volunteer project leader, club leader and archery instructor.

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