

**Grant Report of the Poughkeepsie Farm Project  
For 2010 Funding Support from the Foundation for Sustainability and Innovation**



*City Seeds* is the Poughkeepsie Farm Project's education program that comprises a seed bank of regionally-adapted and open-pollinated varieties, training for future farmers, and connections to land and sustainable farming for local urban youth. Together these project components provide opportunities for young people to engage in meaningful, skill-building work while learning to grow food, save seeds, and make a difference in their communities and the food system. The Foundation for Sustainability and Innovation provided \$3,000 toward *City Seeds* internships during the 2010 growing season, which supported many important achievements in the lives of youth and young adults.

***City Seeds Trains Future Farmers*** in the practice of sustainable agriculture and issues in the food system

*City Seeds* provided training and hands-on learning experiences for 4 interns in farming, farm education, seed saving, community outreach, farm marketing, urban food access and youth programming – 3 post-college interns and 1 college-aged intern. In 2010, we asked our interns to respond to the following question: "How has this program been meaningful for you?" Here's what they said:

*I have learned so much about growing food, myself, and about what it means to farm for and within a community. I am now confident in my decision to be a farmer.*

– Angela, 2010 Full Season Farm Intern/Apprentice

*I've had the opportunity to develop practical farming knowledge and skills while participating in meaningful work that benefits the community. I've gotten a chance to cultivate greater leadership skills in leading members and volunteers on the farm, while building relationships with members. Managing the stand at the downtown [farmers'] market has meant that I've gotten to build relationship with other members of the Poughkeepsie community, not just PFP members.*

– Hannah, 2010 Full Season Farm Intern/Apprentice

*It was my first season on a larger-scale farm (as compared to a smaller-scale urban farm) and I learned a lot about practices without the use of chemical pesticides and herbicides and how to manage pests and weeds with alternative methods. I learned a lot about seed saving and it is important to me that we continue practicing and passing along the traditions and knowledge of seed saving and become less reliant on monopolizing seed companies and [this is also important] for our own skill development as farmers. I believe in the PFP's mission and think that we try to create a model of food production that builds a local food system that's accessible to as many people as possible.*

– Irene, 2010 Full Season Farm Intern/Apprentice

*This program has expanded my knowledge of agriculture and food systems, helped me think about food access, especially in the City of Poughkeepsie, in a new light and made me more committed to the importance of healthy sustainable food systems. We all need food after all, and it's a great way to establish / build community.*

– Julia, 2010 Summer Farm Intern

***City Seeds Exposes Urban Youth to Gardening and Farming* to gain firsthand connections to sustainable agriculture**

As a result of *City Seeds*, urban youth have a greater connection agriculture and food. Intensive experiences were had by Green Teen youth who visited the farm multiple times and students who completed a 6-week *City Seeds* internship based in a newly established courtyard vegetable garden located within the walls of Poughkeepsie High School.

Green Teen youth gained a feeling of confidence and accomplishment by learning farming and gardening tasks on the farm and repeating these in their own urban garden. During one farm visit the Green Teens were able to help younger visitors to the PFP weed and work in the field. The Green Teens were clearly the more knowledgeable and experienced guests, and that made it easy for them to take on a teaching role. Green Teen visits also involved discussing topics such as climate change, hunger, and seed saving. Later, the teens would talk about what they had learned to other people. They shared what they had learned about climate change and agriculture with other farmers and community members, their families, and other groups of youth that they met throughout the summer. One of the Green Teens was interviewed during one of President Obama's *Americas' Great Outdoors Listening Sessions* and she confidently and passionately referenced an innovative model of combating hunger that she had learned about on a farm visit. The seed saving workshop prompted one teen to save many of her own seeds for the Green Teen garden as well as her own home garden. Now she has seeds stored in her refrigerator for next season and she's anxiously waiting for spring so she can get out there and plant them. Preparing healthy snacks from farm produce helped the teens change their eating habits as they tried more and more fresh foods prepared in delicious ways over the course of the season. They became more open to trying new things and would take many of these new vegetables home with them to share them with their families.

*City Seeds* interns have increased their gardening, leadership and social skills and their knowledge about food justice, food systems and growing food. Several times the *City Seeds* interns would excitedly tell those who may have missed a session about the tasty dishes they missed cooking and eating because they were absent. Two of the interns were very reluctant to try new foods at the beginning and surprised us and themselves as the program went on by trying and liking new foods. The interns enjoyed the garden work, especially planting and harvesting, which helped them to engage with all the activities of the internship after a long day in school. The program involved a field trip to the PFP's farm. The interns who attended told the other interns about what they missed and said that the others should have gone on the trip. The beets that were grown and harvested by the *City Seeds* interns were used by school district's Food Service Director in a "rainbow of vegetables" healthy eating promotion in an elementary school in the district.

