

# Support these Organic Farms to Help Transform Our Foodshed

My bioregion has a lot of growth opportunities and has made great strides within our local foodshed. The biggest sustainable access that anyone can have in relation to their local foodshed is to grow their own produce, like the veggies we grew (shown above) from our organic garden! The **Sustainable Food Center** has been a key player in transforming our community. They have advocated change, helped impoverished communities have access to healthier food choices, provided resources and education, and launched necessary services. They are available at some of the Austin farmers markets in some impoverished areas and have potential growth opportunities to branch out to other neighborhoods. The **Capital Area Food Bank** recovers a lot of food from many restaurants and farms and distributes it to poor communities throughout this region (Texas 2014).

There are several organic farms in Austin, some of which have been around for quite some time. **Tecolote** is an organic family farm a few miles from my home in Manor, which has been the longest CSA distributor in Texas (Kramer 2014). Their engagement in the food movement is through their contributions in living sustainably, local restaurant/co-op distribution, farmers markets in different counties, the slow food movement, and biointensive/sustainable/civic agriculture. These are some of the things I learned from this incredible farm by volunteering and working

for them. As a CSA shareholder or farmers market shopper you will be pleased to have access to specialty smoked peppers from David's famous outdoor wood smoker and other unique heirloom varieties that are boom-tastic! Chat about your next dish at the market with Katie!

**Green Gate** is an organic family farm about ten miles from my house that focuses on civic/sustainable agriculture, CSA distributions, some restaurant wholesale, meat/honey/dairy shares on-site from other farms, host to a bee colony from an offsite beekeeper to share the pollination benefits, promote community development and education through their New Farm Institute (Flynn 2014). I've had the wonderful opportunity to work and volunteer for Green Gate! Learning from Farmer Chip and Farmer Erin is a unique and magical experience. Something that you don't want to miss! **Help support them in building their NFI infrastructure and site. Donate!**

These two farms are very similar, especially since they are strong family farms, yet their focus is somewhat different. While Tecolote focuses on their direct market reach through face to face networking, Green Gate focuses on educating the community on food ethics. Not to sound exhaustive, I'm trying to simplify. They both represent farm gate to food plate, instill historical character at their farms and equally share traction in their fields. Green Gate has integrated permaculture design at their farm sites and they are open to the public to learn, offer children's farm camp programs, and alternative educational curriculum opportunities to local schools. They are the only organic farm in Austin that focuses on this. Green Gate provides additional SNAP benefits from the government

by doubling the voucher from \$10 to \$20 per day for produce when used on the farm (Banks, 2011).

There is a crucial demand in any city or town for people and children to have access to learning about where their food comes from. That ignites interest which can lead to change. Not all organizations who are involved in the foodshed allow others to learn from them through first hand experience. Although you can volunteer at several of the organic farms within this bioregion, that doesn't mean that people are begging to do so, especially if they don't care about the food movement or know why it's important.

**Urban Roots** in Austin is another organic farm with a civic/sustainable agricultural drive that teaches struggling teens a better way of living. This includes preparing food, field work, advocating change, and they team up with other local businesses to fundraise and raise community awareness for their mission. They stand out as leaders in their field in this arena and use their community engagements at the market, SXSW and other festival exposure, farm dinners, CSA, and fundraising events to propel their grassroots movement. Urban Roots attacks food security issues by providing produce to poor communities. Support their social movement, community impact, and farm! They are the funnest farm to volunteer for! Volunteer!

Although not all of the local organic farms have a mindset to transform lives through educational opportunities teaching volunteers or community members, they do in their face to face interaction at farmers markets, website exposure, grassroots involvement and CSA distribution. The need for expanding **SNAP benefit** access at all the farms and providing mobile access to local, fresh foods in different impoverished

neighborhoods is imperative to closing the gap between different populations who may be missing out on the local food system, necessary sustainable food transitions and food security.

For more information about volunteering at a local Austin or Manor farm please review my [Green Thumb-Texas Directory page](#). Or talk to your local farmer at your nearest food hub! Building new relationships through Community Supported Agriculture is a great place to start! Find a local CSA farmshare near you!

