



URBAN AGROFORESTRY TRAINING PROGRAMS

A Joint Report





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ABOUT THE SAVANNA INSTITUTE

The Savanna Institute is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit research and education organization working to catalyze the development and adoption of resilient, scalable agroforestry in the Midwest U.S. We work in collaboration with farmers and scientists to develop perennial food and fodder crops within ecological, climate change-mitigating agricultural systems.



big river farms
a program of the food group

bigriverfarms.thefoodgroupmn.org

PUC



PILLSBURY UNITED COMMUNITIES

pillsburyunited.org



**Dream
of Wild
Health**

dreamofwildhealth.org

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PROJECT SUMMARY

Over the fall of 2021, Big River Farms, a representative from an emerging Black land trust, Dream of Wild Health, Pillsbury United Communities, and Savanna Institute held four meetings to discuss the big questions, needs, and costs associated with developing an agroforestry focused urban apprenticeship program. Together we strategize about how to address the problems, share resources, and identify the levers that could enable successful urban perennial agriculture training programs. We specifically aim to illuminate the considerations and barriers for two groups: 1) funding agencies interested in supporting this work and 2) nonprofit organizations interested in developing agricultural training programs in urban environments. Our conversations were framed through a lens of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) farmers, who experience increased obstacles as the result of historic trauma and continued systematic inequalities.

This report synthesizes our discussions and recommendations beginning with issues that are more simple and discrete to achieve (e.g., staffing, tools and equipment, and transportation), those that require time and community engagement (community building) and then transition to more complex issues (land access, markets, and current funding structures) that require paradigm shifts in order to successfully move forward and heal the historical traumas that affect all of us. We include some examples to illustrate how a paradigm shift could work for some of the complex barriers to urban agriculture, and conclude with lessons learned and final recommendations.

- **BIG RIVER FARMS:** Big River Farms, a Program of the Food Group of Minnesota. We serve anywhere between 15-20 farm teams at our 50 acre organic incubator farm on Marine on St. Croix.
- **AN EMERGING BLACK LAND TRUST IN MINNESOTA:** Exploring models for land trusts to connect the next generation of Black land stewards to rural spaces, skill building opportunities and/or funds to support land-based endeavors.
- **DREAM OF WILD HEALTH:** A farm in Hugo, Minnesota working to restore health and well-being in the Native community by recovering knowledge of and access to healthy Indigenous foods, medicines, and lifeways.
- **PILLSBURY UNITED COMMUNITIES:** A Minneapolis-based nonprofit that co-creates enduring change toward a just society. Built with and for the people we serve, our united system of programs, neighborhood centers, and social enterprises empowers individuals and families across the region to own their future on their own terms.



SIMPLE BARRIERS

BARRIER 1: Tools and equipment

Perennial agriculture requires a basic set of tools to be successful, and the amounts will be based on the size of the operation. An average starting cost for tools in an urban environment ranges from \$5,000 to \$10,000 varying on amounts, irrigation, plant and soil needs. Many urban environments require imported soil to the site because of poor conditions and increased levels of heavy metals. An important study by University of Minnesota's, Dr. Nic Jelinski's lab, studied the effects of heavy metal uptake of plants and addressed benefits and challenges of urban farming.*

As a cost example, soil on average will cost \$50/yard and the average urban lot will require 20 yards of good soil for a total cost of \$1,000 (not including the delivery fee).

Tools

- Shovels
- Pitchforks
- Wheelbarrows
- Pruners: ideally one per staff/apprentice
- Gloves: ideally one per staff/apprentice
- Mowing or weed whacking equipment
- Cultivating tools: varieties of hoe

Infrastructure

- Tool storage and security
- Fuel
- Soil
- Plant material
- Fencing
- Trellising or support
- Irrigation (water access)
- Hoses
- Hose reels, locks and timers
- Plan or space for green waste
- Bathrooms- difficult in urban areas
- Dry/cool storage facilities - funding to build infrastructure, rent space, or partner with entities like a food shelf
- Processing for value added products, commercial kitchen space
- Wash and pack stations

Pest/competition Management

- Tree tubes: 1 per tree
- Stakes: 1 per tree
- Weed mats: 1 per tree
- Mulch
- Bird netting
- Pest / disease management equipment

* "Ecosystem Services of Urban Agriculture" southwestjournal.com/news/green-digest/2019/02/proving-the-value-of-urban-agriculture/

BARRIER 2: Transportation

Many urban sites are separated and will require a form of transportation between, and to market, with access to a cooler for most produce. In addition, consideration must be given to how staff and apprentices will arrive onsite and what the expectations are when reliable transportation is not available.

