

Roots and Wisdom, a youth agriculture and community service program, brings together urban, suburban, and rural Schenectady County youth to grow organic vegetables for donation to local food pantries and for sale at area farmers' markets. The program teaches its participants about sustainable agriculture, hunger, nutrition, and diversity. Roots and Wisdom's participants, through hard work and community service, create genuine change by helping county residents in need.

dig ideas

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PHOTO/TIM TEAR

"Working with Roots and Wisdom has meant meeting new people and learning new skills. I learned that my community has wonderful people. I learned that youth can make a strong difference."

— ELIAH B. 2006 SUMMER YOUTH PROGRAM PARTICIPANT

Growing Together

The summer of 2006 marked Roots and Wisdom's first Summer Youth Program. For the seventeen county youth, two college crew leaders, college growing intern, and three program founders, it was a truly enriching experience. For 5½ weeks the group came together to work, learn, serve, laugh, and ultimately form a strong connection to the gardens we tended and to each other.

The youth were divided into two crews, each led by a college crew leader, and gave themselves the catchy names of "A-Squash" and "Z-Karma." As the weeks progressed, staff and youth fell comfortably into a routine. Mornings we worked in the garden hilling potatoes, preparing new beds, planting beans or chard or carrots, harvesting as necessary, and weeding everything!

Each Tuesday a group of youth sold produce under the Roots and Wisdom market tent at the St. Luke's Farmer's Market on State Street in Schenectady. Wednesday was service day, and we spread out throughout the community to lend a hand—working at the Schenectady Inner City Ministry (SICM) Food Pantry, the Salvation Army, or one of the Summer Lunch Program sites. On Friday, a weekly food donation was made to the SICM Food Pantry.

During afternoon workshops we explored topics related to our program mission and how each of us could make a difference in the community. Friends and colleagues from Cornell Cooperative Extension, Concerned for the Hungry, Hunger Action Network, and the YWCA shared their knowledge and experiences with us.

Be Vocal Eat Local

During the week of July 31 to August 4, Roots and Wisdom celebrated **Be Vocal Eat Local** week as part of an international effort to encourage people to eat locally grown foods. The week provided an opportunity to raise awareness about the benefits of eating locally grown food. The issues our youth focused on were eating healthy foods, supporting the local economy, and reducing fossil fuel consumption.

Some of the highlights of the week were:

City Council Resolution Schenectady City Council unanimously declared July 31-August 4 Be Vocal Eat Local week. Roots and Wisdom Summer Youth Program Participants worked with City Councilwoman Barbara Blanchard to write a resolution highlighting the benefits of eating food grown in Schenectady County.

Schenectady Today Two youth and one staff member were interviewed about **Be Vocal Eat Local**

week and the Roots and Wisdom program on local access cable TV. A third youth demonstrated salad preparation using our produce.

What are YOU eating... Flyer Youth program participants prepared and distributed a flyer encouraging people to eat locally grown food. Farmers' Markets and Farm Stands in the county are listed in the flyer.

Daily Gazette Letter A letter to the editor entitled "Eating locally grown is better," was written by Roots and Wisdom youth, signed by all program participants, and published in *The Daily Gazette*.

Hamilton Hill Arts Center Visit Youth program participants gave visiting children garden tours and engaged them in gardening activities. A drawing workshop, using the garden as the subject, was conducted.

Family and Friends Celebration A potluck luncheon for participants' families and friends was held to commemorate **Be Vocal Eat Local** week.

Rodriguez-Colborn Benefit

Pat Rodriguez and Rob Colborn have strong alliances to Roots and Wisdom. Their eldest son, Sam Colborn, was a participant in the 2006 Summer Youth Program, and Pat, a local attorney, serves as a Roots and Wisdom Advisory Board member.

On Thursday, September 21, 2006, the Rodriguez-Colborn family welcomed neighbors and members of the community into their home for a benefit to support the Summer Crew Leadership Fund. The fund pays the salaries of the summer crew leader positions held by college students. The crew leaders supervise and guide youth participants and are a critical part of Roots and Wisdom's success.

Roots and Wisdom is extremely grateful to the Rodriguez-Colborn family for their steadfast commitment to the program.

Dig In

Since the program's inception, Roots and Wisdom has received an outpouring of support in its gardens from community and corporate volunteers. Greenhouse participants from the Schenectady

ARC lent weekly help at the gardens leading up to the start of the summer program. A wonderful variety of individuals—an area college professor, community volunteers and local high school and college students—stepped forward to help with bed preparation and weeding during the late spring.

After the Summer Youth Program ended in mid-August, the Fehr Avenue Neighborhood Garden continued to be a buzz of activity with volunteers helping to harvest vegetables for Tuesday's St. Luke's Market and for distribution to area food providers.

Several 2006 Summer Youth Program participants returned to help in the garden and at the farmer's market. A diverse group of Niskayuna High School students also offered their support during the final weeks of their summer break.

Seventeen members of the Computational Intelligence Lab from the GE Global Research Center in Niskayuna spent half of their workday harvesting more than 750 pounds of potatoes at the Fehr Avenue Garden.

In October, a few of our harvest days fell on school holidays, and the garden was filled with children of all ages and their parents helping to gather and weigh vegetables. For many of the children, it was their first vegetable picking experience!

