



Challenges and Opportunities in Urban Organic Agriculture at VSU

Leonard J.M. Githinji, Ph.D.
Associate Professor and Extension Specialist
Sustainable and Urban Agriculture
Virginia State University
(804) 524-5962; lgithinji@vsu.edu



Introduction

What is Organic Agriculture ?

What is Organic Agriculture ?

Definition

- ❑ It's a production system that is managed to respond to site-specific conditions by integrating cultural, biological, and mechanical practices that foster cycling of resources, promote ecological balance, and conserve biodiversity (USDA).

What is Organic Agriculture ?

Practices involved in organic agriculture

- Use of cover crops, green manures, animal manures.



What is Organic Agriculture ?

Practices involved in organic agriculture

- Use of crop rotations for soil fertility and pest control.



Rahman (2018)

What is Organic Agriculture ?

Practices involved in organic agriculture

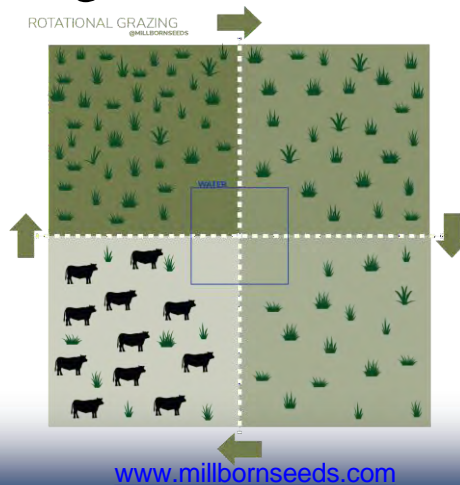
- Use of biological control techniques to manage pest and diseases.



What is Organic Agriculture ?

Practices involved

- Using rotational grazing for livestock operations.



What is Organic Agriculture ?

Practices involved

- Reduction of external and off-farm inputs.
- Elimination of synthetic pesticides and fertilizers.



What is Organic Agriculture ?

Practices involved

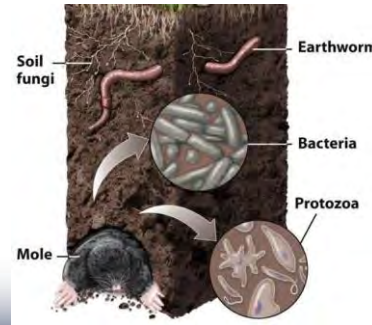
- Elimination of hormones and antibiotics.



What is Organic Agriculture ?

Practices involved

- A focus on renewable resources, soil and water conservation, and sustainable management practices for ecological balance.



Challenges of Organic Agriculture Program at VSU

- Insufficient demand for organic agriculture program by our target audiences.
- Lack of a training site at VSU Research and Demo Farm dedicated to organic agriculture.
- Lack of personnel (Extension Specialists and Program Assistants) dedicated to organic agriculture.

Opportunities for Organic Agriculture Program at VSU

- Existing sustainable and urban agriculture educational program.
- Sustainable agriculture Research and Demonstration at VSU Randolph Farm.
- Existing partnerships with an organically certified farmers and Virginia Association for Biological Farmers (VABF).

Opportunities for Organic Agriculture Program at VSU



Sustainable urban agriculture certificate program at Virginia State University

PROGRAM GOAL:

**To increase competence in Sustainable Urban
Agriculture for Citizens in the Commonwealth of
Virginia.**

Sustainable urban agriculture certificate program at Virginia State University

TARGET AUDIENCE:

- ANR Extension Agents
- SFO Program Assistants
- Master Gardeners
- School Teachers
- Community Members
- VSU Students

Sustainable urban agriculture certificate program at Virginia State University

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES:

- 12-week coursework including:
 - ❖ classroom instructions; and
 - ❖ hands-on experiential learning.



