

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.



PHOTO/CARRIE FOSTER

dig ideas

Number 4

Spring 2007 A seasonal publication of Roots and Wisdom

“As a multi-service organization, the Schenectady Inner City Ministry (SICM), directly provides emergency food assistance to individuals and families in need. ...Our collaboration with Roots and Wisdom, in their first year, was a huge success and far exceeded our expectations.”

GAIL VAN VALKENBURGH, SICM FOOD PROGRAM DIRECTOR

IN 2006, SICM PROVIDED FOOD FOR NEARLY 230,000 MEALS TO SCHENECTADY COUNTY INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES.

Hunger in Our Neighborhood

The following was written by Rachel Nevins and Ariel Shapiro, High School Seniors and Roots and Wisdom Advisory Board Members

When you think of the typical American unable to afford food, you might imagine an unemployed, homeless person. In the Capital Region, however, 36% of people who went to a food bank in 2005 had at least one employed adult in the household. With the price of gas, heating and rent on the rise, minimum wage is no longer enough to sustain the average family. Families are forced to choose between buying food and paying the bills, and when it comes to raising four kids on the streets or going hungry, food is most likely to come in second.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service, over 10% of New York households experienced “food insecurity” (or the lack of sufficient resources to obtain proper nutrition) in 2005. Food stamps, which once provided a person at least three weeks of food, now only provide for about two. In addition, the welfare program implemented in 1995 placed a limit of five years on how long a person could receive benefits, hoping to wean dependents off the system. Yet this has only caused more people to depend on food pantries for their daily meals.

Volunteers at the pantry located at Schenectady Inner City Ministry have had to turn hungry people away due to the large volumes of people at their doors. And even for those that can afford food, it is much more expensive to purchase healthy foods like fruits and vegetables than chips and cookies with no nutritional value.

Although hunger and poverty are an undeniable presence in our area, with your support, we can all make a difference in helping people not only to obtain food, but also to make healthy choices.

Building Community

Roots and Wisdom continues to strengthen its ties within the community. During the past several months, we have participated in workshops with regional farmers, educators, and community members. At the annual Northeast Organic Farming Association conference, two workshops were facilitated by a youth participant and staff member. Outreach presentations continue to be made at local gardening clubs, faith-based organizations, and colleges.



PHOTO/TIM TEAR

GE Volunteers raise the tent on a new growing season.

On April 21, Roots and Wisdom welcomed more than 60 volunteers—area youth and GE volunteers and their families—to the Fehr Avenue Neighborhood Garden for a productive, fun and sun-filled morning of mulching, bed preparation, tent raising, and picnic table assembly. Our volunteers were part of National and Global Youth Service Day.

On April 27, in collaboration with the Schenectady County Community College TRIO Program, Roots and Wisdom hosted a public screening of *The Future of Food*, a documentary exploring the controversy over genetically modified foods. The movie was followed by a roundtable discussion with representatives from Roxbury Farm Community Supported Agriculture, the 100-Mile Diet, and Roots and Wisdom.



PHOTO/TIM TEAR

Volunteers from Our Lady Of Fatima Church participated in National Youth Service Day.

Happenings

St. Luke's Farmer's Market

Tuesdays, July–September

Throughout the summer, Roots and Wisdom will be selling a wide variety of vegetables at the St. Luke's Farmer's Market, 1241 State Street in Schenectady. Please visit us between 9:00 am and 1:00 pm.

Be Vocal Eat Local Week

July 22–July 28

This summer, Roots and Wisdom will celebrate **Be Vocal Eat Local** week, as part of an international effort to encourage people to eat locally grown food and support local farmers. We are working in cooperation with the Chamber of Schenectady County, and local restaurants and farmers, to organize and promote a Farm to Chef Event. Select area restaurants will be featuring local bounty on their menus during the week. Details of **Be Vocal Eat Local** week activities will follow!

Book Discussion

September 27

When putting together your summer reading list, consider including an informative and entertaining book by Michael Pollan—*The Omnivore's Dilemma*. Ruth Reichl, editor-in-chief of *Gourmet* magazine writes... “Every time you go into a grocery store you are voting with your dollars, and what goes into your cart has real repercussions on the future of the earth. But although we have choices, few of us are aware of exactly what they are. Michael Pollan's beautifully written book could change that. He tears down the walls that separate us from what we eat, and forces us to be more responsible eaters. Reading this book is a wonderful, life-changing experience.”

Please join us for a discussion of this book on Thursday, September 27, 2007, at 7:00 pm at the Horticulture Education Center in Schenectady's Central Park.

“A good farmer is nothing more nor less than a handy man with a sense of humus.”

E.B. WHITE, 1944

Garden News

During the winter months, we kept busy with garden planning and community education. As we begin this growing season, the garlic sprouts are several inches high in the ground, and the greenhouse is full of the promise of summer with an assortment of peppers, eggplants, onions, leeks, broccoli, peas, lettuce, chard, okra, tomatoes, and more. The vegetables are as anxious as the gardeners to spend the days outside!

Blueberries, raspberries, sweet potatoes, and asparagus are some of the new crops being introduced this year at the Fehr Garden. Tomatoes will be grown in a hoop house at the Cornell Cooperative Horticulture Education Center in Central Park.

We are delighted to report that our garden sites are expanding. We are working with representatives from the historic Vale Cemetery, a 250-acre cemetery located in the heart of Schenectady, to develop an additional garden site. Another growing site in Niskayuna is under negotiation, and we have begun discussions with the Mt. Pleasant Action Coalition to revive a neighborhood park.

