

# MILL CREEK FARM

## ANNUAL REPORT 2008



*"Beautiful, visionary work"*  
*-Johanna Gilligan*

A Little Taste of Everything · Mill Creek Farm  
3451 Walnut Street · Franklin Building Annex Suite P-117A · Philadelphia, PA 19104-6205  
Email: [millcreekfarm@resist.ca](mailto:millcreekfarm@resist.ca) · [www.millcreekurbanfarm.org](http://www.millcreekurbanfarm.org)

## Mission

A Little Taste of Everything (ALTOE) is a non-profit agency dedicated to increasing access to nutritious, affordable foods and providing food systems education for low-income populations in Philadelphia.

ALTOE's mission is put into action through the Mill Creek Farm (MCF) project, a collectively run urban education farm that utilizes vacant land to improve local access to nutritious foods and to promote sustainable resource use by growing and distributing produce and by demonstrating ecological methods of living.

MCF is committed to:

- Improving consumer access to nutritious foods and building food security;
- Educating local school groups and the greater Philadelphia community about urban agriculture, natural resource management and sustainable living;
- Developing a greater sense of community within the Mill Creek neighborhood;
- Managing stormwater run-off and providing a model for vacant land reclamation.

*"Thank you for the best time I ever had at a farm, you're ok."*

*-Ricky, visiting the farm with a group from Mural Arts*

## History

ALTOE grew out of a youth-driven project at University City High School in conjunction with the Urban Nutrition Initiative (UNI) and received its non-profit status in 2005. ALTOE evolved from previous efforts to improve food security in West Philadelphia communities through school gardens and farmers' markets.

In August 2005, the Philadelphia Water Department (PWD) and the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society (PHS) gave ALTOE access to ~1.5 acres of vacant land, at 49th and Brown Streets in the Mill Creek Neighborhood of West Philadelphia, to start the MCF project. The farm site was designed to address the flooding that shaped the block's history and transform a blighted lot into community green space as part of a stormwater management project made possible through the State Department of Environmental Protection's Growing Greener Grant. 2008 marked MCF's third successful season and we anticipate continued growth as a model for local food system development and sustainability education in succeeding years.

The Mill Creek neighborhood is a low-wealth, predominantly African-American neighborhood. Minority and low-income populations are disproportionately affected by rising obesity rates and nutrition-related diseases. This is attributed in part to lack of access to affordable, healthy foods in inner-city neighborhoods. In West Philadelphia, supermarkets are few and far between and the ubiquitous corner stores do not supply fresh, nutritious options. Shopping opportunities that do exist offer very little in terms of local or organic choices, and where such goods are available prices are often prohibitively high, discouraging vegetable consumption. People are increasingly

disconnected from the places and processes that produce their food. There is urgent need for improved understanding of our food system to protect the health of populations and the environment. MCF has an innovative program that builds on existing work in Philadelphia to develop a food system that will ensure food security for all residents. MCF is also creating a model of how blighted land can be used productively to contribute to a healthy community and environment. Urban agriculture makes fresh, locally-grown food more widely available and reduces the need for shipping and preservatives. Urban farms improve city environments, reconnect urban populations with active resource management, and promote biodiversity within cityscapes. Through its programs, MCF strengthens the local economy, saves energy resources, and facilitates community education about food, health, and sustainability.

*"What a wonderful slice of heaven this farm is!"*

*-Shelley Rogers, Director of documentary: "What's Organic About Organic?"*



## **2008 Programs**

### ***Food Production and Distribution***

In our third growing season, MCF grew and harvested over fifty varieties of fruits, vegetables, and herbs. The farm's organic produce is distributed locally through direct marketing, wholesale, and donations. In 2008, MCF continued its bi-weekly markets (at the farm every Saturday, at the Food Trust's Haddington market at 52nd and Haverford Avenue every Wednesday, June through November), making its freshly-harvested produce and honey available to its immediate community at affordable prices. In addition to providing access to fresh, organic produce, the on-site market stand also

brings visitors to the farm itself and thus connect consumers with the source of their food. In 2008, the farm sold over \$6,500 in produce (up from \$5,150 in 2007).

The community response has been overwhelmingly positive and a base of loyal customers has continued to develop over the course of each season. We continued to accept Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) coupons from seniors and WIC recipients and expanded our capacity to accept Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT or Food Stamps Access Card) at our Saturday market to make it even more accessible to people in the neighborhood. Over 100 seniors used their FMNP coupons at the Mill Creek Farmstand during the 2008 season (up from 60 in 2007). Okra was the most popular crop again in 2008 after increasing production for the third straight year to meet customer demand.