Sustainable urban agriculture certificate program at Virginia State University

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES:

Module	Module Topic	Date / Time	Instructors
0	Program Orientation	March 5, 2022 9:00 AM – 3:00 PM	All the course instructors
1	General Principles of Urban Agriculture	March 12, 2022 9:00 AM – 10:30 AM	Dr. Leonard Githinji (lgithinji@vsu.edu)
2	Site Selection and planning, Ecosystem Services	March 12, 2022 10:30 AM – 12:00 PM	Dr. Marcus Comer (mcomer@vsu.edu)
3	Basic Botany, Physiology and Environ. Effects of Plant Growth	March 12, 2022 12:30 PM – 3:00 PM	Dr. Leonard Githinji (lgithinji@vsu.edu)
4	Urban Agriculture Entrepreneurship	March 19, 2022 9:00 AM – 11:30 AM	Dr. Richard Omotoye (romotoye@vsu.edu)
5	Business Principles for Urban Agriculture	March 19, 2022 12:00 PM – 3:00 PM	Dr. Richard Omotoye (romotoye@vsu.edu)

Sustainable urban agriculture certificate program at Virginia State University

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES:

6	Sustainable Soil Management; Urban Soils and Brownfields	March 26, 2022 9:00 AM – 11:30 AM 12:00 PM – 3:00 PM	Dr. Leonard Githinji (lgithinji@vsu.edu)
7	Insect Pest Management	April 2, 2022 9:00 AM – 11:30 AM 12:00 PM – 3:00 PM	Dr. Doug Pfeiffer (dgpfeiff@vt.edu)
8	Permaculture	April 9, 2022 9:00 AM – 11:30 AM	Mr. Patrick Johnson (nanihva@gmail.com)
9	Weed Management	April 9, 2022 12:00 PM – 3:00 PM	Dr. Leonard Githinji (lgithinji@vsu.edu)
10	Plant Propagation and Nursery Management	April 16, 2022 9:00 AM – 11:30 AM 12:00 PM – 3:00 PM	Dr. Laban Rutto (lrutto@vsu.edu)
11	Plant Disease Management	April 23, 2022 9:00 AM – 11:30 AM 12:00 PM – 3:00 PM	Dr. Zelalem Mersha (zmersha@vsu.edu)

Sustainable urban agriculture certificate program at Virginia State University

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES:

12	Urban Poultry	April 30, 2022 9:00 AM – 11:30 AM	Mr. Tracy Porter (tporter@vsu.edu)
13	Small Ruminants (Rabbits, Sheep and Goats)	April 30, 2022 12:00 PM – 3:00 PM	Dr. Dahlia O'Brien (dobrien@vsu.edu)
14	Greenhouse Production, Hydroponics & Aquaponics Systems	May 7, 2022 9:00 AM – 11:30 AM	Mr. Chris Mullins (cmullins@vsu.edu)
15	Urban Aquaculture	May 7, 2022 12:00 PM – 3:00 PM	Dr. Brian Nerrie (bnerrie@gmail.com)
16	Backyard Livestock Demonstration	May 14, 2021 9:00 AM – 11:30 AM 12:00 PM – 3:00 PM	Mr. Tracy Porter (tporter@vsu.edu) Dr. Dahlia O'Brien (dobrien@vsu.edu)
17	Vegetable and Small Fruit Production	May 21, 2021 9:00 AM – 3:00 PM	Dr. Reza Rafie (arafie@vsu.edu)

Sustainable urban agriculture certificate program at Virginia State University

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES:

- 80-hours internship at an urban agriculture operation
- 20-30 seminar related to classroom instruction and internship.



Sustainable urban agriculture certificate program at Virginia State University

PROGRAM COMPLETION:



Sustainable urban agriculture certificate program at Virginia State University

PROGRAM HISTORY:

- The 1st cohort began in March, 2017, with 25 participants enrolled.



Sustainable urban agriculture certificate program at Virginia State University

PROGRAM HISTORY:

- The 2nd cohort began in September 30, 2017 with 14 participants enrolled.
- The 3rd cohort began in March 10, 2018 with 25 participants enrolled.

Sustainable urban agriculture certificate program at Virginia State University

PROGRAM HISTORY:

- The 4th cohort began in March 2, 2019:
- 23 face-to-face participants and
- 15 virtual participants enrolled.



