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JOËL NDONGMI & SARA TINGSTRÖM



“Through our articles, you get to meet several urban farmers across Malmö and Toronto with different perspectives and practices, but also a lot that unites them. These are the stories of the people on the ground.”

Introduction

What role do urban farms have in our societies? How could urban farming tackle pressing issues such as food insecurity? Why do urban farms build community? These are some questions that sparked our interest in writing about urban farming. We hope that they will provide you with insights as to what urban farming is today and what it could mean in the future.

Thanks to The Nordic-Canadian Fellowship in Environmental Journalism, by Harbourfront Centre and the Nordic Council of Ministers, we’ve had the opportunity to travel to two countries to elicit diverse stories. During the summer of 2022, we visited Malmö, Sweden, and Toronto, Canada, to interview multiple urban farmers. A part of our work has been shown at an exhibition at the Harbourfront Centre in Toronto during the winter of 2022-2023. This collection of articles titled “How Urban Farmers Grow Green Minds,” contains all of the work produced during this project, and we are happy to be able to share it with you.

Through our articles, you get to meet several urban farmers with different perspectives and practices, but also a lot that unites them. These are the stories of the people on the ground. While both cities are different in scale, they are united in their multiculturalism, since half of the population in Toronto and a third of Malmö’s population was born outside the country. This diversity inspires the practices of the urban farmers. You get to learn about what motivates them and the various challenges they face. By growing local food, these farmers are encouraging community members to reconnect with the food production and with each other.

We want to thank the project team, Lex Harvey, Laura McLeod and Iris Nemani, for believing in us and giving us the opportunity to tell the stories of urban farmers. We also want to thank all the people that we have met along this journey. Lastly, thank you to our mentor, Mogens Blicher Bjerregård, and to our friends and family for supporting us during this process.

Joël Ndongmi and Sara Tingström

About us

Joël Ndongmi and Sara Tingström have been paired through The Nordic-Canadian Fellowship in Environmental Journalism based on their mutual interest in photography and their curiosity to tell stories that focus on how individuals take action on the climate crisis. They hope the passion that you will see in the articles can inspire others to get involved in their community.

Joël Ndongmi is a student at the University of Toronto. He is currently studying political science, English, and diaspora studies. He is interested in literature and photography. During his time at the University of Toronto, Joël got involved as an Arts & Culture columnist at The Varsity (U of T’s student newspaper established in 1880). While he does not come from a journalistic background, he applied for this opportunity to learn more about environmental reporting. So far, he’s learned much during this process. He is eager to apply these newfound skills in his future journalistic endeavours.



Sara Tingström grew up in southern Sweden and lives in Stockholm. She previously worked at the local newspaper in her hometown and has a bachelor’s degree in environmental journalism. Her thesis investigated whether journalism uses a global outlook when reporting on natural disasters caused by climate changes. She and her co-writer found that journalists should prioritise transnational perspectives instead of only using a national media logic in their work, since climate change is a global issue. In 2020, she was accepted to WWF Sweden Youth, a non-profit leadership program, that she is a part of until the end of 2023.



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“Cityfarming is the children’s green oasis and a fantasy world, based on all their different conditions.”

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Loisa Nordensson, Malmö



“We don’t know the story behind that [commercial] food, who’s growing it nor what’s in it. That’s problematic in many ways. We need to reconnect with food.”

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Jessey Njau, Toronto

“Don’t let anyone tell you that you don’t have a green thumb. When you put a seed in the ground, it will grow. And we owe it to our home to ensure that we take the best care of this planet.”

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Noel Livingston, Toronto



“My experience is that it’s not families that come mainly, it’s people that are lonely in one way or another. So in that sense, it’s a really important community builder.”

Pages 15-20

Cornelia Altgård, Malmö



“There are so many things that can be integrated with food. When you add food to the green city aspects, it gives you a productive landscape together with social aspects. ”

Pages 35-38

Hugo Settergren, Malmö



“The fact that the food has gone from seed to plate, and only gone through my hands, it’s pretty surreal.”

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Buddha Browett, Malmö

“When I tell people that I work on a farm, they could not guess I work right downtown on a roof.”

Pages 57-62

Jezebelle Mossong, Toronto



“Sometimes you have stuff in your garden that is actually good and that you can eat, but you don’t know about it.”

Pages 27-30

Hilda Wiggins, Malmö



“There is always a lot happening around food. It’s natural to build your interest around something very basic that everyone needs and requires.”

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Judith Prince, Toronto



“We need to rearrange many of our systems, urban farming is one of all the solutions that will be needed.”

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Göran Claesson, Malmö

HOW URBAN FARMERS GROW GREEN MINDS

JOËL NDONGMI & SARA TINGSTRÖM



Saba Nazarian, a Swedish-Canadian urban farmer in Malmö, Sweden, holding up carrots. According to him, farmers holding a bunch of carrots in hand can be a political symbol of self-sufficiency. Photo by Joël Ndongmi.

Across urban centres, urban farming is experiencing a surge in popularity. In this article, urban farmers from Toronto and Malmö draw their community to their farming practices through various means such as culturally relevant foods. Through their endeavours, farmers are facilitating an ecological mindset shift within the minds of city inhabitants.

Saba Nazarian's apartment in Montreal, Canada was growing crowded and humid. His place was starting to look like a rainforest. While his partner had become a bit frustrated by his newfound arrangement, Saba was dedicated to growing his microgreens in his apartment. He would toss them on a fresh salad and enjoy them with a fresh drizzle of olive oil. He had also turned his passion for growing microgreens into a profitable business, supplying 10–15 homes with micro-



Saba Nazarian found it difficult to find local goods in conventional grocery stores and, as a result, he felt disconnected from the food system and asked himself: What can I do as an individual? Photo by Sara Tingström.

greens. Over a period of a few months, he had been able to pay half his rent this way. His passion became a new way to connect with people.

The community that has come with Saba's small scale growing operation mimics that of the urban farms across Canada and Sweden. Across the various people we've interviewed for our story, this became a theme in their farming practices. People come together around food for this sense of belonging and community. Urban farming is a way for communities to reconnect with the food system.

As a musician and sound engineer, Saba had no prior knowledge of urban farming or how to grow his own food. He came to urban farming due to his frustration with the food system. He started by asking himself the question: Where does my food come from and where is it produced? Through the ques-



Saba travelled from Canada to Scandinavia with the hope of finding food producers and entrepreneurs to continue developing his newfound interest in urban farming. Photo by Sara Tingström.

tion, he got a deeper understanding about food production, which led him to the follow up question: What can I do as an individual? Saba found it difficult to find local goods in conventional grocery stores and, as a result, he felt disconnected from the food system. By purchasing the products available in these stores, he felt he was enabling a food system that does not value local produce. "We vote with our wallets," Saba says. "With every single purchase that we, as consumers, make, whether that's clothes or food that we buy, I think in one way or another we vote for how we want the future to be shaped."

Processes of industrialization have caused city people to be far removed from the production of our food. According to a 2019 report from the Canadian Centre for Food Integrity, "a large proportion (91%) of Canadians claim they know little, very little or

"With every single purchase that we, as consumers, make, whether that's clothes or food that we buy, I think in one way or another we vote for how we want the future to be shaped."

nothing about modern farming practices." The average Canadian knows very little about how the food they consume has gotten from the farm to their plate. People don't know where their food comes from.

Saba suddenly ran out of space in his apartment due to the microgreens he started growing while also supplying them to his friends and neighbours. He got inspired by the possibilities and started to teach others how to grow their own microgreens. "I wanted to pass on the knowledge and inspire others to have a bigger impact." This passion burgeoned into a desire to immerse himself in urban farming at various farms in Canada. He says, "I had the privilege to be mentored by Jean-Martin Fortier and Curtis Stone, two of the most iconic organic growers in Canada who have inspired hundreds of young entrepreneurs to start their own farms and that experience has led me to where I am now."

Eventually, Saba travelled to Scandinavia with the hope of finding food producers and entrepreneurs that were doing similar things as his mentors did in Canada. “Food culture doesn’t start in what we eat, it has to start where food is produced in the region,” he says. During his visit, he met the founder of the urban farm and meeting spot, Botildenborg, in Malmö, Sweden. This is where his dream of building up a farm and teaching new farmers began.

While Saba’s journey to urban farming may have been unique, it resonates with the experiences of today’s urban farmers, many of whom do not have a background in agriculture. Urban farming deals with the production of food in urban areas. It can take the form of allotment gardens, rooftop farms, or indoor production. Across Sweden and

Canada, the farmers we have interviewed have expressed the newfound popularity urban farming is experiencing in their local areas. In Toronto, this popularity is demonstrated through the City of Toronto endorsing the movement through the “growTO: an urban agriculture action plan for Toronto.” In Sweden, there’s been a surge of interest in urban farming as a way of becoming more self-reliant when it comes to food imports.