Our program continues to grow and flourish because of the dedication and support of the community, and we are extremely fortunate to have such remarkable commitment from our friends.



PHOTO/DEBBIE FORESTER

Summer Youth Program participants harvest garlic at Roxbury Farm, a large-scale bio-dynamic farm in the Hudson Valley

“The Fehr Avenue Garden is one of the best improvements to the neighborhood since I’ve lived here.”

PETER TERESCO, LONG TIME SCHENECTADY RESIDENT

Garden News

Throughout the summer and early fall, our Fehr Avenue Neighborhood Garden produced a wide assortment of beautiful crops. We are continuing to harvest kale, chard, collards, parsley, and cabbage well into November. Some highlights of our garden season included Orient Express eggplant, rainbow chard, a fantastic variety of sweet and hot peppers, spicy salad onions, salad greens, Sun Gold tomatoes, and red, white, and purple potatoes.

During the summer program, our youth spent many hours diligently picking squash bugs off one of our most challenging crops—winter squash, and through their good efforts, we were able to produce close to a quarter ton of squash.

In October, at the Fehr Avenue Garden, we cover-cropped our vegetable beds with winter rye, which will be incorporated into the soil in early spring. We also planted garlic at the Central Park Garden.

The garden bounty was distributed at several Schenectady locations including: the SICM Food Pantry, Safe, Inc., the Hamilton Hill Arts Center, and the YWCA. We also sold our vegetables at the St. Luke’s Farmer’s Market and held evening markets at the Moon and River Café in the Stockade. All proceeds from the produce sales directly support the Roots and Wisdom program.

Roots and Wisdom’s farmer market season ended in October; however, our produce is available at the Earthly Delights on Jay Street in Schenectady, and the Niskayuna Co-op Market on Nott Street.

We are presently looking for a third garden site and are researching alternative growing techniques using grow tunnels or hoop houses to extend our growing season.

Garden Angels

Roots and Wisdom is indebted to our Fehr Avenue neighbors Marilynn and Dave Coutant for their extraordinary generosity and kindness this year. The Coutants gave us full use of their spacious garage providing a safe and secure space for tools, wheelbarrows, harvest and market supplies, fertilizer, and produce. During the Summer Youth Program, Marilyn delivered ice to the garden each morning for the water coolers, and Dave continues to bring a pot of freshly brewed coffee and lively conversation to the garden for our mid-morning breaks.

Cathy Rogers has been instrumental in helping to launch the Roots and Wisdom program. Cathy generously provided and planted many of the flowers and grasses that border our Fehr Avenue Garden, which greatly enhances the beauty of the site. She also organized our successful Spring Celebration, and delighted us with



GE Volunteers harvest carrots

her culinary offerings of carrot cake at the event and homemade zucchini soup at our summer community luncheon.

We are most grateful to the Tear family for building our picnic tables—put to good use by the youth and staff this summer—and to Donna Wiedmann for our market banner and creating our delightful carrot costumes enthusiastically worn by youth participants during **Be Vocal Eat Local Week**.

College Connections

Carrie Foster joined the Roots and Wisdom team in May 2006 to complete her academic requirements for a bachelor’s degree from the State University of New York at Cobleskill. A Plant and Soil Science major, Carrie brought terrific energy and enthusiasm to her work in crop production and distribution. She was a vital contributor to our first successful growing season and demonstrated outstanding leadership skills while working with the youth participants this summer. Carrie plans to continue working with Roots and Wisdom as a grower, and we are truly fortunate to have her on our team.

Wish List

- 1-5 acre garden parcel in Schenectady County within 1/2 mile of a CDTA bus stop
- Commercial-sized stainless steel sink
- Occasional use of a pick-up truck
- Computers

Call us at: 518-372-1622 x286
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PHOTO/DEBBIE FORESTER

2006 Summer Youth Program Participants

Roots and Wisdom’s mission is to engage the diverse population of Schenectady County—particularly youth—in serving their community through the support of a sustainable local food system. Participants will experience personal growth and development leading to positive social change.

Financial Supporters

Roots and Wisdom gratefully acknowledges the generous support of the organizations and agencies that provided funding to the program from October 2005 through September 2006.

Business Donors

Animal Hospital of Niskayuna
Precision Motors, Inc.
SI Group

Matching Gifts

GE Foundation
Verizon

Corporate and Community Foundations

Carlilian Foundation
Lowe’s Charitable and Educational Foundation
Ronald McDonald House Charities of the Capital Region, Inc.
Wright Family Foundation

Community Groups

Eastern Parkway United Methodist Church
First Reformed Church of Schenectady
First Unitarian Society of Schenectady, Daytime Women’s Alliance
Healthy Start Action Team of Schenectady’s Promise
Rotary Club of Schenectady, Inc.
Union Presbyterian Church of Schenectady

County, State and Federal Funding

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Schenectady County Job Training Agency

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Roots and Wisdom Staff

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Carrie Foster, *Grower*
Christine Horigan, *Coordinator of Volunteer Programs and Development*
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Roots and Wisdom Advisory Board Members

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Colleen Brisport	Chris Logue
Sam Colborn	Jay Quaintance
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LOGO AND NEWSLETTER DESIGN/AURORA DESIGN

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