Sustainable urban agriculture certificate program at Virginia State University

PROGRAM HISTORY:

- The 5th cohort began in March 7, 2020 (F2F → Virtual)
- The 6th cohort began in March 6, 2021 (Virtual)
- The 7th cohort began in March 5, 2022 (F2F)

Sustainable urban agriculture certificate program at Virginia State University

PROGRAM COMPLETION:



Challenges and Opportunities in Urban Organic Agriculture at VSU

THANK YOU

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Virginia State University /
Virginia Cooperative Extension
(804)524-5962

ORGANIC URBAN FARMING: CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

Ezra Lee, Farm & Program Coordinator



ABOUT GROWING HOME

Growing Home is a non-profit organic urban farm and workforce development center in the Englewood neighborhood of Chicago. We are committed to serving our communities through local, healthy food access and robust workforce development that has pathways to sustainable careers.

**WE BELIEVE EVERYONE DESERVES A GOOD JOB, GOOD FOOD
AND TO LIVE IN A VIBRANT, SUPPORTED COMMUNITY.**



OUR HISTORY

- Incorporated in 1993 by Les Brown, former Director of Chicago Coalition for the Homeless
- Farming & Training since 2002 – Marseilles, IL
- Englewood-based since 2006 – to be a source of fresh food and employment services in a neighborhood affected by structural racism and on-going disinvestment



OUR FARMS

- Chicago's 1st & only high-production USDA-Certified Organic Urban Farm!
- 3 farm sites, 7 hoop houses, 1.5+ acres
- 150 varieties of produce
- 10-hive bee apiary
- Classroom, Processing Room, Nursery, Office Spaces, Storage Shed



OUR DISTRIBUTION

- Markets: On Site & City-Wide at Sliding Scales
- Food Pantries/ Food Access: Beyond Hunger, Greater Chicago Food Depository, Local Food Donations
- CSA's: Local & City-wide at Sliding Scale
- VeggieRX, Restaurant, Wholesale, Pop-Up Events



OUR PROGRAMS

Workforce Development

- 12-Week Paid Employment Training Cohorts (~ 80 Participants/year)
- Alumni + Employer Partner Program
- Internships & Apprentices
- Computer & Job Resource Center

Community Food & Education Programs

- Adult & Youth Workshops
- Volunteers
- Tours
- Events



OUR IMPACT

- 30,000+ lbs grown
- 61% of distribution in Greater Englewood & areas experiencing high food insecurity (2021)
- 48,648 Individual Servings administered through food access programs (2021)
- 81% of graduates on average retain first job for at least 30 days
- Training program reduces recidivism by 71% compared to Illinois State Average (2019 study)



CHALLENGES



Permitting



Water Access



Organic Specifics



Compost



Cost of Produce



Space



OPPORTUNITIES



New Sites



Empowerment
& Education



Safe Area
& Sanctuary



Resources



Markets Close By



Collaboration

GET INVOLVED GROWING HOME

VOLUNTEER

INDIVIDUALS

GROUP

CORPORATE VOLUNTEER DAY

growinghomeinc.org/volunteer

DONATE

JOIN CORPORATE OR

INDIVIDUAL GIVING CIRCLES.

MONTHLY DONOR.

growinghomeinc.org/donate

SUPPORT OUR EVENTS

SPONSORSHIP

IN-KIND DONATIONS

ATTEND WITH A GROUP

growinghomeinc.org/events

EMPLOYMENT TRAINING

CONNECT US WITH EMPLOYER

PARTNERS, INTERNSHIPS &

MENTORSHIPS FOR ALUMNI.

LEAD A CAREER WORKSHOP OR

MOCK INTERVIEWS.

email: info@growinghomeinc.org

FARM & PRODUCE

CONNECT US WITH

WHOLESALE PARTNERS FOR

OUR SOCIAL ENTERPRISE.

PURCHASE OUR PRODUCE OR

CONNECT US WITH RESOURCES.

email: info@growinghomeinc.org

JOIN OUR ASSOCIATE BOARD.

FOR YOUNG PROFESSIONALS.

SUPPORT YEAR-ROUND EVENTS,

PROJECTS & NETWORK WITH

OTHERS FOR A GREAT CAUSE.

