CAUSES Hosts D.C.'s First Urban Agriculture Symposium

CAUSES is pleased to have hosted a successful Urban Agriculture Symposium on Oct. 24-25, 2014. This is a first for the District, but surely not the last given the momentum of the urban agriculture movement. As a landgrant, the University of the District of Columbia - like its fellow landgrant institutions - is charged by the USDA to research solutions for agricultural concerns. And what greater concern is there today than addressing how to feed the world's growing population, estimated to exceed nine billion people by 2050, according to the United Nations. A worthwhile goal, but there are people right here in D.C. who are food insecure, struggling to provide daily meals for their families. Oftentimes, those meals are unhealthy, lacking the nutrients to fight rising urban health concerns like obesity, diabetes and hypertension.

As a landgrant, UDC must provide research-based education both on campus and in the community. Being an urban landgrant institution makes UDC different from other landgrant colleges, because unlike them, the residents we serve live in cities and do not have large amounts of arable land upon which to farm. D.C.'s landgrant programs are housed under CAUSES. Popular offerings include farming and gardening programs for urban residents, many of which are taught at the Muirkirk Research Farm in Beltsville, Maryland. Our nutrition programs are taught in every Ward of the city—in schools, community centers, and places of worship among them.

CAUSES is making strides to address the lack of access to healthy and affordable food in the underserved areas of the District. However, it's not just CAUSES, but many organizations and entities around the city. The Urban Agriculture Symposium brought together several leaders to host breakout sessions address local trends in concerns. Special thanks to session leaders:

- Nazirahk Amen, Purple Mountain Organics, Growing Your Own Health Care System
- Chris Bradshaw, Dreaming Out Loud, Decoding the Food System: Empowerment Access, and Opportunity
- Andrew Finke and Amy Bachman, DC Central Kitchen, Building Communities, Creating Opportunity
- Julie Kirkwood, DC UrbanGreens, The Neighborhood Farm - Growing Food & Composting in the City
- AJ Cooper, Freedom Farms, Unplugging our Cities: How Sustainability can Improve the Resiliency of Cities
- Judy Fisher, Mercy Outreach Ministry, Women and Agriculture in Haiti
- George Jones, Bread for the City, A Nonprofit's Quest to Provide Organic Produce to DC's Underserved Communities
- Steve Coleman, Washington Parks & People, Imagine Healthy Local Food for All: Restoring 2,000 acres of DC Farming

Additional thanks to: Che Axum, Center for Urban Agriculture, Sapna Batheja; Center for Nutrition, Diet and Health, Eat Smart, Eat Local- UDC’s effort to empower DC residents to make healthy choices), Associate Dean of Programs, William Hare, for their participation on
behalf of CAUSES, and our friends at the David A. Clarke School of Law for allowing us use of their space.

Additional thanks to the featured keynote speakers: Steve Moore, a lecturer of environmental studies and agroecology at Elon University, North Carolina; Dr. Dionne Fortson Toombs, director of nutrition, National Institute of Food and Agriculture, USDA; and Philson Warner, an applied scientist at Cornell University Cooperative Extension in New York, and also the founding director of the New York City Hydroponics, Aquaculture, Aquaponics Learning Labs which are located at the Food and Finance High School in New York.

Workshop/Farm Tour

The UDC Workshop/Farm Tour took place the next day following the symposium. During the first part of the Saturday workshop on intensive growing techniques, which was hosted on UDC's Muirkirk Farm in Beltsville, Md., Steve Moore taught attendees how to calculate the yield various grains, nuts and vegetables, and to determine how much land would be necessary to grow each crop in order to produce a year's worth of yield. As an example, historically, cultures like Russia and Ireland were almost able to subsist on a diet of potatoes, eating up to ten pounds per day.

Moore then explained the concept of the personal diet design, a scientifically-based model. His diet design consists of peanuts, sunflower seeds, wheat, corn tomatoes, sweet potatoes, Irish potatoes, garlic, onions, artichokes and parsnips, all grown on 4,000 sq. ft. on his farm in North Carolina. Diets can also be designed to meet culinary and even therapeutic needs, Moore explained.

"This system is designed to feed people with virtually no resources and with minimum technology and to be healthy," explained Prof. Moore.

Following the indoor session, participants toured the UDC farm led by Che Axum. Before wrapping up the workshop, Moore demonstrated some of the techniques he uses on his organic farm, and custom tools such as the non-mechanical "U-Bar" tilling tool, welded by his sons.

"It's comforting to know that we can feed all the people in the world on much less land than we have. And we can feed all of the people coming to dinner tonight, up to 2050 when the population reaches 2050," stated Moore.

For more information on how to eat better while conserving resources, visit http://growbiointensive.org/. Additional photos are available on our Facebook Page.