MCF also sold some produce directly to restaurants, including Satellite cafe, Honey's Sit and Eat, Full Plate Café, and the Fair Food Farmstand in Reading Terminal Market. Our food distribution program is also strengthened through our participation in PHS's City Harvest program, which brings together many partners Self Help and Resource Exchange (SHARE), community gardeners to provide fresh produce and nutrition education to food cupboards, where healthy food is often lacking. The program provides the farm with seedlings started by inmates working at a prison greenhouse through the Philadelphia Prison System. MCF donates produce to a local church, Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament, for distribution through their food cupboards to ensure that fresh high quality food is available to those who usually receive mostly non-perishable foods through food assistance. In 2008 MCF donated over 1600 pounds of produce (up from 970 in 2007). Also, as part of the City Harvest program, MCF hosts cooking demonstrations and tastings at the farmstand with the Health Promotion Council.

*"I love the okra and all the beauty. Great to see the possibility of this. Thanks for the conversation and inspiration!" -Marian Dalke*

### ***Education***

In addition to growing food for local distribution, MCF is an education center, giving tours to groups, hosting school field trips and community skill-share workshops, training volunteers, supporting a community garden, and offering summer internships. In 2008 we were pleased to host over 1700 visitors at the farm (up from 950 in 2007).

*"I like how the bees are in little houses."*

*-Nehemiah Hodges, 5<sup>th</sup> grader at  
FACTS Charter School*



In 2008 MCF lead tours for classes and groups and had the privilege of working with a variety of youth development programs and volunteer organizations including:

- Broad Street Ministry
- Southwest Community Enrichment Center
- Neighborhood Bike Works
- Mural Arts
- Pentridge Children's Garden
- Youth Arts
- First Presbyterian Church
- Jewish Farm School
- Teens for Good
- Temple University- food security class
- Community College of Philadelphia
- Independence Charter School
- Blankenburg School
- Springside School
- Friends Select School
- Paterson Elementary
- Robeson School
- Delaware Valley Planning
- Middle Years Alternative/Sulzberger Schools
- Jewish Farm School
- School of the Future
- Community Food Security Coalition Conference
- Penn State University
- University of Pennsylvania groups including APO (community service fraternity)
- Webster Presbyterian Church
- The Permibus Skills Tour
- Belmont Charter School
- Upper Darby High School
- Urban Farms Bike Tour
- Mayor's Office
- YPEC (Young People's Empowerment Convergence)
- Farmadelphia
- Saint Joseph's University
- Schuylkill Center Environmental Education
- St. John Baptist Church
- Urban Tree Connection
- The Folk Arts - Cultural Treasures Charter School
- Villanova University

*"I'm so impressed. I want to do this in Minneapolis."*

*Hannah Knazan-Lippman, visitor to the farm on November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2008*

In 2008, we began a partnership with Saul Agricultural High School, hosting a 6-week internship program for students. The program is a unique opportunity for youth who need paid summer jobs to work with the farm on an ongoing basis, allowing for deeper learning and leadership development. We hosted four student-interns in 2008, and look forward to continuing with this program in summers to come. We also hosted 2 adult volunteer interns.

MCF also provided many other hands-on learning opportunities for the community. Over 500 volunteers took part in service learning opportunities, including regular volunteers from Mariposa Food Cooperative. Over a thousand visitors toured the farm including over 50 groups (up from 30 groups in 2007).

We offer much gratitude to all our volunteers. We could not have done this work without them. In 2008, our volunteer participation increased for the third consecutive season

(reaching 500 volunteers), mostly working at the farm as part of weekly workdays or as part of volunteer groups.

MCF offered educational workshops such as basic construction for women and urban sustainability skills with the Rhizome Collective. Not only do workshops and volunteer programming serve MCF's mission of



education and sustainable resource use, but it also helps foster greater interest, involvement, and a sense of community ownership of the project.

The farm site is also home to a community garden which has been active for over 30 years. During its third season, MCF continued to support the gardeners, mostly seniors from the neighborhood, by sharing seeds, seedlings, produce, stories, gardening tips, water and facilitating new gardeners to cultivate unused plots.