Saba moved to Sweden a couple of years ago thanks to Botildenborg’s Stadsbruk project. He is now the farm director for the commercial farm at Botildenborg, and an educator and mentor at Stadsbruk. The program combines entrepreneurship and small-scale agricultural practices with the mission of increasing the number of local farmers in the region. Botildenborg also has programs



One of the many entry points to the urban farm and socials spot, Botildenborg, in Malmö, Sweden. On the sign it says “Welcome” in Swedish. Read more about Botildenborg on pages 15-20. Photo by Sara Tingström.

such as “Growing Buddies,” where people from different communities are brought together through urban gardening. This is one of the many ways Botildenborg builds community.

Community building is central to the work of urban farmers. Across the ocean, in Toronto’s Downsview Park, Jacqueline Dwyer and Noel Livingston at the Toronto Black Farmers Collective and Growers Collective overcome their own set of challenges to foster a greater community. On a warm August day, Jacqueline and Noel are opening their greenhouse. Due to the heat the previous day, their plants have burned. As Jacqueline walks through the rows of plants, she uncovers more damage. She is exasperated. What she’s experiencing is a warning for what is to come, she says. Jacqueline discusses how inefficient leadership regarding the climate has resulted in a wide range of weather patterns in Toronto summers.

“We see through an upfront lens that all people are food insecure and food poor.”

Although the atmosphere is grim, this doesn’t stop her from excitedly showing us how large her peppers grew. Foods that are culturally relevant to Black people, such as scotch bonnet peppers, are central to their farming practice. Apart from those peppers, they grow other culturally relevant foods such as okra and amaranth. Cultural relevance goes beyond creating comfort dishes. Jacqueline explains that racialized individuals are disproportionately more likely to be food insecure in the city of Toronto. “We see through an upfront lens that all people are food insecure and food poor,” says Jacque-



Jacqueline Dwyer and Noel Livingston run Toronto Black Farmers Collective and Growers Collective. Photo by Sara Tingström.



Jacqueline explains that racialized individuals are disproportionately more likely to be food insecure in the city of Toronto. Photo by Sara Tingström.



Farmers have a hard time fighting the climate change with unreliable weather. Heat and frost affects the plants. Photo by Sara Tingström.



Noel Livingston are attempting to be the solution to the problem of food insecurity by democratizing access by donating part of their produce while also selling it at the Afro-Caribbean Farmers' Market. Read more about them on pages 43-48 . Photo by Sara Tingström.

line. Poverty, low-income, and lack of affordable housing are all issues that contribute to food insecurity.

Urban farming that centres culturally relevant foods makes food more accessible to the city's marginalized groups. In her own experience, Jacqueline has realized that the Black community in her corner of Toronto is disenfranchised from Toronto's food system. The statistics prove to her the realities she interacts with. According to the City of Toronto's Black Food Sovereignty Plan, "28.4 percent of Black households are food insecure." This is especially relevant within the context of Downsview Park, where 9–17 percent of the population is Black. Jacqueline and Noel's focus on food insecurity is in line with the Black Sovereignty Food Plan as they help to create systems "centred on the decision-making power of people to define how to access their culturally appropriate foods."

Jacqueline and Noel are attempting to be the solution to the problem of food insecurity

ity by democratizing access by donating part of their produce while also selling it at the Afro-Caribbean Farmers' Market. Jacqueline and Noel's approach emphasizes encouraging people to see the value of fresh local foods. "When people come to our farm, we don't ask them if they're hungry. We give food. Whatever we have, we share." To farmers such as Jacqueline and Noel, building community and building stronger food systems are done cooperatively.

The future of solving food insecurity may heavily involve urban farming. This hope is embodied by Toronto City Councillor James Pasternak. He says groups like the Black Farmers Collective "can grow the fruits and vegetables relatively cheaply. They can get it to market very cheaply, and they take it where there's a need. They have that flexibility that many agricultural corporations don't have."

Combating food insecurity is one way that urban farming builds community. Other organizations such as Växtrverket in Malmö,

Sweden, focus on combining spaces of interaction with urban farming. Nicolas Keller is a project manager at Växtrverket. His association seeks to create green meeting spaces. He sees urban farming as a way of reconnecting with the nature around us. He says "gardening is an important element of this because it allows for physical creation. You can actually transform the space by gardening. In doing so, you influence the space that you're inhabiting." According to Nicolas, this physical intervention of space leads to a change in mindset. It's about using one's thoughts to create a "green space, in which they would like to interact with themselves. People will get used to them, and then start thinking in a way that becomes sustainable."

By getting on the ground and farming, people are more likely to act in a climate

"It's about using one's thoughts to create a green space which they would like to interact with themselves. People will get used to them, and then start thinking in a way that becomes sustainable."

conscious way because they have a point of reference. In this way, urban farming is an entry point for city inhabitants to develop a sharpened sensitivity to the Earth.

The social benefits of urban farms are often initiatives that get funded on a project basis



At Växtrverket in Malmö, Sweden they seek to create green meeting spaces. They see urban farming as a way of reconnecting with the nature around us. Read more about Växtrverket on pages 21-26. Photo by Joël Ndongmi.

and it could therefore be a risk that the operation will cease when the project period ends. For this reason, it could be difficult to sustain an urban farm economically or get people interested to invest in an urban farm. If urban farms are only utilized by beginners, a lack of experience can have consequences such as: a higher risk of nutrient leaks and ground pollution, the space could look untidy, or attract rodents to the area. Beyond this, Canada and Sweden both have short growing seasons. This inhibits the production of food all year round. Land and infrastructure are also factors preventing the spread of urban farms. While Malmö has potential farmland available, Toronto's real estate is not in the same condition. For urban planners, it comes down to utilising the green spaces already available in the city. "We're not going to buy a vacant lot at, you know, Yonge and Bloor at \$10 million an acre



Toronto Metropolitan University has established a rooftop farm in the middle of Toronto's downtown area. Read more about them on pages 57-62. Photo by Joël Ndongmi.

to plant," says Councillor Pasternak. "That's not realistic. What is realistic is using our parks."

In addition to using parks for additional space, rooftops are becoming an important source of space for the creation of urban farms. This is the case with the Toronto Metropolitan University that has established a rooftop farm in the middle of Downtown Toronto. Apart from building rooftop farms, Jessey Njau from Zawadi Farm in Toronto also emphasizes more rooftop farming in the future of building cities. Currently, we have a lot of what he calls "naked buildings." He says "there's no reason why we should have naked buildings, I call them naked because they are just buildings, dress them up. I'm part of a group that is trying to bring rooftop farming to literally all condos, on any factory we can create a farm."



Jessey Njau from Zawadi Farm emphasizes the importance of incorporating rooftop farming on Toronto's buildings. Meet him again on pages 53-56. Photo by Sara Tingström.

"If you want to do something that's going to work towards sustainability, you really need to pick up something, roll up your sleeves, and get on your knees and do it. Find a problem that you can be part of the solution and be the change."



Saba Nazarian is cleaning the carrots he just harvested in Botildensborg's commercial garden for the local restaurants. Photo by Sara Tingström.

While Saba is cleaning the carrots he just harvested in Botildensborg's commercial garden for the local restaurants, he is also thinking about the future of urban farming. He believes that more municipal and governmental support is needed to not only make more land accessible to young entrepreneurs but also help them financially kickstart their small-scale farming enterprises. In the future, Saba predicts that the next big thing is going to be agrihoods popping up in and around major cities. He defines them as "a neighbourhood that is fed and nurtured by a small scale farm."

Ultimately, imagining a different future and being an agent in that change comes down to engaging in your local community. Sometimes, there's much discussion about sustainability but a lack of action to pair with that ambition. In fact, Saba says he's "allergic to the word sustainability and its misuse." He adds, "students who have joined the internship program on Botildensborg's farm often say that they sit through university classes, and study what sustainability is without taking any actions. Unfortunately



Saba says that students who have joined the internship program on Botildensborg often say they lack practical experience in sustainability. Photo by Sara Tingström.

there is a lot of green-washing happening around companies that 'speak' of sustainability goals whereas in practice they take little to no action adopting any sustainable practices."

He views sustainability as something more than a marketing ploy, a true call to action. With conviction, he adds, "If you want to do something that's going to work towards sustainability, you really need to pick up something, roll up your sleeves, get on your knees and do it. Find a problem that you can be part of the solution and be the change."

A PLACE TO LEARN AND GROW

JOËL NDONGMI & SARA TINGSTRÖM



"Nature and gardening is not meant to be boring, it's meant to be something that's fun," says Cornelia Altgård, the project coordinator for the social garden in Botildenborg. Photo by Sara Tingström.