***City Seeds Distributes Seeds that are* locally-grown, regionally-adapted and open-pollinated seeds to the community while providing opportunities to learn about seed saving**

*City Seeds* completed its 5<sup>th</sup> year of seed saving in 2010. Growing, cleaning and saving seeds since 2006, *City Seeds* has built up and maintained a seed bank that serves as a local resource for seeds and knowledge about seed saving. Future farmers and urban youth contributed to and accessed this resource, along a wide variety of individuals involved with community, educational and home gardens. We increased the public's access to the seeds saved through expanded distribution efforts to those who grow or want to grow their own food, including gardeners, youth programs, school groups and community organizations. Seeds were made

available to home gardeners for purchase. In 2010, for the first time, non-profits, schools and other educational initiatives were offered seeds for free. We were pleased by the number of requests that community and other gardening projects to participate in this resource. We disseminated printed and online knowledge and resources about seed saving to allow recipients to become part of the process of protecting biodiversity and ensuring our future food security, and hosted seed saving demonstrations and workshops. Our seed demonstration garden continued to serve as an educational resource to practice and show how example varieties are grown, harvested and processed.

### **City Seeds Evaluation of 2010 Program Objectives**

- 1. Train future farmers in the practice of sustainable agriculture who are also responsive to issues in the food system, in particular urban food access issues, by providing workshops, facilitating discussions and managing hands-on opportunities that provide comprehensive and in-depth training for young adults, for a full farming season or for the summer, with additional learning experiences for dozens of other future farmers.**

*City Seeds* 2010 training consisted of on-farm workshops; visits to / workshops on other farms (CRAFT) in the Mid-Hudson Valley (as part of a collaboration we coordinate) and in Eastern NY and Western MA (as part of a collaboration we participate in); and opportunities to apply learning in a hands-on way through direct work experiences on the farm and in the community.

This training was part of the experience of four intensive internship opportunities at the PFP.

- Full Season Interns/Apprentices: Three positions, full-time for 7-9 months, focused on extensive farm training with responsibility for green house, planting, cultivation (by hand and with tractor), harvest, supervising crews and volunteers, and managing distribution at a CSA and/or urban farmers' market. In addition, interns work with youth and the community while learning about farming.
- Community Food Fellow: One position, full-time for 10 weeks, focused on working with youth and the community while learning about farming.

During the 2010 season, interns working at different farms were exposed to the PFP's sustainable farming practices when they attended a workshop that we hosted, while our interns were exposed to wide variety of learning experiences on other farms. Under the auspices of *City Seeds*, the PFP plays a leadership role in coordinating the Collaborate Regional Alliance for Farmer Training (CRAFT) in the Mid-Hudson Valley, which involved exchange visits for 16 weeks that provided interns with exposure to a variety of farming practices and practical workshops on sustainable agriculture through visiting other local farms. Mid-Hudson CRAFT Visits / Workshops, hosted by 16 farms and community food programs, were attended by up to 30 people each and covered the following topics in 2010: Early Season Extension, Dairying and Cheese Making, Permaculture, Starting a Farm, Establishing Affordable Low-Tech Infrastructure on a Small Vegetable Farm, Mechanical Cultivation, Creative Approaches to Work, Nutrient Density, Compost, Urban Agriculture, No Till, Processing and Marketing, Seed Saving and Farm Innovations.

Eastern NY / Western MA CRAFT Visits / Workshops were held for 12 weeks and covered the following topics: Tractor Safety Training, Small Scale / Starting Up, Grazing and Livestock, Soil Health, Direct Marketing / Greenhouses, Fruit Production, Horse Power / Cover Cropping,

Mechanical Cultivation, Small Scale Diversification, Business Management, Whole Farm Systems and Forestry Tour.

In addition to as-needed farm task-related training, on-farm workshops were offered. In 2010, these were demand-driven. Interns indicated a list of farming-related topics that they were interested in discussing with the PFP's Farm Manager during evening sessions. By making this portion of the training demand-driven, the topics selected were a supplement to other training experiences and allowed for key areas to be dealt with in greater depth.

PFP internships offer a wide breadth of hands-on learning experiences that increase farming and other skills. Based on past successes with providing interns areas on which to focus their skill-building, and in an effort to operate as efficiently as possible with reduced resources to accomplish a broad and important mission, we assigned specific areas of responsibility to different interns. We were successful in matching areas of responsibility with individual interests, and interns were excited about and committed to excelling in their areas of focus. Focus areas were: low-income food distribution; herb gardening and herbal product making and farmers' market booth management; seed saving and urban teen education (using the farm as a base for lessons on food and climate change); and youth farm visits, community food assessment, seed gardening and farmers' market booth management.