***"I love your urban farm: the whole concept of feeding the neighbors, using sustainable practices, and learning about awesome veggies. Your roof garden rocks and so do you."***

*-Reverend Leslie Leitham*

### ***Demonstration***

MCF is an active demonstration site for ecological methods of living in an urban setting. As an urban farm, Mill Creek not only demonstrates a wide variety of locally viable crops, but also models many sustainable gardening techniques, including companion planting, crop rotation, composting, and cover cropping, that can be applied in nearby home and community gardens. The farm site was formerly vacant land, accumulating litter and prone to flooding. Improvements benefit the neighborhood through stormwater management and beautification.

In 2008, we installed additional educational signage including information on the living roof, the composting toilet, and the bees, which improves the instructive quality of a visit to the farm. We hosted events such as barbeques, and a garlic planting and sweet potato pie party in order to foster community. In 2008 we also completed the installation of our solar electric system, to make use of and educate about alternative and renewable energy technologies. Additionally, we completed the mosaic on the side of our farm shed.

These new infrastructure elements enhance the farm's educational mission and make it even more visitor-friendly.

***"Thank you so much for showing us the farm. We appreciate what you are doing for the community!!"***

*-Kathleen Snyder, visiting from Penn State University*

### **Growing the Movement**

In 2008, MCF staff attended a variety of events, presentations, and meetings with the following groups to develop our skills, network with others, raise awareness of our work, and help to build a better food system:

- Germantown Collective Farm
- Metro Agriculture Conference
- Penn State Extension
- Growing Food and Justice For All Initiative Gathering (Milwaukee)
- Environmental Leadership Program's Politics of Food Conference (North Carolina)
- Terra Madre (Italy)
- Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission
- Philadelphia Urban Farmers Network

MCF's work interfaces with many other organizations. Some of our key partners:

- The Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, City Harvest
- The Urban Nutrition Initiative
- Philadelphia Water Department
- Neighborhood Bike Works
- The Food Trust
- Mariposa Food Co-op
- Brown Street Community Garden
- Chris Hill Media
- Saul Agricultural School



***"My time here was heavenly! Thank you for all that you are doing."***

*-Yonnette Fleming,*

## Press

- Tremble, Sam. "Soil Survivor," Philadelphia City Paper, May 6, 2008.
- Katz, Alli and Persico, Michael. "Roots," Philadelphia Weekly, May 21, 2008.
- ATTRA. "A Small Sampling of Urban Agriculture Programs," ATTRA news, August 8, 2008.
- Schimmel, Bruce. "Sweet on Bees," Philadelphia City Paper, August 12, 2008.
- Wang, Kathy. "Urban Farm Tills the West Phila. Fields," The Daily Pennsylvanian, September 23, 2008.



## Board of Directors

Elizabeth Kelly  
Lorelle Becton  
Leanne Krueger-Braneky  
Danny Gerber  
Jill Roberts

Chris Hill  
Stephanie Singer  
Lisa Mosca  
Dave Jonas

Mill Creek Farm Staff:  
Jade Walker, Co-director  
Johanna Rosen, Co-director



## Funding

MCF is an environmental education farm that is part of a not-for-profit supported by donations and grants. Additionally, produce sales and sliding-scale workshop fees partially defray operating costs for the farm project.

We are grateful for in kind support from:

- Urban Nutrition Initiative
- Pennsylvania Horticultural Society
- Chris Hill Media
- Erik Ruin, Just Seeds

55 individual donors gave a total of: \$12,896

Thank you!

Bill Anderson

Amy Faulring

Victor Fritch

Jewish Farm School

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Tom Gilbert

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Brent and Lisa Davison

Melodie Malfa

Liz Kemp

Edward Walker

Danya Perry

Note: MCF has made every effort to ensure the accuracy of this list. If you notice an error or omission, please let us know and please accept our sincere apologies.

## Mill Creek Farm Budget Report 2008

### Revenue and Support

#### Grants

Rosamond Gifford Charitable Corporation	\$4,000
Allen Hilles Fund	\$4,000
Chace Foundation	\$5,000
Fels Fund	\$5,000
Claneil Foundation	\$14,000
Fourjay Foundation	\$3,000
Patricia Kind Family Foundation	\$5,000
Douty Foundation	\$3,000

Grants	\$43,000
Produce Sales	\$6,500
Individual donations	\$12,896
School Tours	\$725
Fundraiser	\$8,212
Other	\$125
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$71,458</b>

#### Expenses

Salaries and benefits	\$47,769
Operational	\$6,095
Fundraising expenses	\$615
Capital expenses	\$1,103
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$55,582</b>