A group of five year olds have gathered to sit down under a walnut tree in Botildenborg's school learning garden in Malmö, Sweden. Cornelia Altgård, the project coordinator, brings a bowl with small carrots, as a conversation starter. After this, they have a fun day ahead of them at the farm.

"They look funny," one of the children says, while Cornelia Altgård, the project coordinator for the social garden at Botildenborg, shows carrots with unique shapes and sizes, to the children. Cornelia explains to the children that "carrots and other vegetables can come in all different shapes and still taste the same."

After spending some time talking about their favorite vegetables, the children are ready to experience the joy of harvesting for themselves. Among the many vegetables they are set to harvest, it's time to harvest tomatoes, cucumbers and whatever they could find. Cornelia explains that the school garden is a way to get the kids to connect with nature. This is especially important in the context of Malmö because it has the least greenspace per capita in Sweden. In the garden, they can use their senses to create a stronger bond with the natural world around them.

"I just love working with young people and kids. In the garden, there are no pressures. Nature and gardening is not meant to be boring, it's meant to be something that's fun," says Cornelia when she gets inter-



The kids that joined the school garden in Botildenborg have harvested potatoes for today's lunch. Photo by Sara Tingström.



The school garden is a way to get the kids to connect with nature. Photo by Sara Tingström.

"You learn that it's okay if it's chaos. They have a great time and get an experience that they remember."

rupted by one of the children: "Look what I found," he says while he shows the others a red tomato.

One child wants to find a "tzatziki cucumber" which Cornelia figures out means a zucchini. The treasure hunt is ongoing: Cornelia now directs them to find potatoes across the garden. The children grab a small shovel and run to the small potato field and start digging. "Wow, a potato," shouts one of the children when she digs up the little root from the earth. One of the teachers asks Cornelia if "she had put the potato in the soil before they arrived,". That is not the case. "The potatoes have grown here", Cornelia guarantees.

When the children have collected enough vegetables, it's time for lunch! They wash and clean their successful harvest and chop all of the cucumbers, tomatoes, beans, kale, onions and potatoes. Many of the kids want to cook the food, but in the meantime one of the children is preoccupied with ruffling a stick against the various materials of the garden. In doing so, he finds his own meaningful way to interact with nature.

It's a playful moment for the kids where they can be allowed to be in the moment. "You learn that it's okay if it's chaos. They have a great time and get an experience that they remember, both that they start to eat more vegetables, but also learn new words and get a wider vocabulary," says Cornelia and continues: "In a garden you also don't need to be very verbal. You can show someone how to do something, or you can just give someone something that they can try."

Cornelia experiences the same things with the adult groups that gather every Thursday for the Growing Buddy program. “You can always join in, which makes it a much nicer and inclusive space. My experience is that it’s not families that come mainly, it’s people that are lonely in one way or another. So in that sense, it’s a really important community builder.”

Bachir Hamoudeh and Hunayda Chahada both participate in the Growing Buddy program. When we meet them during one of the sessions they are proud to show us around the garden. By their enthusiasm, you can feel what this place means to them.

In the spring, they focused on helping Cornelia plant everything. During the summertime, they mostly water, harvest crops, and get together to cook food over the bonfire. “It’s a really nice way of getting people

together,” says Cornelia. She then directs the intern, Ola Arent, to help out with starting the bonfire for the vegetables that the children are preparing.

Ola is helping out with the school garden and designing a food forest garden here, which is a permaculture concept of mimicking a forest in the garden by planting in layers. Such as, using trees with crops, climbers, shrubs and herbaceous layers, this is to maximize the space that we can grow food in a perennial way. “I really enjoy my internship here, I learn a lot,” she says while she lights the fire.

After giving the freshly harvested vegetables some time on the grill they eat together. The food gets a thumbs up from the kids. When Cornelia asks the children how the day has been, all of them agree that it was a good day and that they want to come back tomorrow.



Growing Buddy is a weekly activity, which Bachir Hamoudeh and Hunayda Chahada both participate in. They enjoy meeting new people here and they think the project coordinator, Cornelia Altgård, is fantastic. Photo by Sara Tingström.



The intern, Ola Arent, is helping out with the school garden and designing a food forest garden. A food forest is a permaculture concept of mimicking a forest in the garden by planting in layers. Photo by Sara Tingström.



Bachir Hamoudeh’s happy place: the tomato rows! Photo by Sara Tingström.

THE CHILDREN'S GREEN OASIS

JOËL NDONGMI & SARA TINGSTRÖM



The family Nordensson Stenberg is one of 20 families that enjoy the green space in the middle of Malmö, where they can grow food and play. Photo by Sara Tingström.

Every Wednesday evening during summertime, children and their parents gather, harvest, and cook their fresh vegetables together around a bonfire in a green public park in Malmö, Sweden. This weekly meeting is facilitated by Växtvärket, an association that strives to create green learning spaces for children.

Kalle Albjär has just harvested vegetables with his family and the other community members at Växtvärket. He is now preparing a salad for tonight's shared dinner. He says that "family gardening is a valued activity in their everyday life." This is especially true for the children who learn about the cultivation of food while sowing seeds, watering the plants, and pulling weeds in the garden.



The families at Växtvärket grow, cook and eat together. Kalle Albjär thinks that is fun for the kids and that it adds value to see where food comes from. Photo by Sara Tingström.



Alexia Christiansson, has joined the garden for the first time and she thinks it's fun to be here. Photo by Sara Tingström.

The family lives in an apartment and does not have much experience in cultivation. "Here we get all the good parts, because we grow and eat together. It's fun for the kids and it adds value to see where food comes from and learn how to grow crops. It's good for our well-being," says Kalle.

Kalle discovered the family garden while he was on paternity leave. Coming to the garden is now a recurring activity for the whole family. His son, Nelson Albjär, calls out for his father. He shows his finger that got stung by a nettle. This incident seems to be quickly forgotten as he continues his adventures in the garden. Today, Nelson's cousin, Alexia Christiansson, also joined the garden for the first time and has been tasked with watering. "It's fun to be here. I have found sugar snap peas, which is one of my favourites," says Alexia.



Community members gather around a bonfire and grill their recent harvest to create a communal dinner. From L-R: Vilgot Wiahl (a summer worker for three weeks), Ivan Nordensson Stenberg, Emmeli Stjärnfeldt with her child Vinter Stolt Stjärnfeldt, Milano Zada (the second summer worker for three weeks), and Kajsa Högfeldt, nature educator at Guldängen's construction play). Photo by Joël Ndongmi.

On the other side of the garden Loisa Nordensson and her three children have gathered around the bonfire to make campfire bread. "The dough is sticky" the children point out. After some struggle, they manage to twist some dough on a stick. While the children are preoccupied with grilling their bread, Loisa explains that when they first joined Växtvärket a couple of years ago, they had a responsibility for their own garden beds here. Now, they share the tasks among 20 families that are active members. "It's much better now when we share. I have a vision of growing food, but I am not always good at the continuous thing. So it feels good with flexibility and that everyone can participate."



Even though the campfire bread is sticky Ilja Nordensson and Ivan Nordensson Stenberg manage to bake it. Photo by Sara Tingström.

“It only takes a short time to see that it has grown.”

While growing vegetables is engaging to children, another feature of the family garden is the adventure playground, which is built by the kids with the help of staff from Växtvärket. The playground is incorporated into the garden. Here, the children use their imagination to build their own creations. Ivan Nordensson Stenberg thinks the playground is the best thing. “It’s fun and you can do what you want and come up with your own ideas.” With the supervision of the Växtvärket staff, the children are empowered to create their fantasy playground with all of the tools available to them. There’s much going on in this garden: many small and big wooden houses and different creations painted in strong colours.

Ivan and Ilja point out one of their playground creations, in the middle of the allotment garden. It’s a ladder to the moon. The ladder has a strong foundation and both Ivan and Ilja could climb on it. The ladder tapers at the top where there is a crescent moon. “It took a long time to build, and I got the chance to think outside the box,” says Ivan and adds: “I like farming as well. When you have planted, it only takes a short time to see that it has grown, then it feels like I have passed a test.”

Loisa appreciated the opportunity for her children to be creative while learning about how vegetables go from farm to table. “It’s the children’s green oasis and a fantasy world, based on all their different conditions.”



In the middle of the garden beds at Växtvärket, as a part of the adventure playground, is a ladder to the moon (to the left) that the children Ilja Nordensson and Ivan Nordensson Stenberg have built. Their mother Loisa Nordensson, (holding Björk Stenberg) is also enjoying the shared family garden. Photo by Sara Tingström.



The children’s playground is integrated with the families’ allotment gardens. It features a variety of colourful structures that were designed by the children of the families utilizing the garden at Växtvärket. Photo by Joël Ndongmi.



Emmeli Stjärnfeldt with her daughter Vinter Stolt Stjärnfeldt testing the campfire bread. Photo by Sara Tingström.