- Parking needs to be considered, especially considering that heavy produce will need to be loaded from the site.
- How can the site provide access for large vehicles to be able to deliver mulch, compost, soil, etc.

BARRIER 3: Public facing education

Robust education efforts in urban landscapes can help to address potential challenges of crop theft, vandalism, public support, and beneficial partnerships. Funding will be needed to provide each perennially planted site with:

- Signage
- Language services to interpret signage inclusive to the community demographics

BARRIER 4: Staffing

Understanding the role and time commitment to staff positions is one of the most important decisions to ensure a quality training program. Job descriptions within the nonprofit industry often don't encompass everything a person may do, and burn out is a common occurrence. Considerations are:

- Qualifications of staff leading the training program.
- What levels of staff are needed: Director, management, coordinator, etc.
- Identifying the types of staffing positions that will be required, and how their positions

will be funded now and into the future. For example, we've identified the need for more staff (or training) for positions of finances and budgeting, grant writing, and human resources; in addition to educators, horticulturists/farmers, and staff time to build community as listed below.

- Program considerations: pathways for trainees to move into leadership roles and careers within the program; with exposure to multiple career paths within agroforestry and urban agriculture provided by partners in the industry.

BARRIER 5: Community Building

Taking the time to build a strong community is imperative to any urban agriculture endeavor. Urban agriculture can provide many services to a neighborhood, and should be positioned to city officials as a dominant approach to mitigating rising temperatures in cities. Building communal relationships is a gradual process that requires additional labor and a specialized skill set. It is important to start this process in the initial planning phase.

Some ways to build community:

- Volunteer days (people should be compensated for their time—compensation can include food, skills learned, networking opportunities, and more)

- Potlucks
- Events
- Classes- often offered as free
- Field days

The needs listed above are fairly straightforward and easy to attain given the appropriate amount of financial support and adequate time. The next section of challenges are serious impediments to a perennially focused urban apprenticeship program where systematic shifts will be necessary in order to achieve.

SUPPORT THROUGH RELATIONSHIP AND FUNDING A POSITIVE EXAMPLE:

A supporter of Big River Farms provided them with unrestricted funding which enabled the farm to purchase new picnic tables, a tent, and a couple of outdoor heaters. These items made it possible to host an important volunteer event for the farmers. Farmers are often very exhausted towards the end of the season, so the event welcomed residents from Stillwater and Twin Cities communities to help the farmers clean, and put their fields to bed for the winter. Volunteer time was honored through a shared meal that was catered by a local restaurant who purchased produce directly from the Big River Farmers. Funding for this event provided staff time and resources to make this event possible, recognizing the work it takes to pull together an event. This type of non-restrictive funding was very beneficial in that it allowed Big River Farms to plan, host and support their farmers in a fun, community oriented event. Additionally, it helped to support the local food system (who in turn supported the farmers!). This is a powerful example of how unrestricted funding allows an organization to do what is best for their specific community needs.





COMPLEX BARRIERS

BARRIER 1: Land access

Before we begin summarizing the barriers and issues with land access, we need to illuminate issues relating to land ownership. Without the acknowledgement of where and how current ownership happens, we will never have equity and will not be able to move forward.

1. Ownership was forged in the historical trauma of violent removal and genocide of Indigenous people, which assigned the predominance of ownership to those who were white and male.
2. Ownership was leveraged through the bodies of enslaved Africans who, while classified as property, built the institutional and material wealth that bottom-lines our current economy.
3. Ownership is a privilege of those few who have been allowed to protect their generational wealth, which has been accumulated through these legacies of genocide and enslavement.

Land access may be the most formidable opponent to an urban farm. The systems to support perennial agriculture are virtually non-existent because of the limited time cities are willing to acquiesce land to other parties. For example, Pillsbury United Communities worked with two city departments in Minneapolis to lease land for an urban food forest. The Minneapolis health department wanted to purchase the food grown on the urban lot, understanding the perennial food would take three to five years to mature; however, the Minneapolis planning department would only negotiate a five

year lease to grow perennial crops. Unfortunately due to the pandemic, priorities and positions within the city transitioned away from urban farms towards affordable housing. Now that the lease has expired, officials intend to use the food forest lot for housing.