## Bibliography

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# Spring

# Fever=Ag+Edu+Bees+Onion Sprouting+Garden Seed Start Smarts

I seriously need to get with the program. Full swing in Grad school continuing my sustainability studies and ready for the semester to be over! Did I say that out loud? 9 credit hours was too much I think. I guess 6 hours is full time when getting your Masters degree; and mine is a curious blend of sorts; Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies-Sustainability Studies. With the possibility of moving I searched for other programs in the Houston area and none came close to this one. I do wish I was fortunate enough to be in another state that has better offerings for sustainability opportunities however I've gained a lot of experience in the field just by volunteering. The great thing however is that it's a new program at Texas State. I'm also a part of three projects in my first semester which is why I'm feeling slightly overwhelmed; I'm working full time as an Intervention Teacher for Elementary kids, and doing some nannying, while continuing my KKC creations shop online; my husband says that's a hobby. I am forever hopeful that my endeavors will turn from passions and dreams into successful and profitable differences. One day! We pray! ☐

**SEAWEED STUDY** Did you know there's thousands of kinds of seaweed?! You may recall me discussing the marketing study I'm continuing for publication. The long term goal for this class; Specific Problems in Agriculture; Independent Study, is to help clean up the sargassum seaweed; brown seaweed that evades the Texas gulf coastline. If you have traveled among these areas you will notice the build up. The proposal is to combine brown seaweed with other natural compostable materials and turn them into a marketable product; Seaweed Compost. The benefit would be shared by many; Texans wanting to contribute

to education, cleaning up the ecosystem, gardening with compost that strengthens the drought tolerance of plants, supporting local products and jobs...sounds great right? There has been quite a deal of work put into it, in fact there is another student who has been trying to also turn the seaweed into an edible product. Got your juices flowing? Getting surveys completed has been a lot more difficult than I imagined! I've done a couple days at the Natural Gardener in Austin which has been quite lovely because of the people that I've met and spoken with about various topics. One customer posed several great questions that put me to the test about what's in seaweed and why or why not; would it be toxic? Especially from the oil spills a couple of years ago, and all the other pollution in our oceans. What do you think about that question? While becoming more curious about the scientific data myself, I came across this very interesting study :Chemical analysis and toxicity of seaweed extracts with inhibitory activity against tropical fruit anthracnose fungi; not what I was searching for but yet very interesting.

**ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT** My other projects involve Boots & Roots; Veterans Community Garden, Venture Entrepreneurship project that is also going to be a proposed new nonprofit business for the Austin community and Veterans. One of the approaches taken to boost revenue for the nonprofit is to get grant funding and have a vermiculture farm that can make worm composting products, earthworm castings, etc. It's a pretty intensive class; we've also been reading books like Innovation and Entrepreneurship, The Monk and the Riddle, and Running Lean. Some of the books can be pretty dry from time to time but all very useful tools for the new venture. My fave has by far been Drucker. The historical references he reflects on for innovative change are intriguing.

**AGRIVOLTAIC AGRICULTURE** My final project in Special Topics in Agriculture is another study for publication. Based on previous studies done in France in 2011-2013. Renewable

Energy, European Journal of Agronomy , and Agricultural and Forest Meteorology were all studies I reviewed in an effort to combine previous theories for successful biomass applications in Agrivoltaic systems. I go to the school farm on Friday to see what kind of layout I have to work with. This project will be the most learning curve of them all because I will have to build miniature field sets with photovoltaic opaque panels(solar) and have controlled crops to test in two seasons. Yikers. I'm still working out the kinks. We are thinking about using Chard as the main crop to test the soil, moisture in soil, and biomass. If anything else comes up like the leaf proportions, I may add that too. Please send me thoughts and suggestions on this topic because it will be probably the most challenging project for me to do; simply because I've never done a field experiment like this before.

**BEES** her Earth News this month was concerning the chemicals that are found in nursery purchased plants, they harm bees! So it's very important where you buy your plant starts from, especially if they are edibles. Read more on Cheryl Long's article on what I'm talking about online regarding Neonic "pesticides that spread thorough plants and contaminate pollen and nectar." As much as I love hardware stores that give veterans discounts; Lowe's and Home Depot were mentioned. I generally buy my plant starts at other local garden centers anyways. But love to get my hands on clearance non edible plants at Lowe's that are going to be thrown out. This article may change the way you buy your living green friends, to help take care of our little fuzzy friends. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=2vQ5PV-bNtM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=2vQ5PV-bNtM)

**GARDEN STARTS** I highly recommend going to the Sunshine Gardens spring sale March 1st in Austin to get your gardens ready. Bring cash and something to transport the plants with like a wagon or cart. These community gardens are in the backyard for the School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Another great

way to support your local community and nonprofits! Learn more about them by watching this video. Sunshine Community

Other garden centers to visit this spring that offer affordable prices; Red Barn-love this place! AND they give military discounts, although they are north Austin they are worth the drive, they have a fantastic selection and are very friendly. Last year I got my onion starts there, Texas 1015 bunch for \$2.99-steal of a deal, and my red onions for the same, 120 in a bunch. So, if you have looked anywhere, online, catalog, and other places you won't find a deal like that unless you use your own onions as plant starts. We are doing that with some of our 1015s and red onions this year since I hadn't used them all and they started sprouting; I harvested them in May 2013 and they lasted until January! So our new sustainable garden start is using our own sprouted onions.