Milano Zada and Kajsa Högfeldt preparing tonight’s shared dinner. Photo by Sara Tingström.



Björk Stenberg with traces of strawberries around the mouth. Photo by Sara Tingström.



Mimmi and Johanna Albjär have found treasures from the garden. Photo by Sara Tingström.

A GARDEN FOR EVERYONE

JOËL NDONGMI & SARA TINGSTRÖM



The gardens at Slottsträdgården are created to invite the local community in enjoying the green spaces. This philosophy is demonstrated through the ample amount of seatings through the parks. Photo by Joël Ndongmi.



Hilda Wiggins, a garden engineer at Slottsträdgården, enjoying the cool microclimate in the Climate Garden. Photo by Joël Ndongmi.

Take a seat in the middle of the city center in Malmö, Sweden, and enjoy the big open park with different themed gardens. This garden complex has various species of plants and fragrant flowers among many of their gardens.

“So many people, on a daily basis, tell us how important this place is for them,” says Hilda Wiggins, the garden engineer at Slottsträdgården (which translates into The Castle Garden in English), in Malmö, Sweden.

The organic garden of 12,000 square meters is located on the fortress island, behind the castle Malmöhus. It’s an oasis for the people living in the middle of the city. Here, a large number of different crops and ornamental plants are cultivated, sold, and divided into different areas. They have sections with unique themes such as a Kitchen Garden, an Orchard Garden, and a Japanese garden.

One garden is almost like a jungle and has its own cool microclimate even on the warmest of summer days. Appropriately, its name is the Climate Garden and it’s Hilda’s favorite.

Walking through the garden, she explains that even if she didn’t have any interest in gardening before, her relationship to nature has changed. She adds, “I truly believe working with plants connects to something deep within us. I have found out that it’s both creative, practical, and problem solving.”

Nowadays, The Castle Garden is run by three people that are employed by the city of Malmö, but also offers internships to young people. “It could be hard for people who don’t work with gardening to know how much work we put into the gardens. I think



Community members take advantage of the allotment gardens in Slottsträdgården to grow a variety of flowers, vegetables, and a variety of other plants. Photo by Joël Ndongmi.



Hilda Wiggins, garden engineer, and her colleague Monika Bengtsson, want to create a place for everyone where you can both learn and enjoy the garden. Photo by Sara Tingström.

“I truly believe working with plants connects to something deep within us.”

it’s easiest to just pass it by and think that it is nature that just sort of happens, but of course, it’s a lot of control every day.”

When you enjoy the garden and the view, it could be hard to imagine that around 30 years ago there was not much here. The Castle Garden is based on an initiative by some enthusiastic citizens that wanted an ecological garden. They started an association, Vänföreningen, in 1997, and are still a part of the garden with their own private allotment gardens where they grow mostly vegetables and flowers. “To get your own allotment garden could take years, it’s popular,” says Hilda.

From time to time, Hilda and her colleagues have focused on vegetables and edible plants. It’s mostly used for education and school kids to show for example how a tomato grows. They still have one area where they try to show people what’s possible to eat. In 2021, they had different varieties of kale. “Sometimes you have stuff in your garden that is actually good and that you can eat, but you don’t know about it,” says Hilda.

Education about plants and farming is really important according to Hilda, especially when the local climate will probably change in the future. She says “You care more about the things you know about. With climate change, we will not be able to grow stuff like we’re used to. It will be a challenge and we need to find a way to solve that and start somewhere.”

**FROM
SEED
TO
PLATE
BY
HAND**

JOËL NDONGMI & SARA TINGSTRÖM



As a chef and an urban farmer, Buddha Browett, is driven to add local produce to the city and change people's connection to food. Photo by Sara Tingström.

More than half of the world's population lives in cities. The food that city inhabitants consume is often shipped from rural and international spaces. The food is not grown locally. This is an equation that the urban farmer Buddha Browett wanted to disrupt. He runs a commercial urban farm, a café, collaborates with local restaurants and sells his vegetables at the farmer's market in Malmö, Sweden, but it hasn't been a straight road.

"I don't know what is driving me. People need to connect to the food system. I just need it to happen, and I do believe people care about where the food comes from," Buddha Browett says. He has always had a relationship with food. He started as a chef in Sydney, and, after a couple of years with a rooftop garden in Barcelona, he moved to Malmö and started growing crops in his allotment garden.

"While I was working in the kitchen, I got upset with how much stuff that was imported when we at the same time were growing those things ourselves. Someone needed to do something about it, so my former partner and I started an urban farm." Buddha's farm is located in Vintrie, which the City of Malmö constructed with help from the local farmers. "The vision of this area was to imagine a really big allotment, where we just do everything by hand and not using chemical products, nor machines. And when the city is expanding, it's nice to know that we sort of claim this area to keep it a green space."

Over the years there have been several setbacks to adapt to and learn from. In January, when a storm came, the old greenhouse was destroyed, and Buddha did not think he

"While I was working in the kitchen, I got upset with how much stuff that was imported when we at the same time were growing those things ourselves."

would be able to restore it. "We were ready to sort of give up".

He resorted to crowdfunding. Within eight days they had enough money to build a new greenhouse and invest in the business. "An insane response, and a strong proof that the community was also giving back to us when we needed help. I am so grateful and overwhelmed." Buddha thinks that the contact with the community is important and a few years ago, Buddha and some friends, started a farmer's market that has grown popular.

Their concept of the farmer's market is to use the platform Facebook, where they have a group that has nearly 40 000 members as a way to keep direct contact with the consumers. He says that "They buy directly from us farmers, and there's no middle hand. Everything's pre-ordered, so there's no waste, we know exactly how much we have to harvest."

At the café, he also has close contact with the customers. With his prior experience in restaurants, he appreciates operating on a local scale while having his customers at the heart of his practice. "The fact that the food has gone from seed to plate, and only gone through my hands, it's pretty surreal." He grows the food on his farm, harvests it, uses his bicycle to bring the food into town to create dishes out of them.



The urban farmer Buddha Browett loves to include his daughter, Cloe, in the farm operations. She knows where to find food, how the vegetables are grown and what they look like. "When you ask another city child they would probably think the salad is from the store," says Buddha. Photo by Sara Tingström.



"The fact that the food has gone from seed to plate, and only gone through my hands, it's pretty surreal," says Buddha Browett. Photo by Sara Tingström.

THE ROOFTOPS WITH MEADOWS FRUIT TREES AND FOOD GARDENS

JOËL NDONGMI & SARA TINGSTRÖM



Hugo Settergren, landscape architect and project manager, wants to see more green rooftops that grows food for locals. Photo by Joël Ndongmi.

Buildings can play a vital role in creating greener cities thanks to the sheer amount of space on their roofs. Growing food on these roofs can create green roofs and productive skylines across the city. People can often be skeptical of the thought of green roofs, but Hugo Settergren, a landscape architect, is eager to dispel myths about rooftop gardening and share the knowledge about their benefits.

“The roof which we are standing on, carries the most weight, and has bushes, trees, larger plants, an allotment garden, and a flower meadow with beehives”, says Hugo Settergren, landscape architect and project manager at the Scandinavian Green Roof Institute in Malmö, Sweden.

Standing on the ground, the area appears to be industrial. A passerby wouldn't be aware of a rooftop garden on these roofs unless



Hugo Settergren has met some skepticism about keeping water on the roof. “You believe it when you see it”. Photo by Joël Ndongmi.

they take the stairs. Being on the roof opens a new perspective. At a first glance, the eye catcher is the walnut tree. It conveniently sprouted when a bird dropped a walnut. The tree has now grown and has taken root on the roof. “Plants come and go and trees are no problem if you have the right construction,” Hugo ensures.

What sparked Hugo's passionate interest in urban planning was the possibility of combining the practices of city planning with food. He says “when you add food to the green city aspects, it gives you a productive landscape together with social aspects. There are so many things that can be integrated with food.”

In the beginning of 2022, Hugo joined the Scandinavian Green Roof Institute owned by SGIA (the Scandinavian Green Infrastructure Association). SGIA was founded in 2001 with the purpose of spreading knowledge about green roofs and nature based solutions, as



Hugo showing the technological layers that go into creating the ultimate soil on a rooftop farm. Photo by Joël Ndongmi.

well as maintaining and giving study tours in the Eco-City Augustenborg. Hugo and his colleagues therefore have three focuses: research, consulting and tours.

The tours are designed with a wide audience in mind: the groups range from Swedish locals to international actors and politicians. Hugo says “last week, a group from California was here. We guided them around, spreading information about the solutions and the benefits and how you can work with green roofs.” “Most people who go on the tours don't have knowledge about nature based solutions. Hugo explains that the tours are an eye opener for these groups. “We're trying to meet them wherever they are to continue their journey to understand the benefits of green roofs, and inspire people.”