THE ULTIMATE VOLUNTEER.

growinghomeinc.org/volunteer






GROWING HOME

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Farm and Training Center
5814 S. Wood St.
Chicago, IL 60636
(773) 434-7144

Administrative Office
6429 S. Honore St.
Chicago, IL 60636
(773) 549-1336

growinghomeinc.org  [@growinghomeinc](https://www.facebook.com/growinghomeinc)   [@growinghome](https://www.instagram.com/growinghome)



rooted

Troy Farm

Rooted

We are committed to collaborations rooted in food, land, and learning so that people can grow and thrive in healthy, equitable, and sustainable neighborhoods

Kids Farm/Youth Farm/Badger Rock, Farm to School, Farm to ECE, Gardens Network, and WI School Gardens Network



A Resource to Our Local Community

Training and Employment



Community Land Use



Accessible Produce



Meet the Troy Farm Staff



**Paul Huber,
Troy Farm Director**



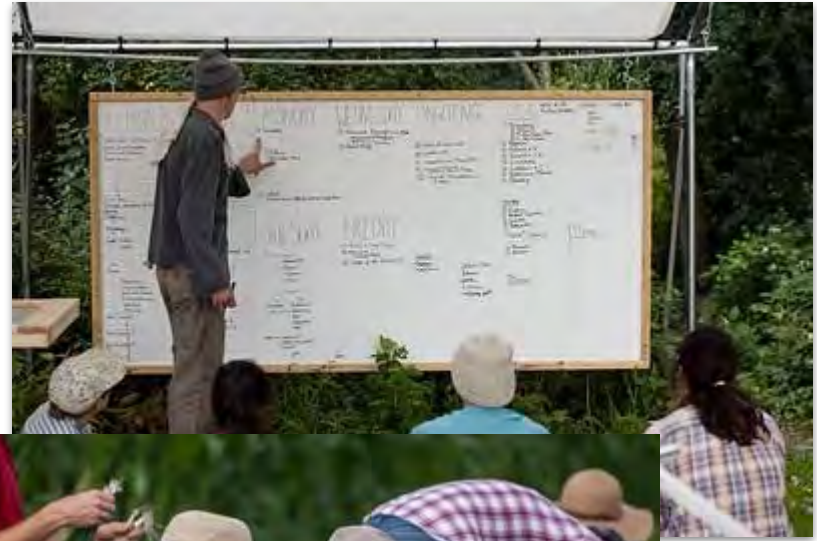
**Federica Ranelli,
Troy Farm Manager**



**Sam Douglass,
Troy Farm Assistant
Manager**

Troy Farm - The Broader Team

- **Urban Farmer Training Program**
 - 3 Summer and 3 Full Season trainees
 - Wide range of topics and experiences from fieldwork to food justice
- **Volunteers**
- **Worker share Volunteer Program**
 - Work at the farm in exchange for produce



Troy Farm - Employment Partnerships

Alternative Work Program:

- **Veterans Affairs (VA)** - Compensated Work Therapy Program
- **Chrysalis** - Employment program and field work for clubhouse members
- Youth Employment

Chrysalis 



Troy Farm - Production

- 2.5-acre certified organic farm
- 3 Caterpillar tunnels, one high tunnel, and one hoophouse for spring, summer, and fall production
- Small scale intensive production with hand tools, 2 wheel tractor, and 4 wheel tractor
- 80 different types of culturally relevant vegetables
- Produce available from June through December



Troy Farm - Events and Sales

- **Plant Sale**
- **Thursday Farm Stand and Sunday Northside Farmers Market**
- **Flexible Market Share CSA Model**
- **Community Veggie Boxes**
- **Dinner in the Garden**
- **Community Workshops**



Troy Farm - Land Access

- **Youth Empowerment Initiatives** - employment opportunities for youth growing foods from the African Diaspora
- **Trade Roots** - growing foods from the African Diaspora and hosting educational events
- **Occupy Madison** - formerly houseless folks growing flowers for sale
- Volunteer-led projects - herb garden and other potential areas on the land



Challenges

- Infrastructure
- Code requirements for greenhouse - building and covering
- Cost of water
- Land owner approvals and permitting
- Land cost and size limitation
- Mission goals vs. production
- Cost and burden of organic production and certification (inputs and labor)
- Limitations of management strategies compared to “conventional”
- Animal pressure



Opportunities

- Unique zoning
- Market location for sales, labor and community engagement
- Collaborations
- Safe environment for engaging with the land
- Model that is usable in range of situations
- Access to material for composting
- Learning and access opportunities for a wide range of people





rooted

rootedwi.org