

winter at a demonstration center for local farmers. And it's working with Will Allen's Growing Power (see p. 16) to start an aquaponics and composting project at the center as well.

Foothills sells its FFMI software to anyone who is interested in the model, as several neighboring counties have already done. "We're riding the crest of concern over the transportation costs of food, concern for family farmers, and the fact that people want to eat fresh food," says Brown. "The more people understand how important local, sustainable food is, the more these kinds of programs will flourish."

—Tracy Fernandez Rysavy



## Earthworks Urban Farm, Detroit, Michigan Making Veggies Cool For Kids



courtesy of Earthworks

ABOUT 32 PERCENT of children in the US today are obese or overweight, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Combine that with the drastic shortage of conventional grocery stores in some areas (see p. 14), and it's easy to see how vital it is to get kids invested in growing, preparing, and eating good food. One of the oldest and biggest urban farming enterprises in Detroit—the Earthworks Urban Farm—has started two highly successful youth programs to do just that.

"We see the farm programs for kids, and the food we produce, as a vehicle for encouraging relationships in our community," says Shane Bernardo, Earthworks outreach coordinator. "In showing the kids how we create a just and beautiful food system, there's an overarching theme of sustainability, of passing on the knowledge and skills from previous generations on how to responsibly care for our whole community, and be whole people."

Building a "just and beautiful" food system had been one of Earthworks' goals from its very beginning, in 1997, when Franciscan friar Rick Samyn started Earthworks as a small urban farm designed to produce food for an affiliated soup kitchen.

In 2003, Earthworks set up the Growing Healthy Kids (GHK) program, welcoming neighborhood children ages five to 11 to weekly after-school gatherings.

Beginning with a healthy snack, each GHK gathering incorporates an enjoyable and educational farming activity: painting signs for the garden, starting seed transplants in the greenhouse, or visiting the on-site apiary. The purpose is as much to develop healthy eating habits early in life as it is to teach the how-tos of urban agriculture.

"By getting involved in the garden, seeing where food comes from, experiencing the cycle of how things grow—all of this experience leads [kids] to make better and healthier choices," says Denis Roshac, Earthworks' education director.

Debbie Bleger, whose daughter Augusta participated in the program, told the local *St. Anthony Messenger*: "Augusta has a greater appreciation of what it takes to feed others. We garden at home so she already understood how to feed a family. But this has shown her how to feed a community."

As they watched children from Growing Healthy Kids get older, Earthworks organizers decided to launch its Youth Farm Stand. For this program, children ages 12 to 17 continue learning about plant lifecycles and community food systems, while also helping to produce "value-added" products, like jams and pickles. What's more, they get real-time training in the job skills necessary to market and run a small business.

—Andrew Korfhage



## growingSOUL, Montgomery County, Maryland A Zero-Waste Food System



Jessica Weiss

WITH SEVERAL RAISED BEDS and an aquaponics system nestled in the heart of Gaithersburg, MD, growingSOUL is a thriving urban farm. But this sustainable food education center is also all about starting a nationwide composting revolution.

"To have a truly sustainable food system, you have to

1

**Start your own garden** (and raise your own chickens for eggs). For urban gardening advice, see our interview with “Garden Girl” Patti Moreno: [GreenAmerica.org/go/moreno](http://GreenAmerica.org/go/moreno).

From Florida to Seattle, people are creating healthy, vibrant, sustainable, and local food systems. Help change the food system in your area in the following ways:

6

**Eat less meat, more veggies.** Reduce your personal climate emissions and care for animals. Consider becoming a vegetarian or vegan, if you aren't already.

2

**Make your own organic soil.** Find our how-to articles on composting at [GreenAmerica.org/go/compost](http://GreenAmerica.org/go/compost).

7

**Involve children.** EarthWorks staff are happy to share the curricula they've developed for their Growing Healthy Kids program. Contact [earthworks@cksdetroit.org](mailto:earthworks@cksdetroit.org). (Use the subject line “Education Coordinator—Curriculum.”)

3

**Eat local and organic.** Join a CSA, buy from farmers' markets, and visit locally owned restaurants. Find them at [LocalHarvest.org](http://LocalHarvest.org).

## Inspired? 9 Good Food Things To Do

4

**Close the loop.** If you want to get organic waste for your farm or used vegetable oil to power your car, contact growingSOUL to see if you can form a relationship with a local Chipotle Mexican Grill: 301/537-7422, [growingsoul.org](http://growingsoul.org).

8

**Volunteer** with a sustainable farm or food justice organization. Find one at [LocalHarvest.org](http://LocalHarvest.org).

5

**Join a local food club.** Google “organic food delivery” or “local food club” to find a service near you. Foothills Connect sells its software to any groups interested in replicating their Farmers Fresh Market Initiative to bolster local farmers: 828/ 288-1650, [FarmersFreshMarket.org](http://FarmersFreshMarket.org).

9

**Invest in good food.** Community investing organizations offer vehicles that support the creation of small, local businesses—including organic grocers and restaurants—as well as healthy food systems. Read our community investing guide to find out more: [GreenAmerica.org/go/CI](http://GreenAmerica.org/go/CI).

[GreenAmerica.org](http://GreenAmerica.org)

Illustration by John Woodcock / istock

compost,” says Jessica Weiss, growingSOUL’s founder and executive director. “It keeps vital nutrients in the soil, and it helps avoid unnecessary waste. It closes the loop.”

Workers at growingSOUL collect organic waste—fruit and vegetable scraps, coffee grounds, used paper products, and more—from local businesses to turn into compost for the farm. Individuals can drop off their waste at the farm or at special drop-off centers at one of three farmers’ markets in Montgomery County. Or, for a fee, growingSOUL will pick up compostables directly at your door if you live in Montgomery County—in a F350 diesel truck powered by straight vegetable oil (SVO).

In addition to selling its extra compost at the farm, growingSOUL also sells “worm casting” fertilizer, composting bins, and red wiggler worms for vermicomposting. And to help fledgling composters get started, growingSOUL offers how-to workshops on composting, cooking, and gardening.

While much of growingSOUL’s work has been locally focused, it’s now starting to take the composting revolution national. One

of its newest initiatives is a partnership with Chipotle Mexican Grill restaurants, wherein growingSOUL currently picks up the organic waste from four local Chipotles to turn it into compost. It plans to expand this model to Chipotles across the country.

“We want to create a franchise program to connect Chipotle restaurants nationwide—as well as other restaurants and food banks—with compost haulers,” says Weiss.

Weiss says growingSOUL is also rolling out program to collect waste vegetable oil from all of its local Chipotle sites this year to fuel the organization’s SVO truck.

“We have plans to take this initiative national, which is good news for anyone seeking used waste vegetable oil to power a biodiesel or SVO vehicle,” says Weiss. “We are working on an arrangement where all someone has to do is contact me, and I’ll hook them up with a Chipotle Mexican Grill near them, anywhere in the country, so they can have access to very clean, used veggie oil.”

—Tracy Fernandez Rysavy, with additional research by Joshua Marks