Even if green roofs are getting more popular Hugo mentions that he has met some skepticism, especially when it comes to the thought of keeping water on the roof. He thinks people need to be familiarized with this concept. “You believe it when you see it, and you rarely see the roofs because they're so high up, it's not visible. And that's why the tours are important for us”, adds Hugo. To build a green roof, experts work with dif-



A variety of greens growing on the rooftop. Photo by Joël Ndongmi.

ferent layers. To shape a landscape, you have a mix of light weight material underneath and build layers on top with soil. The thickness of the substrate dictates which type of vegetation you can have.

Hugo wants to give another good example on how green roofs can be beneficial and he points at a roof nearby that has a solar panel. He explains that new research shows that having a green roof underneath a solar panel can help the panel produce more energy. “Solar panels actually are more efficient when not overheated, and green roofs cool down the microclimate because of evapotranspiration, instead of having a black regular roof which becomes warm”, he says.

A green landscape in the cities is important for both the health of people and for the creation of resilient systems to handle heavy rainfalls or warm days. “I usually say that native forests are experts in handling climate changes, because they're diverse. But when we push it away, we've become more fragile. So that's why we need more nature in the cities.” Hugo invites the community to see the potential in rooftop farming as a way of creating greener cities.

THE FARMER ON A MISSION TO PROVE A CONCEPT

JOËL NDONGMI & SARA TINGSTRÖM



Göran Claesson is eager to prove that an urban farm could be economically and ecologically sustainable within seven years. Photo by Sara Tingström.

Meet Göran Claesson! A Swedish engineer that put his life on hold to prove an idea. His idea? That urban farming can be an economically sustainable activity. His inspiration? Canadian farming icons such as Jean-Martin Fortier and Curtis Stone.

It's Thursday during the high season for the urban farmer Göran Claesson. He's currently in the middle of packing the customer's orders for the day to the farmers market. The orders range from small to large boxes with the season's harvest. He invites us to stay for lunch with him and his coworkers, so we can get a chance to talk even though he has a tight schedule.

Göran's farm, Vegostan, is a seven year project, which started the first season in 2018. Early on Vegostan grew mostly fast-growing crops such as Swiss chard, lettuce and vari-



From small fast-growing crops to large-scale cultivation. Photo by Sara Tingström.

ous shoots, also called microgreens, which need little space and provide a revenue year round. He focuses on both direct sales to consumers, business-to-business with sales to restaurants and then training courses and lectures.

It's a time consuming project, but Göran has a clear vision. "This farm is to prove a concept and you need to have passion. Up until now no one has proven that a small scale farm could become both economically and ecologically viable. I hope to inspire more people to start in this way, and I believe more and more people are interested," says Göran. He has had a dream to work with agriculture for a long time, and put his career as an engineer to the side and studied agroecology.

Before he even had the land to start his farm, he made a calculation and a concept



The team consists of Göran and his colleague together with interns and curious volunteers. Photo by Sara Tingström.



On Thursdays, Göran Claesson and his team work efficiently in order to harvest and deliver the vegetables to the customers. Photo by Sara Tingström.



Vegostan is one of ten urban farms in a newly built area of Malmö, Sweden. Photo by Sara Tingström.

of how to be an economical and ecology small scale farm, where he expected to be profitable within three years. His inspiration came from Canada, from urban farmers such as Curtis Stone and Jean-Martin Fortier. They showed him that it's possible to make a living on a small scale farm. "We need to rearrange many of our systems, urban farming is one of all the solutions that will be needed."

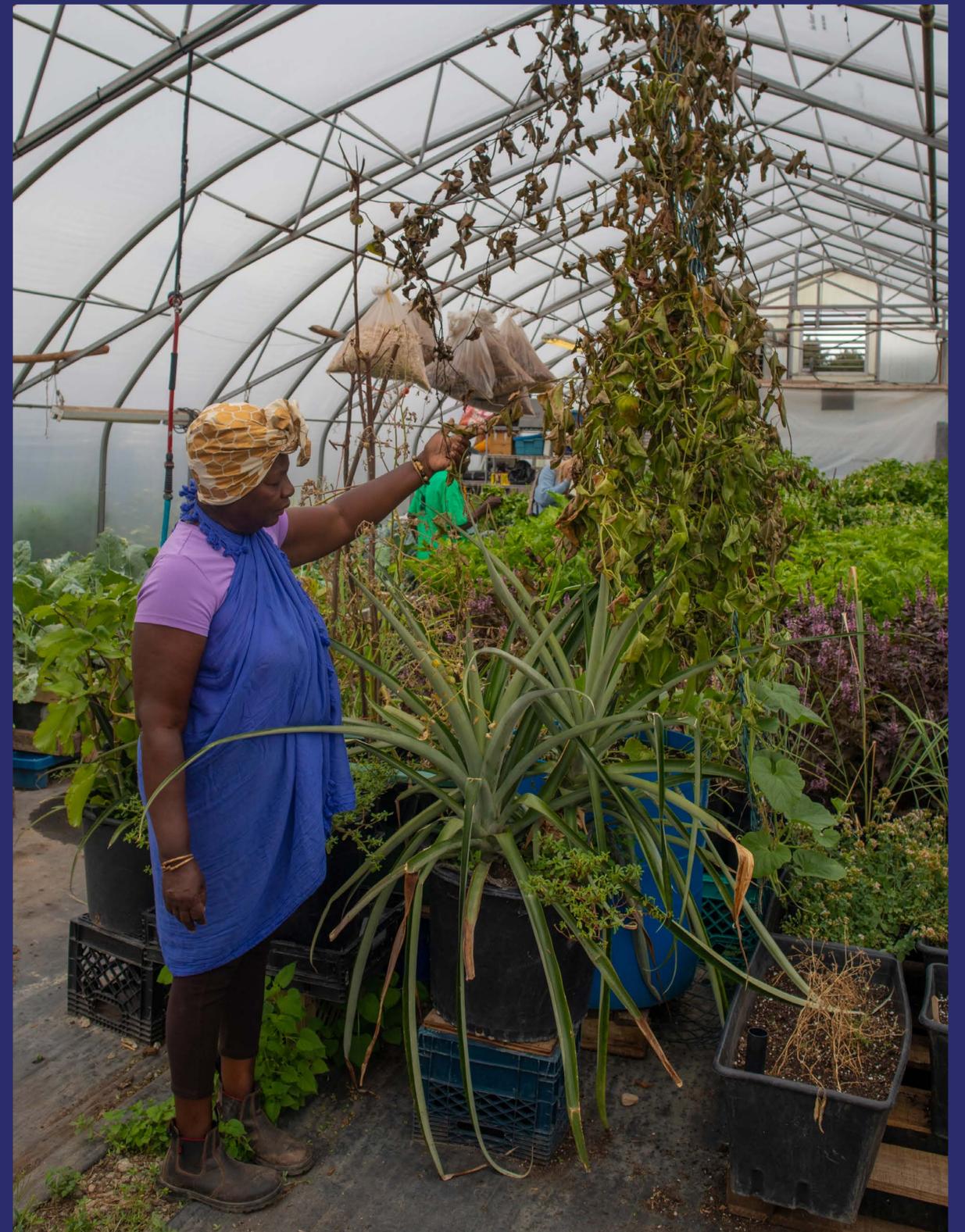
Göran explains that many parts of agriculture are subsidized, which does not make it sustainable. "It should be more favorable for small-scale farms, but the city also needs to be able to offer pieces of land that we can have access to." The land that Göran is farming on is owned by the City of Malmö

and it's an area where ten farmers currently work. The City of Malmö prepared the area with support such as a fence and access to water and electricity.

Göran sees that in Malmö, the problem is not a lack of land. Instead, it's not enough entrepreneurs that are willing to start such a business. "In Malmö there are already farmers who set plenty of good examples, you don't have to reinvent the wheel. We just need people who want to do it, and landowners need to be convinced that it's a small investment to prepare the land for someone that wants to grow. It's possible to change the system and we must not give up on that. It's a long-term investment, but I'm glad that I took this step."

**TIME TO
CATCH UP WITH
THE CHANGED
CLIMATE –
“WE CANNOT
DENY WHAT’S
HAPPENING
TO US”**

JOËL NDONGMI & SARA TINGSTRÖM



Jacqueline Dwyer showing a plant of hers that was affected by the heat in Toronto summer 2022. Photo by Joël Ndongmi.

“Climate is not changing, it has changed,” say the farmers, Jacqueline Dwyer and Noel Livingston. The unreliable weather is affecting them and they want to address the issue they are facing as farmers. They believe in the power of mobilizing change by involving the community in their farming practice.

Destroyed. The cherry tomato plants are heavy with sadness and have lost their fruits. Desiccated pain has spread in the greenhouse. “Look at that, it’s the heat,” says the urban farmer, Noel Livingston, while pointing at the plants that have turned from green to white because of the heatstroke.