**SEEDS** I order seeds every year from various companies online. I get numerous catalogs in the mail, some of which I must discontinue since they send entirely too many. The most useful but somewhat expensive is Johnny's ; good company to support, employee owned. It's worth ordering a catalog because they give you an excellent and thorough description about what you're planting, the seed envelopes have entirely as much useful information on them as well. You could keep an old catalog for seed references because it's literally a little encyclopedia.

I also have gotten my tomato and pepper seeds from Tomato Growers Supply, and Burgess Seed Company. If I'm at Lowe's, yes I go to Lowe's, we save 10% always and we get great deals there, I may browse Seeds of Change organic seeds and Burpee Organic Seeds. This year I'm using a few new suppliers; Botanical Interests-killer deals on heirloom pole and organic seeds, Four Seasons Nursery-for inexpensive bulbs and bare root flowering bushes, Pinetree-unique herbs and fantastic prices, Territorial Seed Company-many unique items including mushroom starts, rhizomes for hops, and soap making supplies,



very inexpensive seed pricing! What's important to me when ordering seeds; non gmo, organic or a good second option, heirloom, zone specific, good insect plants, North American suppliers, company missions, quality products; free shipping, not outsourced-although I've found that some of the Midwestern garden supply companies are managed by the same companies of sorts and outsource customer service. I try not to use them for this reason because they don't understand what I'm talking about when dealing with plants.

Great fruit plant company I HIGHLY recommend Stark Bro's-guarantee to fruit, refund within the first year. Very happy with this company. I've purchased strawberry rhizomes, blueberry bushes, and grapes from them. Outstanding and personable customer service. Don't buy your fruit in a garden center when you can buy it online for much cheaper. Especially when it comes to strawberries, 25 shouldn't cost more than \$12.00, you can't buy that deal in a store anywhere.

p.s. Our chicken coop is almost ready and we are getting 4 Barred Rock Dual purpose chickens! Yeah! Look for updated photos in our Sustainable Projects link.

Gardens<http://www.motherearthnews.com/~media/Images/MEN/Editorial/Special%20Projects/Issues/2014/02-04/The%20Dangers%20of%20Neonicotinoid%20Pesticides/Flying-Honey-Bee%20jpg.jpg>

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## Urban Roots Promotes Growth through Volunteerism in the

# Austin Community

This morning I spent a few hours weeding tomato plants for a local nonprofit that supports the development of youth by teaching organic farming techniques as well as genuine life principles. Although the youth who work on the farm are scheduled on Saturdays it was a great way to meet people on an Organic Farm that I haven't volunteered at before. Truth be told it's been on my list of nonprofits to volunteer for quite some time. I was prompted to help out when I also thought it'd be mutually beneficial for LateBloom, Siduslink, and my own personal development too.

I must admit, what I love the most about volunteering on organic farms is learning what other people are doing, meeting new faces, sharing ideas, reflecting on lessons in life, and if your lucky, getting some complimentary produce for your efforts at the end of your shift. This farm is just off 183 S; loop around the Balm exit and it's tucked back around some curves that eventually turn into Delwau Lane. The farm is on just a small plot of land with well established and maintained rows. Megan assisted volunteers; there were 8 by mid morning. She even held a t-shirt drawing for volunteers at the end of the shift which I think is just another fantastic way to give back even more! I had the pleasure of meeting a great gal originally from Vermont today who shared an

equally fulfilling conversation with me right from the start. It's hard finding women to connect with who don't live states away so hopefully we will keep in touch!

If you are looking for a great way to meet others who share the same interests as you, volunteer on a local farm who invites volunteers. Urban Roots only asks for 3 hours on Tuesdays and Thursdays which isn't long at all. Urban Roots not only assists in the developmental and educational growth of urban youth in Austin but helps strengthen communities through their farm volunteerism program! I will definitely return. I had a wonderful time and experience. As an added bonus I was able to glean a few more peppers for canning tonight! Davin will be happy I can add a few more into his hot sauce too!

Thank you Urban Roots for a genuine experience. Glad I volunteered my time and efforts. For more information on how you can help Urban Roots thrive check them out online at <http://www.urbanrootsatx.org/> or Give to Urban Roots by volunteering or donating.