



**Arturo Velasquez Institute
Chicago Botanic Garden
Chicago, Illinois
Sustainable Agriculture**

SCHOOL

Arturo Velasquez Institute -- Chicago Botanic Garden, public, 31 credit hour continuing education certificate, 15/year (55 total), 4 years, Chicago, Illinois.

ABSTRACT

Windy City Harvest is a social enterprise that provides a nine-month certificate training program and internship in sustainable horticulture and urban agriculture. Students grow fruits and vegetables using organic methods and gain experience in a variety of urban farming and horticulture activities through work placements with other organizations and production sites. The program is offered in partnership with Richard J. Daley College/Arturo Velasquez Institute and accredited by the Illinois Community College Board. Windy City Harvest certifies 15-20 participants per year. The program is in its fourth year with a total of 55 graduates.

Windy City Harvest also operates a production and training garden at the Cook County Sheriff's Boot Camp, an alternative sentencing facility for young men. Employment has been shown to be powerful in reducing recidivism among ex-offenders, and through its partnership with the Boot Camp, Windy City Harvest has developed a progression of opportunities for this population, including an eight-week residential garden program at the Boot Camp, paid transitional jobs for selected graduates, and certification in environmental literacy for green jobs. Graduates of the Boot Camp residential garden program are encouraged to apply to the Windy City Harvest certificate program.

Major funding for Windy City Harvest is provided by an anonymous donor, the Cook County Environmental Control Department, The Helen V. Froehlich Foundation, Leo S. Guthman Fund, Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Institute of Museum and Library Services, Polk Bros. Foundation, SARE-Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education, and the United States Department of Agriculture NIFA. Additional support is provided by an anonymous donor, the Alvin H. Baum Family Fund, The Brinson Foundation, The Crown Family, Kemper Educational and Charitable Fund, Midwest Foods, Sara Lee Foundation, HSBC – North America, and the Steans Family Foundation. Also contributing to Windy City Harvest is NeighborSpace.

The challenge we face is ensuring that the populations we work with are able to access the green jobs that exist in our region. Across multiple sectors of the economy, employers want employees with strong skills in writing, mathematics, reading comprehension, written communications, critical thinking, and problem solving. In addition to these skills, employers in the green economy need employees to

understand and be able to articulate the environmental mission of their firms. *Roots of Success* is the main educational tool we use to accomplish this.

GOALS AND OUTCOMES

Goals

Job Placement is our main goal. We set our goals high for the 9-month certificate program and currently have an 80 percent job placement rate. A goal for this program is to provide further entrepreneurial connections for graduates of the certificate program. For our transitional jobs program, our goal is to secure relationships with a wider array of employers in green industries. We currently work with Midwest Foods (a family owned food wholesaler dedicated to purchasing from WCH) to place a percentage of graduates.

Accomplishments and Outcomes

We have hired 30 young men into our transitional job crews this year working in four green industry areas – Farm Operations, Compost Operations, Native Seed Farming and Corporate Campus Gardening.

Challenges and Responses

Programs like ours face a number of challenges and obstacles. Our program's participants need environmental literacy and academic skills training, increased confidence, life skills, financial literacy, and job readiness skills to overcome multiple barriers to employment and access good green jobs. *Roots of Success* helped our program overcome these challenges by providing us with the teacher training and teaching materials we needed to prepare youth and adults with barriers to employment for jobs in the green economy. The curriculum is affordable, flexible and adaptable, while the multi-disciplinary approach helps us to easily accomplish a variety of training goals. People without teaching experience or environmental science expertise can deliver the user-friendly materials, and still effectively deliver engaging course content about issues focused on the environment, green economy, and opportunities for green careers. *Roots of Success* staff supports my program throughout the duration of the class and issues Graduation Certificates to our students upon completion of the course. Additional resources are also available to students to support them in the classroom and beyond online.



Campus Climate Action: Your School's On-Campus Sustainability Projects

Cook County Bootcamp, where inmates apply what they learn in the *Roots of Success* environmental literacy and job readiness course to work on a sustainable urban farm located at the jail. Many inmates will look for jobs related to urban agriculture after completing their sentence, and the graduation certificate that participants receive for their environmental literacy training may help them to overcome employment barriers related to their incarceration. Certificate students also complete the *Roots of Success* certification process in order to set up a foundation for the 9-month program.

Commentary and Reflection

The green economy is strong enough to lift people out of poverty, but only if the people who need jobs the most receive training and support for good green jobs. It is critical that training programs have effective and engaging educational components like *Roots of Success* that can empower participants of all backgrounds to enter careers in the green economy.

ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT

Leaders and Supporters

Support for Windy City Harvest has come from neighborhood, community, and civic organizations; educational institutions; governmental agencies; and charitable organizations throughout the Chicago area, the Midwest, and nationally. Leading funders include the Steans Family Foundation, the Searle Funds of the Chicago Community Trust, the USDA, and the Institute for Museum and Library Services. Additional support is provided by Grossinger Chevrolet, Harris Bank, Leo S. Guthman Fund, Polk Bros. Foundation, Sara Lee Foundation, the Siragusa Foundation, HSBC-North America, The Brinson Foundation, and the Kemper Educational and Charitable Fund.

Employer and Other School Partnerships

The WCH certificate program partners with Resource Center City Farm and Farmed Here LLC for internship placement which has translated into nine full time jobs working with these employers in urban agriculture. WCH invites local stores and chefs to speak to certificate students on what is needed to work with small growers. WCH offers field training at one of six sites and also engages with rural farms for work days for program participants. For sixteen weeks, WCH transitional crew participants have classroom time with guest employers, financial literacy institutions and Roots of Success instruction.

Education and Community Outreach

Windy City Harvest provides produce boxes for the WIC federal benefit program in exchange for vouchers. Produce grown at all sites supplies 50 boxes per week. Participants also sell produce at the Pilsen Community Market and offer community workshops on Sustainable Agriculture topics.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Contacts

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Image Credit: Kelly Larsen