After one of the warmer days of August in Canada, the urban farmers Jacqueline Dwyer and Noel Livingston are devastated and determined to heal the damage. Not only

for the crops right now, but for future generations to come. “You cannot run from the sun or know how much rain we will get. Our food supply is going to be more traumatized. We are feeling the consequences and we have to adapt to the climate,” says Jacqueline.

Jacqueline and Noel run the Toronto Black Farmers and Growers Collective Urban Farm in Downsview Park, in Toronto, Canada. They place an emphasis on growing foods with ecological methods. On the farm, they have a focus on culturally relevant food such as okra, callaloo, tropical and local medicines, culinary herbs and tropical hot peppers. Some crops they have grown up with in Jamaica and others they grow in partnership with a couple of First Nations communities. “Anywhere we go as a people, we carry what we eat. This has been the fundamental rea-

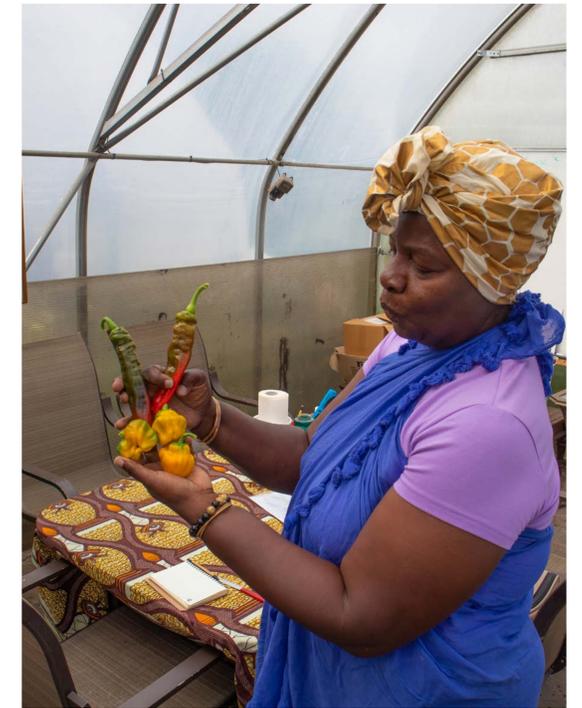


Noel Livingston holding the leaves affected by the heat of an August day in 2022. Photo by Sara Tingström.

“You cannot run from the sun or know how much rain we will get. Our food supply is going to be more traumatized. We are feeling the consequences.”

son why we grow our food for reasons of accessibility, affordability, and cultural relevance. We need to preserve our planet and continue to preserve important heirloom varieties of all our plants, not just food, but all our plants,” says Jacqueline.

Noel and Jacqueline explain that food justice and food security is very important and relevant to what they do. “We always share food with people, not just our community, but all people, because we already see



Jacqueline Dwyer proudly holding the colorful peppers she had just harvested. Photo by Joël Ndongmi.



One day the farm could be green and pretty, and the next morning it could be destroyed by the frost or heat. Photo by Joël Ndongmi.



Nifima Bhalia and Codrina Ibanescu from the 4Real Training Program that the Toronto Black Farmers Collective Urban Farm have a partnership with. Photo by Sara Tingström.

through a very upfront lens that people are food insecure particularly since post COVID. We believe that when you mobilize the community you mobilize the change,” says Jacqueline.

Jacqueline likes to think outside the box and be proactive to find new ways of collaboration. Therefore they have formed a partnership with the 4REAL Training Program and York University. They are working on a concept called “The Climate Solutions Park.” The hope for this Climate Solutions Park is to showcase practical solutions such as regenerative agricultural gardens, renewable energy, and environmental education workshops. Today, around 20 students from the 4REAL Training Program have one of their final Climate Solutions classes at the farm. They have gathered to talk about the challenges and possibilities that the future holds,

and to get practical experience of being on the farm. “We need more settings like this where we, the community, are doing our research, sharing education, providing knowledge and training also in partnership with First Nations communities,” says Jacqueline.

Noel adds “climate change affects all of us. We must address this whole issue of farming and climate change not just for some farmers but [for] all [of us]. In this environment in which we live, we must find ways and means that are effective in how we grow food in this new era.” One of the hardest things to adapt to is the fact that the weather is unreliable. Noel explains that you could leave the farm green and pretty, and the next morning everything is destroyed by the frost or like today, by the heat. In the same passion, Jacqueline says that “we must be aware that the climate is not changing, it’s

changed. We must catch up and adapt our habits. We must stop our destructive ways, and our greed for sucking the life out of the planet constantly.”

Both Noel and Jacqueline use the word “politricks” to emphasize how, in their experience, politicians make empty promises instead of actually taking action on the real solutions. These politicians “trick” their population by hiding their agendas. “When we talk about the challenges we are seeing through climate change such as famine, reversed and shorter growing season, hunger, poverty and climate refugees, decision makers are not doing nearly enough,” says Jacqueline and adds: “Many people are not a part of any decision making table, and feel powerless because they are the ones that are being impacted the most through the socio-economic systems that exclude

residents from being part of the solution. It’s the problem of solving what the colonial masters have done to the planet, how they consistently keep doing it, and their politricks. We cannot deny what’s happening to us,” says Jacqueline.

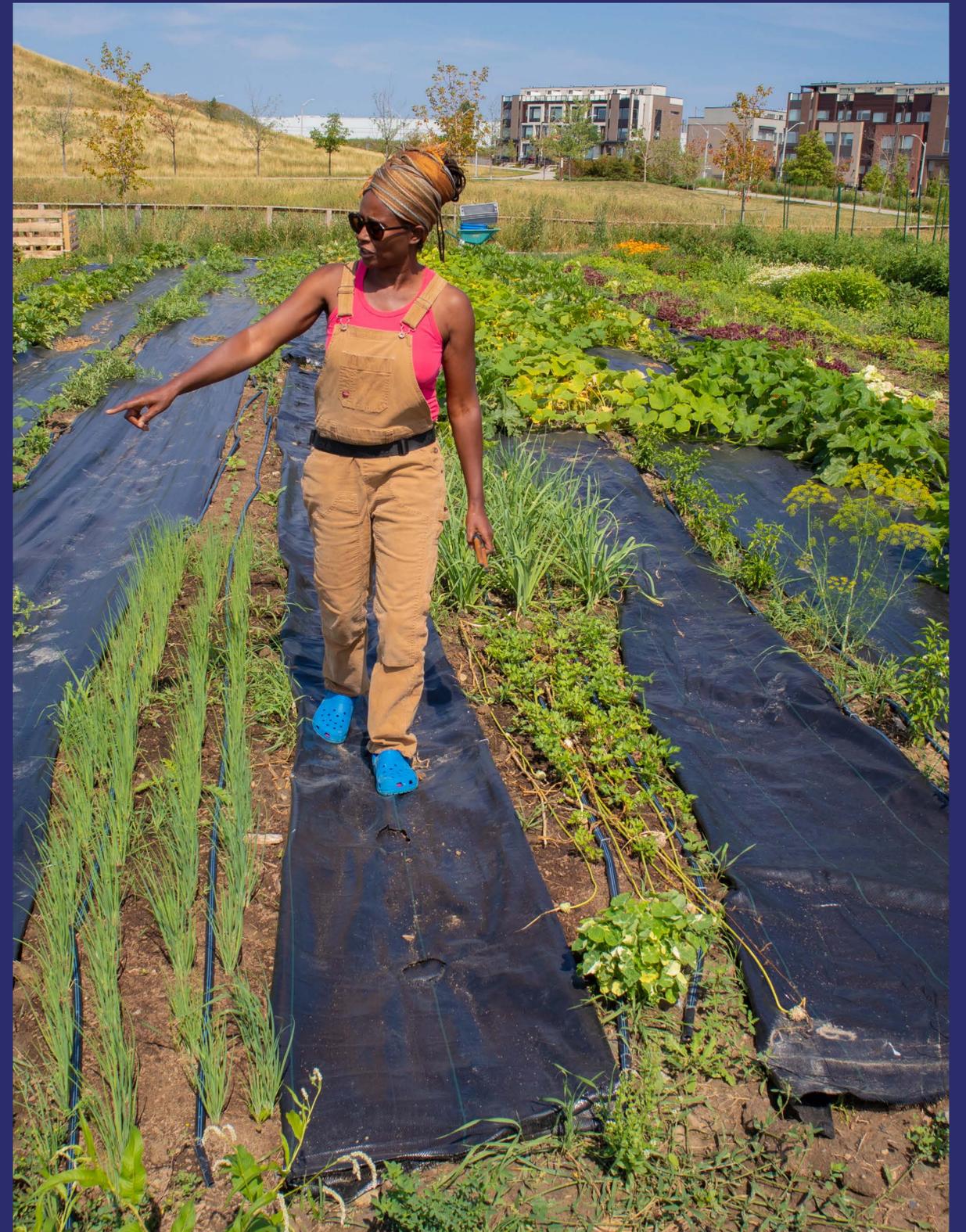
They are both determined that it’s possible to resolve the problems engendered by climate change. Noel believes that everyone has the ability to grow food as a part of the solution for food insecurity and food poverty. “Don’t let anyone tell you that you don’t have a green thumb. I’ve not seen any of us have a green thumb,” he says with sarcasm and adds that “it’s a poor excuse not to grow food. When you put a seed in the ground, it will grow. And we owe it to our home to ensure that we take the best care of this planet.”



