



URBAN TREE CONNECTION

Urban Tree Connection's (UTC) mission is to work with residents in Philadelphia's historically marginalized urban communities to transform abandoned open spaces into safe and functional places that inspire and promote positive human interaction. Founded in 1989, UTC works primarily with residents of West Philadelphia's Haddington neighborhood to develop community-driven greening and gardening projects on vacant land. Over the past two decades, UTC has partnered with residents to redevelop 29 vacant lots, totaling more than 86,000 square feet of land. Together, we have repurposed these spaces for communal growing and gathering, sustainable food production and affordable food distribution, and multi-generational community health and wellness education. We aim to cultivate community leadership, improve community health, and develop a local sustainable equitable food system.



Urban Farming & Gardening: Neighborhood Foods Farm (NF) was founded in 2009, by UTC and three community leaders as a solution to the food insecurity and the growing number of vacant lots in Haddington. After significant remediation, NF farm is now a fully functioning $\frac{3}{4}$ acre urban farm. We have also developed a micro-farm in collaboration with First African Presbyterian Church, and 27 other vacant lots have been converted into pocket parks, community gardens, and educational spaces. Together, these sites comprise a network of green spaces that annually produces 6,500 pounds of sustainably grown and culturally significant vegetables.



Community-Led Food Distribution: The food we produce at NF Farm is primarily distributed through community-led farm stands and a low-income Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) program in targeted areas in West Philly where residents have limited access to healthy produce. We engage residents with limited incomes by offering produce at affordable prices and encouraging the use of subsidized forms of payment and incentive programs. Our farm stands are uniquely operated by community members and youth apprentices, to whom we offer training and support. We regularly donate our excess produce to local food pantries in Haddington.



Multigenerational Community Education: Our education programs promote health and wellness, and leadership development; and are rooted in food, land and environmental justice. For adults and families, we host hands-on workshops at our community gardens and farm sites, covering topics such as healthy cooking, sustainable growing methods and medicinal tincture-making. We provide access to garden beds, technical assistance and resources (i.e. starts, soil, tools) to local community gardeners. We also have a Youth Apprenticeship Program, where Staff mentor youth in urban farming, local food distribution and leadership development.



URBAN TREE CONNECTION

Youth Apprenticeships: UTC's Youth Apprenticeship Program hires and mentors 10-12 high-school aged youth that primarily live in Haddington. This unique five-month paid apprenticeship introduces Black youth to urban agriculture. Each Apprentice receives 1:1 mentorship from UTC Staff in the areas of urban farming and gardening, local food distribution, and community education and outreach. The goals of this program are to:

- Teach young people of color how to grow food sustainably and distribute it within their neighborhood
- Develop a critical analysis of historical and current social conditions locally and globally that shape our food systems
- Cultivate youth's sense of agency and leadership development towards addressing community needs



Advocacy: UTC has consistently been at the forefront of urban farming and land reclamation movements in Philadelphia. Working with other organizations, civic and community leaders, we helped pioneer key tools for the legal reclamation of abandoned properties. Most notably, we are one of the first nonprofits in Philadelphia to be granted conservatorship over a vacant lot, which is now Neighborhood Foods Farm. UTC has testified on critical issues impacting urban farms in Philadelphia, which include: storm water fee exemptions for farm/gardens, pathways to land security and ownership, and city-wide strategic planning for Urban Ag.



UTC's Forward Vision: Our aim is to build a people's food and land system that is sustainable, just, community-led and governed. Our work goes beyond food and green space access towards self-determining practices that engage people in governing resources together to meet the collective needs of the entire community. **We envision a vibrant community-base in Haddington, West Philadelphia, in which the community stewards its own land, engages in alternative economies, and creates sustainably produced, chemical free, produce.**

As such we adopt an Agroecology framework + Food Sovereignty principles in our work. *Agroecology* is people-centered agriculture that recognizes a long history of oppression and exploitation in our food/land systems; and aims to repair it through people-centered agriculture that puts us in a better relationship with the earth, our environment, and one another.