Roots and Wisdom is also working with Safe, Inc., to establish a kitchen garden at their shelter for women and children. We are participating in an exciting Farm to Day Care pilot program which will provide access to fresh vegetables for area day care providers.

This January, we launched a unique opportunity called “Harvest Share”—participants make an initial investment and select available produce on a weekly basis from June through October. We were overwhelmed with the response from the community, and hope to expand the program next year.

In keeping with our mission, we will continue to sell produce at the St. Luke’s Farmer’s Market and make weekly donations to area food providers. Our marketing will expand to include regular deliveries to the Niskayuna Cooperative Market, Earthly Delights, and Cella Bistro.

Student Connections



Amata Castillo started working with Roots and Wisdom in 2006 as a youth participant. When other summer crew members headed back to school, Amata began working as an administrative intern. This winter, she completed an analysis of our farmer’s market sales data which was used to plan for the coming growing season. Amata will be working on product development and outreach materials through the end of the school year. We look forward to welcoming her back to the gardens as a 2007 summer crew member in July.

Wish List

- garden gloves • clippers • loppers
- office chairs • pre-owned cutlery
- videographer to film summer activities

518-372-1622 x286 or info@rootswisdom.org

Dig In

Once again, Roots and Wisdom is offering exciting volunteer opportunities for youth (age 14+), adults, and community groups at our urban garden sites beginning in May, prior to and following our Summer 2007 Youth Growing Program, and through late October. No previous experience with farming is required.

Spring Youth Volunteer Opportunities

Youth volunteer work will take place on Mondays and Thursdays from 3:30–5:30 pm from May 7 through June 14 at the Fehr Garden. Come help us prepare beds, make new friends, and build connections in the community.

Please note: There will no volunteer work on Memorial Day.

Summer Youth Volunteer Opportunities

August 13 through 31, Roots and Wisdom will offer youth volunteers a terrific experience of working in the garden and at the Farmer’s Market. Youth will learn first-hand about growing and marketing vegetables in our community—and be a part of a national movement to promote eating locally grown produce! Volunteer work will take place on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays from 9:00 am–12:00 pm.

Please note: Youth are required to provide an email address so that Roots and Wisdom staff members can alert participants about time and site changes, and cancellations.

Individual and Community Group Opportunities

Roots and Wisdom invites individuals and community groups to perform service work in the gardens. Teambuilding and workshops related to sustainable agriculture, nutrition, and diversity for community group participants will be offered by Roots and Wisdom staff.

Please note: There are no volunteer days during our Summer Youth Growing Program.

Contact Chris Horigan at: DigIn@rootswisdom.org or call 372-1622 x 286.



PHOTO/DEBBIE FORESTER

Fehr Avenue Neighborhood Garden

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.

Cornell Cooperative Extension of Schenectady County provides educational incubator services and acts as Roots and Wisdom’s fiscal agent.

In-Kind Supporters

Warmest thanks to the following individuals, businesses, and organizations for their generous in-kind contributions of materials to Roots and Wisdom from April 2006–April 2007:

Kay and Don Ackerman	Panera Bread
ActiveHost	Park View Cemetery
Aurora Design	Price Chopper
Janet Britt	Grace Reynolds
Constantine Construction and Farm, Inc.	Pat Rodriguez and Rob Colborn
Marilyn and Dave Coutant	Cathy Rogers
Cornell Cooperative Extension of Schenectady County	Lynn and Norman Satterlee
Empire Mulch	Schenectady County Soil and Water Conservation District
John Fiddler	Schenectady Parks and Recreation Department
Hannaford Markets	Katie and Peter Schoch
Randy Jennings	Eleanor Smith
CCE Horticulture and Education Center	Barb Stanley
Melissa MacKinnon	Target Corporation
Jon Miles	The Nature Conservancy
Schenectady McDonalds	Matthew Trigger and birthday guests
Niskayuna Cooperative Market	Donna Wiedmann

While we can not list each individual by name, Roots and Wisdom is grateful to the more than 100 individuals who stepped forward to volunteer last year in the gardens and with office tasks.

Thank you!

Funding for the design, printing, and distribution of the Spring 2007 Dig Ideas was generously provided by the **William Gundry Broughton Charitable Private Foundation, Inc.**

Roots and Wisdom Staff

Amata Castillo, *Intern*
Debbie Forester, *Coordinator of Youth Programs and Planning*
Carrie Foster, *Apprentice Grower*
Christine Horigan, *Coordinator of Volunteer Programs and Development*
Angelique Kelley, *Senior Project Intern*
Leslie Wiedmann-Herd, *Coordinator of Agriculture and Service Programs*

Roots and Wisdom Advisory Board Members

Mary Anderson, <i>chair</i>	Matt Cutler	Chris Logue
Elijah Belmar	Lucy Gottung	Rachel Nevins
Barbara Blanchard	Julia Holcomb	Jay Quaintance
Colleen Brisport	Kevin Karpowicz	Pat Rodriguez
Sam Colborn	Ed Kosiur	Ariel Shapiro
	Al Lansing	Amanda Walczak

LOGO AND NEWSLETTER DESIGN/AURORA DESIGN

Roots and Wisdom

107 Nott Terrace, Suite 301
Schenectady, NY 12308
518-372-1622 x286
info@rootswisdom.org
www.rootswisdom.org

107 Nott Terrace, Suite 301
Schenectady, NY 12308

Roots & Wisdom