To ensure that interns were grounded in an understanding of issues in the food system, in particular urban food access issues, we organized a series of three 4-week modules to discuss the Politics of Food and Farming. Each discussion was centered on a relevant reading. The first three weeks of each thematic module focused on issues, while the last week was dedicated to solutions. The first module concerned the Politics of Seeds, and covered Why Seeds Matter, Who Owns Seeds?, The GMO Debate and Sowing the Future. The second module was titled Organic and Beyond and covered An Organic History, Sustainable for People and Planet?, Putting Faces on Our Food and Beyond Certified Organic. The final module was about Rethinking Food in a Time of Crisis and included Hunger at Home and Abroad, Food Disparities, Food Paradigms and Global Solutions, Local Solutions. The interns were also led on an Urban Food System Bike Tour of the City of Poughkeepsie that visited a restaurant that sourced from local farms, a soup kitchen and food pantry, a community garden and a Latino bodega.

## **2. Expose urban youth to farming to gain firsthand connections to the land and an awareness of sustainable agriculture by providing opportunities for at least 50 youth to engage with farming and gardening at the PFP.**

*City Seeds* provided exposure and hands-on learning experiences in 2010 for more than 500 youth, including more than 100 teens, to farming and gardening; harvesting, cooking and eating healthy food; and learning about the food system. *City Seeds* facilitated opportunities for small groups of mostly urban youth to visit the PFP's local farm and engage firsthand in completing farm tasks, while they gained opportunities to think about and discuss farming and the food system. Involving youth in this way engaged tactile learners and provided meaningful and often new experiences working cooperatively using their hands, bodies and minds outside and with the land. Seeing food growing and interacting with it through harvesting, weeding or transplanting, urban youth experienced firsthand the connections between land, farming and nourishment, sometimes for the first time. Youth received an introduction into the nature of farm work while gaining respect for the idea that people choose farming as a challenging and multi-faceted occupation. Providing formative learning experiences and explanations about what motivates our work (justice and sustainability – access to healthy food for all produced and

distributed in a way that is healthy for our bodies, community and environment) are essential ingredients for the awareness of these issues among the next generation of urban residents.

Poughkeepsie High School (PHS) is in an urban school with a graduation rate around 50%, lower than the nation's 50 largest school districts (including Detroit and New York City) without sufficient resources to provide students with hands-on, outdoor learning opportunities. A variety of groups avail themselves of the opportunity to participate in farm visits, but not as many from PHS as we would like since school budget fund for field trips is limited, especially given the high cost for transportation. In response to an opportunity to maintain a good-sized courtyard garden, the PFP launched City Seeds at PHS in the fall of 2010 to provide opportunities for urban youth to improve their health, academic and social outcomes by developing and applying healthy living, learning and relationship skills. It is one thing for youth to have the opportunity visit the PFP's farm located on the outskirts of the City of Poughkeepsie once or twice over the course of a season, and another for students to have the possibility to interact with a garden located within the school's walls multiple times each week. It allows for a vision of fully integrating the garden into the curriculum and regular activities of the high school and changing the school environment so that eating healthy, garden-fresh produce becomes an accepted norm. The teens who were involved in gardening and preparing fresh food gained a sense of pride in their success mastering new skills. Hands-on learning can ignite a spark of inquiry that increases students' interest in school and learning. The program involved student interns, classroom visits and open garden days and emphasizes learning and practicing gardening and cooking skills; connecting practical garden skills to science curricula and lab practice, family and consumer science and other courses; and developing work-readiness, inter-personal relationship and leadership skills.

### **3. Distribute locally-grown, regionally-adapted and open-pollinated seeds to the community while providing opportunities to learn about seed saving.**

*City Seeds* grew and demonstrated 15 varieties of seeds in 2010. Six varieties of lettuce and tomatoes were saved for distribution to the public, while additional varieties were saved to be used for seed or crop production on the farm and in the seed garden. The seed bank distributed more than 600 packets of seeds, plus nearly 100 bulbs of garlic. These seeds were donated (~500) to more than 30 different non-profit farms and gardens, school gardens and other educational gardens, community gardens and programs serving low income residents, as well as sold to home gardeners (~150). The PFP hosted a number of seed saving workshops and activities, in which more than 100 people participated. Workshops were attended by some 35 interns at the PFP or on other farms and seed garden volunteers. Age appropriate seed saving lessons and activities were incorporated into the farm visits of some 70 youth from a wide range of ages from young children to teens from a variety of backgrounds, but mostly youth from urban areas.