Leases are problematic because:

- **They fail to account for land preparation.** In most cases, it will take at least a season of cover cropping, solarization, or other weed-killing and soil-building methods to organically prepare a site for long-term perennial crops. This necessary work is ignored, during a time of expenses with little income coming in for the farmer.
- **They fail to account for time.** Practices for holistic land healing should be inherent in the conversation and training of the next generation of farmers for perennial agriculture. We must take responsibility for climate change and understand that this is a process that we may not see realized in our lifetimes.
- **Leasing structures.** Monthly payments are difficult for the cash flow of a farmer, particularly when it comes to perennial crops that do not produce for several years. Lease payments should reflect the seasonality of farming or offer subsidization.
- **Leased land is tenuous.** Perennials are a huge investment, upwards of \$36,000 for 10 acres (based on numbers for elderberry

establishment from Savanna Institute) without a promise of ownership of continuing access to land throughout the growth cycle of the perennial crops. Ownership is a powerful driver, as will be covered later on.

- **Legal experience.** Agriculturally-focused legal services that are affordable and translatable to cultures and languages are needed.
 - Foundations can help fund this work for farmers.
 - Reading through the legal jargon of a lease is a barrier for english-as-second language speaking (ESL) farmers. Funders should use planer, straight forward language.
 - BIPOC people with legal training are urgently needed in law practice positions. This needs to work in tandem with the call for the next generation of farmers.

- **Land Trust structures.**

- Many leading land trust organizations host majority white, male-oriented boards. This is a complicated barrier for BIPOC groups facing historical traumas originating from this type of hierarchy.
- Land trusts can offer access to land that may not otherwise be financially obtainable. However, many do not offer a lease-to-own option and terminate after 99 years. For people to invest in perennial agriculture, especially those who have been historically precluded from wealth accumulation, they need and deserve stronger lease-to-own options.

- **Land Easements.** There is a need to support the research and movement with easements being a potential way to protect land from development and reduce the purchase price of land for an emerging farmer.

A HOPEFUL COLLABORATION:

After the burning and looting of many Minneapolis owned businesses following the murder of George Floyd, the city was overwhelmed. From those ashes came hope for a better future when Pillsbury United Communities (PUC), a nonprofit whose mission is diversity, offered to purchase some of the hardest hit businesses. PUC has now turned these businesses into lease-to-own options for the surrounding community with priority given to BIPOC neighbors. Justice Built Communities is an innovative community development corporation that leverages land, labor, entrepreneurship and capital to build equitable wealth for the Black and Brown residents of our region, while preventing gentrification and displacement. Their urban agriculture program is hoping to build off this concept to support community in land purchasing to support the long-term vision of food production within community, with community. This is an example of how a nonprofit can leverage their power and fulfill their mission of supporting the communities they serve.





BARRIER 2: Markets

Identifying your market (who, how, and where your product will be purchased) is a critical piece to farming operations, and needs to be identified in the initial planning stages. Fortunately, urban agriculture is well-positioned for many marketing opportunities due to its proximity to relatively large populations, numerous restaurants, and groceries. Yet urban farmers still face important barriers and farmer training programs need to include support and education in order to navigate cost barriers within our current broken food system.

Barriers to Markets

- Big agriculture is subsidized by the government, creating cheap food and consumers who don't understand the real price of growing food. Farmers need to set higher pricing levels to recoup their costs and make a meager living. At the same time, customers are accustomed to pricing levels too low to support farmers and people with lower incomes (often the very people within the same neighborhoods as the urban farm) struggle to pay the actual price of locally grown food. This leaves many urban growers at the mercy of finding additional funding sources (grants) to subsidize the real cost of growing food.
- Urban farm size is dictated by the size and number of lots available. Farmers often require more than one lot to meet market and income demands. Moving from lot to lot, market

to market (often separated by blocks, if not miles), is a transportation barrier that also needs to be addressed.

- Zoning and city regulations. Currently there is not enough support for urban agriculture within city laws making it impossible to sell produce outside of farmers markets, which can be difficult to get into without funding and often have long waiting lists.

Opportunities to facilitate market access

- Provide funding support to farmers, allowing them to price products at lower price points, therefore, enabling farmers to compete with government-subsidized food.
 - We define 'farmer' here as anyone who is growing food for their community. We want to avoid limiting quantitative definitions: "a farmer is someone who grows \$1,000 of crops per year".
- Provide transportation support to facilitate crop management, harvest, processing, and transport to market.
- Provide support to people with lower incomes in the surrounding neighborhood. This would not only provide support to farmers, but ensure food security and community support in local neighborhoods.
- Utilize professional and personal connections to facilitate access to local restaurants and groceries.