The climate crisis is already affecting farmers. Jacqueline Dwyer demands responsibility from politicians to reduce emissions and ensure food security. “We cannot deny what’s happening to us,” says Jacqueline. Photo by Sara Tingström.

IT TAKES A VILLAGE TO OPERATE A FARM

JOËL NDONGMI & SARA TINGSTRÖM



Judith Prince working to fulfill her lifelong dream of running her small scale farm, Ubuntu Community Collective farm. Photo by Joël Ndongmi.

The urban farmer Judith Prince, a single mum of four boys, wants to provide spaces where other mothers can be empowered to engage in self-care. At the same time she's working to fulfil her lifelong dream of creating a small scale farm to recreate the sense of abundance and wellbeing she experienced in her mother's garden.

"I believe that you need the community to raise your children, and be able to take care of yourself," Judith Prince says. Judith spent a few years in Tanzania operating a farm on her property while raising children. At the time, she noticed how she had extensive support from the community members in raising her children while pursuing her other endeavours. When she moved to Toronto, Canada, in 2015, the lack of community became apparent to her.



When Judith Prince step into the garden barefoot and tending the plants, she feels humble that there is much to learn from nature and her community. Photo by Sara Tingström.

She wanted to create networks with friends and communities to establish a stronger community for single Black mothers across Toronto. This is what led her to create the Ubuntu Community Collective, a creative healing space for Black mothers. "As Black mothers are the most marginalized group in the city, we've always been sort of ostracized. So we were just trying to create a safe space for us to come together and really unpack our issues and support each other."

Her vision was to create a model that is a self-sustaining community, so in 2021 she started a farm to expand her organization. Judith got inspiration to start the farm after she read Leah Penniman's book called "Farming While Black". The dream of farming goes back to her childhood when she spent time in her family's backyard, gardening with her mom. "I grew up just tagging along with my mother in the garden. I don't

even know when it became really strong for me that I want to be a farmer. But it's been a lifelong dream." In the family garden they had fruit trees, strawberry patches, raspberry bushes, corn, potatoes, peppers, and tomatoes. "I never really understood until later how much food she grew and what that meant for me, our family and our community." Her family therefore preserved the large harvest and Judith liked to help.

She also remembers back in Tanzania where she had an avocado tree and during the season the tree was giving an abundance. She could bring a giant bowl to her friends, use it as a face mask and conditioner. Nowadays, Judith can't believe how expensive for example an avocado is in Canada. "I think urban farming has a really important role to play, because we're in the middle of an inflation, every week the price of food is going up. I think urban farms are a way for people to connect to food and build community, she says and adds: "There is always a lot happening around food. In my mother's community, there's lots of food, and leftovers to take home. It's natural to build your interest around something very basic that everyone needs and requires. I think it's a no-brainer."

This first season with the farm Judith has been focusing on getting food in the ground. And the intention is to have farm days where mothers could come. "There should be no pressure to make a commitment," says Judith. She believes that an "energy exchange model" could be valuable.

Such a model would thrive on community participation. Judith embodies this approach by encouraging and accepting various levels of participation from the community in building up the farm at the Ubuntu Community Collective. An example of this case



This first season with the farm Judith has been focusing on getting food and beneficial plants in the ground. Photo by Joël Ndongmi.

is when a mum came to help out earlier in the season while she was pregnant. At the time, Judith was trying to get people to do lighter work such as seedlings, transplanting and potting, but the woman was so dedicated to the project that she pushed a wheelbarrow all while being pregnant. Such moments highlight how important this space is for Black mothers in Toronto. Speaking of the greater community, Judith says "it adds so much value. When we all come together, it's really powerful."

You can really tell Judith has found her element. Judith explains that stepping into the garden barefoot grounds her. When she tends to the plants, she feels humble that there is much to learn from nature and her community, both from the mothers and the farmers community nearby. She adds "I have patience and I'm still learning. It's different to farming here than in Tanzania. There's many people who have tips, tricks, and skills. But at the end of the day, it's nature who rules."

THE URBAN FARMER: “WE NEED TO RECONNECT TO FOOD”

JOËL NDONGMI & SARA TINGSTRÖM



Jessey Njau runs Zawadi Farm in Downsview Park, Toronto. Nowadays, he has the capacity of three quarters of a hectare feeding approximately 100 homes a week during his peak season. Photo by Sara Tingström.

A podcast about urban farming changed Jesse Njau's life completely. Now, he has put all his passion into Zawadi Farm. As a grower of food, he feels a responsibility and an opportunity to change the conversation of food and reconnect people.

"Let's play a game. Name five restaurants that you know. And then name five grocery stores that you know. Now. Name five local farms that you'd go to find food today... You see? That's how disconnected we are," says the urban farmer Jesse Njau, at Zawadi Farms in Downsview Park, Toronto, Canada, who uses this set of questions to illustrate how disconnected people are from their farmers and, by extension, the food system.

In his experience, when people answer those questions they usually default to popular restaurants and grocery stores.



Jesse Njau says that the "we" is big. His colleague and son contribute in sustaining the farm. Photo by Joël Ndongmi.

Problematizing this, Jesse says "we don't know the story behind that food, who's growing it nor what's in it. That's problematic in many ways. This is what we at Zawadi Farm want to reset."

Jesse has put all his passion into Zawadi Farm since its start in 2016. But becoming a farmer was never something he had thought about. He was in the tech industry before, when he realized he wasn't happy. One day a friend sent him a podcast about urban farming and it took only one listen to change Jesse's life completely as he realized that he wanted to grow food.

Nowadays, Zawadi Farm has the capacity of three quarters of a hectare feeding approximately 100 homes a week during season. They also farm in private spaces, backyards, front yards, any space that they can find.



A podcast episode changed Jesse Njau's life. Now he's a dedicated farmer. Photo by Sara Tingström.

When Jesse started selling his goods at the farmer's market, he thought he had a solid understanding of his community due to his prior research. On the ground, he realized that the cost of his items made his vegetables inaccessible to the community. Potential customers argued that the food could be found cheaper at the grocery stores. Then Jesse was thinking: "Do people not understand? I started the food I'm selling from seed, it has the optimal flavor and is grown with love. And now you're telling me it's worth nothing." This disheartened Jesse but he sympathized with them because not everybody in his community has the financial capacity to purchase his items.

He realized that he, as a grower of food, was disconnected from the community. When dealing with potential customers, he encouraged them to take the vegetables home so they could taste and experience its value. He adds, "I kid you not, we had a 100 percent retention rate. When they came back, the conversation was not about cost anymore." Jesse discusses how community members had a new attitude regarding his items. They would say "I only have \$25, what can I get from here?" That's how, according to Jesse "the conversation changed from affordability to accessibility."

Jesse struggled with the fact that, while some members of the community could afford, those that couldn't were still left out. Jesse realized that, as a farmer, he had the "capacity to change the conversation." Zawadi Farm teamed up with an organization called FoodShare Toronto. As soon as they had the partnership, they were able to bring vegetables into low income communities.

Thanks to the customers who could pay the full premium cost for the food, the extra

"Do people not understand? I started the food I'm selling from seed, it has the optimal flavor and is grown with love. And now you're telling me it's worth nothing."

vegetables his farm harvested, had already been paid for. So he could bring food to the community. For Jesse, it's not about giving away stuff for free. "I had to pay attention to people's dignity. It's not me coming with that savior mentality. I can't solve everything. But now I can meet you where you're at and with whatever volume of power that I have. I can somehow help facilitate some conversations."

Jesse is always referring to the "we" and he explains that the "we" is big. It includes his family, his coworkers, and the greater number of partners in the community. "I can't feed the city by myself," says Jesse. Eventually, he hopes to train more farmers as a way to encourage access to healthy foods across the city. "We need a lot of moving bodies so that we can solve that equation. In Kenya, we have this word called 'Harambee', it's a call to join forces." Jesse's mission goes beyond feeding his local community. It's also about empowering various communities, and by extension the city, to be more engaged in the cultivation of healthy foods.

As a community, "we have to prove our case for the city of Toronto," says Jesse. "We've done all the talking, let us work now" he adds. "Let us do our job and get those leading spirits into the land and reset the connection to the community. My wealth is stored in your health."