BARRIER 3: Current funding structures

As we have outlined, funding is fundamental to an urban perennial apprenticeship program from equipment to land. Unfortunately, current funding structures and legal verbiage make it near impossible for farmers and ESL nonprofits to navigate, which induces undue emotional labor. In addition, grant deliverables are often skewed to objectives the grantor or development nonprofit organization assumes is important, rather than the objectives, values, and goals of the community.

Barriers within current funding and support structures

- **Grant language.** Maneuvering through grants requires skill and artanship. Calls for grant proposals and applications can be vague and may include cultural references that inadvertently exclude groups. Grant agreements, while important for both parties, are dominated by legal verbiage that make it challenging for most people without legal training to decipher--especially ESL organizations and farmers. Reports and applications often contain language that is difficult and redundant, and asks for qualifiers that are difficult or uncomfortable to address.
- **Disconnect** between funder/developer and farmer/community objectives. Communities often feel unheard and unvalued because grant objectives are not usually rooted in community values. Instead they reflect the priorities of the grantors and development organizations. Our discussions produced a number of community values that are often dismissed, which include:
 - Language and culture
 - Health and wellness
 - Safe spaces
 - Understanding privileges
 - Protecting what we have ecologically
 - Thinking circular: an example is only asking for quantitative results
 - Time
 - Building and celebrating community
 - Storytelling
- **Grant measurable outcomes and reports.** Related to the above values/objectives disconnect, once a grant is awarded, many nonprofits or independents scramble to fulfill objectives like photographs, events, reports, and quantitative results that take time and labor to document and produce. Awarded funds should include the time it takes to produce reporting (especially for those who are applying for grants for the first time and may not know to include this in their budget). This competitive system is detrimental to the good work that could be getting done in lieu of complicated reporting requirements. In some cases, research is a grant deliverable, yet research data has little value to the communities participating in collecting the data.
- **Organizational wealth gaps.** Many grants are based on a reimbursement model, which can be hugely prohibitive to organizations with limited capital or unrestricted funding. Grants sometimes require “matching funds” (either in-kind or in cash). This practice can encourage organizations to pledge in-kind staff time unpaid leading to burnout or prevent nonprofits from applying for grants requiring a match. Some funders will allow a match in the form of land value, but this too is not available if the organization is farming on leased land. The result of these requirements mean in order to raise money, you need to have money. Similarly, asking organizations to pre-bill with limited time frames can force spending for spendings sake.
- **Financial literacy.** To apply for grants large enough to support a perennially focused training program, those applying must understand how to pull together and follow a budget and complete taxes. These are learned skills that many people may not have had access to, and navigating financial structures are barriers.
- **Research literacy.** If research metrics are expected outcomes, the grantee should provide appropriate training on how to conduct usable analysis, to be inclusive of groups that may have not had the privilege to acquire a doctorate degree.

- **Transactional demographic data** The organizations surveyed for this report share common negative experiences when reporting grant outcomes. Many feel as though funders are disconnected from the work they are supporting--merely “checking off the diversity box.” Not only does this lead to inappropriate questions, but also a feeling of surveillance, and leaves communities feeling othered. Grantors often request demographic data on participants and with outreach measurables, putting nonprofits in the situation of collecting data through surveying their communities and participants, particularly when funders and development organizations seem to just be “checking off the diversity box. We are done being researched”, was the prevalent mood while discussing this topic.
 - **Dignity.** When a grantor requires income level reports or zip codes, it often feels demoralizing. Should people have to prove that they are poor to receive support?

REFLECTION

As a funder, it is useful to review why you are asking for certain deliverables. Are they necessary and do they cause more harm than good? Who do the deliverables benefit?

As an entity seeking funding, if you are in the position to do so, consider asking your funding source to review their deliverables.

DREAM OF WILD HEALTH, A CHAMPION OF CULTURE

Dream of Wild Health is rebuilding an indigenous food system through an innovative seasonal food system approach to programs and social enterprise. Our work in collaboration with the Indigenous Food Network and Upper Midwest Indigenous Seed Keepers Network brings indigenous foods, traditional practices, and our stories to the forefront of the healthy indigenous foods movement. The process of organizing around foods and food systems engages our community in recovering cultural knowledge, empowers our youth, and defines actionable steps towards reclaiming food security and sovereignty. We are integrating our Native Youth Leaders program with the social enterprise, hiring Native Youth to work with our farmers, distributors, chefs and community partners to gain job skills, network, and learn more about food sovereignty in a culturally-based curriculum.





OPPORTUNITIES

Opportunities for paradigm shifts in support

We recognize much of this work is complex and challenging. We ask funders and nonprofit support organizations to reflect on their current structures and be intentional about language, objectives, requirements, and deliverables. We have several suggestions to facilitate reflection and shift the current paradigm of support.