SMALL CITY SPACES SPARK A SUSTAINABLE SOCIETY

JOËL NDONGMI & SARA TINGSTRÖM



On a rooftop of the Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU) located in Toronto's downtown, students get the chance to spend their summer learning how to sustain a farm. Photo by Joël Ndongmi.

In contrast to the various skyscrapers in downtown Toronto, the roof of the George Vari Engineering and Computing Centre at the Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU) has a green roof that thrives, with tomatoes, flowers and culturally significant food. Here, some students get the chance to spend their summer. One of them, Elizabeth “Eli” Montoya Rivas, dreams of a future Toronto full of green roofs where everyone can harvest food.

In downtown Toronto, Canada, the skyscrapers are high and the city center is busy with cars, noise and people walking across the streets. It could be hard to understand that on the roof of TMU’s Engineering building, a garden has taken root. The students Elizabeth “Eli” Montoya Rivas, Lama Saidoun and Jezebel Mossong are harvesting, watering,

and pulling weeds. “When I tell people that I work on a farm, they could not guess I work right downtown on a roof. It blows their minds, they have no idea,” says Jezebel.

The Urban Farm at TMU was started around ten years ago by a group of students that wanted to create a garden. It has now grown to be a producing farm that is able to make adequate food for the market, for donations and also for community members. Everything is done with ecological methods which Eli appreciates. She describes the ecological processes of the farm saying “we don’t use sprays. And our methods are reliant on the ecology of the farm. So if there’s a pest, maybe introducing another organism that can take care of that pest is a better solution than trying to tackle it with pesticides.” She adds “Before working here, I worked with coffee production in Costa Rica but it was very different. It was a monoculture, and we



The students found a deeper connection with themselves and each other by participating at the TMU rooftop farm (from L-R: Jezebel Mossong, Elizabeth “Eli” Montoya Rivas, and Lama Saidoun). Photo by Sara Tingström.

“ My dream would be to see a city full of green roofs that are full of veggies where everyone can harvest food seasonally.”

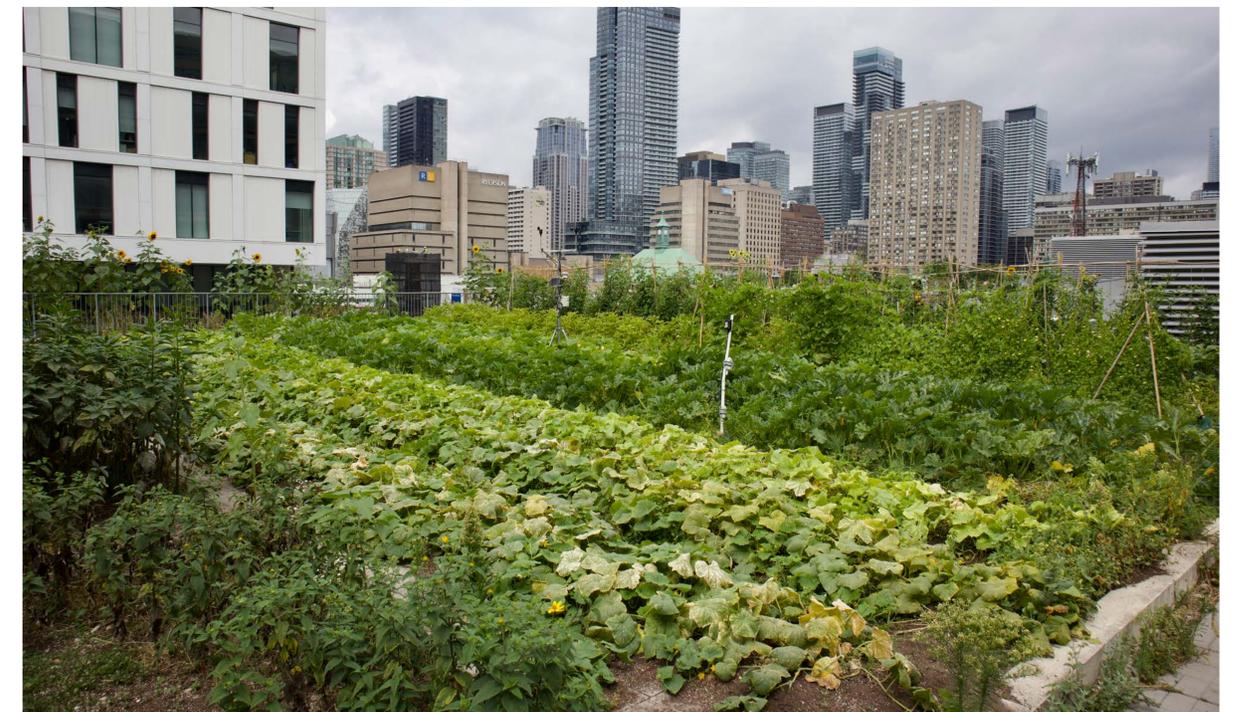
did not use ecological methods. I’ve learned it’s very possible to run a fully producing farm using these Earth saving methods,” says Eli. “My favorite part of the rooftop farm is the pollinator garden, because you get to see all the little insects and it’s really a safe space for them.”

Through the school’s career boost program, they are five apprentices that are involved in all of the work with the farm. They were strangers at first with little experience of farming before. When we met them in the beginning of August 2022 they had been

here for nearly four months, but you could notice they have become good friends. “We’ve all become so close since we’re able to be in the field and really connect with nature, we also connect with ourselves and with each other. It’s almost like group therapy and we’re growing closer as friends,” says Jezebel.

Lama agrees with her friend and also explains that they are all from such different backgrounds both in ages, experiences, culture, school programs from environmental to urban planning to social work. “It sounds so cliché to say, but this brought us together. One space where we all share, not necessarily the same goals, but a very similar goal and actually being able to get fresh, healthy food to people,” says Lama.

It’s important for them to share their experience and spark the interest of people. They



Amidst the gray skyscrapers of Downtown Toronto lies a verdant treasure. Photo by Joël Ndongmi.

host farm field walks every month which is a great opportunity to get the community more involved. Lama says: “Who doesn’t love food? We’ve all become such a generation of “foodies”, and it’s such an essential for everyone. We recently did a tour with little kids, and it was so cool to see them explore how food grows. It’s just sparking those little bits of interest in your mind that automatically happens.”

On Mondays, they have a farmer’s market on the street and sell the food that they harvest the same morning. Today, it’s Sam Di Benedetto and Bella Morgan-Legari who work at the farmers market, where they feel really appreciated by the community. “It’s the most lovely sense of community that you can have. People come by and we explain how we grew these foods, and they tell us how they’re going to use the food. It feels like you don’t get those kinds of opportunities to connect in a big city,” says Bella.

Sam agrees and adds that people are always so intrigued that the food is grown here. “I think urban farming is unique, especially for Toronto. There’re a lot of green spaces in Toronto, but if you look around, there’s not a lot of food that’s grown. It needs to be incorporated more, not just in this city. But everywhere,” says Sam and Bella explains that the rooftop is only a quarter acre of land. “That’s really not that much space, but the amount of food that we can produce shows how a little space can be so important. But people seem to forget that food is grown by people,” says Bella.

On the farm Lama, Jezebelle and Eli discuss that when the community comes together around food, they feel that people gain knowledge about where food comes from. This has a communal benefit. Another as-



The customers at TMU’s local market, often share how they’re going to use the items. Photo by Sara Tingström.

pect that they all agree on is the importance of growing culturally significant foods. They have a Black food sovereignty section and an Indigenous Foodways program. Lama, who has grown up in Lebanon, explains that it was a big culture shock for her moving to Toronto and that she had less access to cultural food that she grew up with. “This is a city of many immigrants and different cultures. I personally really appreciate that it is bringing back so much memory to have access to, whether it’s fava beans, okra, callaloo, or all these really culturally significant foods. It’s very important for sure,” says Lama.

Lama believes that spaces like these ensure more people have access to healthy and culturally relevant foods and are important because they can combat food insecurity. The growing season is short in Canada, and to be able to provide for the greater community, they hope to see more spaces like this spring up in the future. Eli says: “When the city is growing, I think we should also grow urban farming, get more people involved and have more local produce. -My dream would be to see a city full of green roofs that are full of veggies where everyone can harvest food seasonally.” And Sam thinks it’s important to encourage people to try. “It’s not hard to get involved in growing food. You could grow on your balcony or inside your house, and you could easily look up how to grow your favorite food.”



Every Monday during the season the students are selling the produce harvested from the Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU) urban farm. (From L-R: Bella Morgan-Legari and Sam Di Benedetto). Photo by Sara Tingström.



Sam Di Benedetto loves the connection she gets selling their vegetables at the farmers market. Photo by Sara Tingström.

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