- **Grant language clarification.** Clarify grant language to make it more accessible for everyone, and especially people and organizations in which English is not a first language. Streamline application questions to remove redundancy, provide more descriptive language. Proof grant language with several people, all of whom have different perspectives. Diversity of perspectives is a great way to identify cultural blind-spots.
- **Prioritize community deliverables and values.** Provide more open-ended and/or unstructured support that prioritizes community values and objectives.
 - Provide support that more accurately reflects the time-scales necessary for community-building, engagement, planning, and preparing the good work you want to support.
 - Build a relationship with the communities you are funding. Instead of providing short term funding to a bunch of organizations, consider a firm commitment to funding one organization that you align with for the long term.
- Providing diversity options in reporting metrics. Many funders ask for food production tonnage, which doesn't translate to the goals or mission of the organization (and is therefore not a useful metric to said organization). Instead, reporting metrics should include practices like land stewardship, or whatever is important to the mission of organizations being funded. In the end, building organic matter in the soil is more important than bushels being produced.
- **Re-think reimbursement and matching-funds grant models.** Much like aligning lease agreements to income cycles, how can funds be provided in a way that aligns more closely to project expenses? Do all grant awardees need to have the same funding payment structure, or can equity be prioritized over equality?
- **Research outcomes.** If research is an expected outcome, the grantee should provide appropriate training on how to conduct usable analysis. Additionally, research results need to be communicated back to the community and those who helped conduct the research. How can the results be used to benefit the community? How can communities be included in the development of the research plans and have a fundamental way to shape the research? How do we gather data that is relevant to the farmers/programs that are working with urban growers?

- **Address the broken food system.** Focus on food sovereignty and food justice to uplift local food systems. This can be done by subsidizing small growers, or looking to the other points in this section.
- **Grant review committees should include people with farm literacy.** Grant review

committees should be required to complete agricultural training or have backgrounds in farming or agricultural literacy. Sometimes, some farmers lose out on funds depending on the people reviewing the grants. Sometimes those people may not be farm literate even if they work in an agricultural organization.





FINAL THOUGHTS

A perennial urban apprenticeship program is possible, and could see success if the barriers above are thoughtfully addressed. With enough financial, emotional, and community support, urbanized perennial agriculture can be a powerful healer and economic driver—both environmentally and for humanity. However, a tremendous amount of work needs to be done to shift standard agricultural practices in the way that is intrinsic and intentional for perennial agriculture.

- **Addressing the inherent racism in our systems of society.** There will never be equity until our society can collectively address and come to terms with the fact that we reside on stolen land that came from genocide and operate in an economy that resulted from the free labor of enslaved Africans.
 - This work should be done individually, then in groups.
 - The call to those in positions of power is to, “listen, surrender and show-up”.
- **Ownership matters.** Perennial landscapes equate to ownership of a space and reflect the importance of putting roots into the ground, for a sense of belonging and permanency. It is empowering to have ownership and a grasp of a multi generational timeframe.
 - Seeds carry stories of heritage with them. They are too important to plant on a space that you could lose.
- **Urbanized perennial plantings** depend almost entirely on collaboration with city officials and urban planners.
- **Language matters.** Honoring where people are coming from both in terms of semantics and culturally, makes people feel valued and builds stronger relationships.
- **Community values matter.** Really listen to the objectives of the community. Communities often feel unheard, with their principles and objectives not reflected in the funded project. Learn about the languages and cultures of communities you hope to support. Allow for time to build community engagement, planning, and goal development.
- **Building solidarity between urban and rural growers.** The type of funding that was given to create this report is a useful example of how financial support without several preconditions can help to build organic solidarity, by allowing funding to stream

directly into work (not just administrative costs). Some questions that came up:

- What does solidarity look like within a food system?
- How do we define solidarity?
- Could solidarity be collectively hiring a lobbyist to push for legislation that will protect farmers and the climate?

Actionable steps

- “We live in the barriers and need solutions, not more think tanks and listening sessions from the USDA”. Change will come as training programs, funders, and organizations work together for actionable steps towards a common goal.

- Nonprofits use their positions to act as translators between large funders and small growers.
- Philanthropic institutions write a plan for shifting their culture of funding into their five and ten-year strategies. These shifts should reflect a focus on funding long-term commitments, building relationships with funded groups and prioritizing ease and accessibility in their funding processes.
- Nonprofits work to fulfill their missions by empowering their community.