

2014 Year End Report



**COVER CROP
WORKSHOP**
PAGE 2



FARM FIELD TRIP
PAGE 5

**SUMMARY OF
ACTIVITIES**
PAGE 8
CORE VALUES
PAGE 9
GROUP AGREEMENTS
PAGE 10
2015
PAGE 11

East Bay Urban Farmer Field School



The East Bay Urban Farmer Field School (EBUFFS) is an urban agriculture education group that connects farmers and activists in the East Bay, promotes agroecological farming, and strives to be anti-racist. Our members gather monthly at different farms. We create learning opportunities that are guided but flexible, allowing for technical skills development, community building, and leadership development among participants. In 2014, we learned about many specific agricultural practices as well as political issues around food and agriculture.

EBUFFS members have different backgrounds, connections to farming, and means of farming. While a few members make a living by farming for a non-profit community-based organization, they are in the minority. The rest of EBUFFS' members are students, program managers, and non-profit professionals in fields related to urban agriculture and food justice. Unlike the farmers in the

Above: Max Cadji (right) facilitates a fertigation workshop in May, with Justin Valone (left).

Photo credit: (top photos) Katie Bradley; (bottom photo) Leonor Hurtado

Campesino a Campesino movement on which EBUFFS is based, nearly all the urban agriculture groups that participate in EBUFFS depend on grant funding and use urban agriculture as a means for achieving social justice objectives in a number of different areas. Two member organizations do job-training, one with six month cohorts and one through providing longer-term employment. Several do case management work, with low-income families, with refugees, and with formerly incarcerated individuals. Of the organizations working with individuals affected by the criminal justice system, some focus on youth, some focus on employment, and some focus on healing and spirituality. Other organizational priorities include hosting public educational events, operating Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs, and doing youth programming with elementary and teen age groups.

With such diversity among EBUFFS members, it is important that members find and develop common ground, literally, through the work we do on each other's farms and figuratively, through other shared interests. It is also important that EBUFFS uses learner-centered pedagogy that promotes social justice and anti-racism. This report includes detailed descriptions of two workshops from 2014 that demonstrate how and why we center food and agricultural training around social justice. A summary of activities, core values, and a point by point assessment of group agreements follow. In 2015, we will continue this work, while also focusing on network building and establishing EBUFFS as a resource for the food justice movement.

Cover Crop Workshop

In mid-November, Dig Deep Farms & Produce hosted the EBUFFS members for a workshop about cover cropping. Their hillside farm has five acres in annual crop production, and a couple acres more in young fruit trees. Leonor Hurtado, from Food First, Patrick O'Connor, a farmer and seed saver, Gabriela Villavicencio, an agroecology student visiting from Mexico, and Katie Bradley, the EBUFFS program coordinator were the first to arrive. Dig Deep farmers were already there. As Katie caught up with several of the farmers, they told her about pulling out summer crops and planting strawberries – a new endeavor for them. One of them, Damian Scipio, told about the special tools they had to use to plant the starts, because the roots were long. Another farmer, Pac Rucker, told about covering the rows of strawberries in plastic, and the machine he learned to use to do the job.

As some folks were chatting, Mika Tesfaye arrived. She's not a farmer. She works in nutrition services at Oakland's Children's Hospital, where, because of a new partnership with the University of California, San Francisco, the cafeteria must comply with UC's goal of sourcing 20% of their food locally by 2020. Although Mika is responsible for keeping track of nutrition and allergy information for 250-300 patients a day, she's excited to learn more about local food systems and joined EBUFFS for this reason.

Dig Deep's farm manager, Adam Hale, told Mika about the location of our workshop. He told her that it was a good time for her to talk with farmers since fall is when they start to plan their crops for the coming year. He said that although they have to produce a variety of crops for their CSA, they can also plant a lot of one crop if they know they have a committed buyer, like Children's Hospital. He told her about the fruit trees on the farm and she told him that much of the hospital's fruit – apples, bananas, and oranges – have Dole and Chiquita stickers. Adam observed that serving those three fruits all year long makes the 20% by 2020 goal that much harder to achieve.

After a bit of catching up and introductions, the group gathered to begin discussing cover crops. It was a seasonally appropriate topic for a couple of reasons. Going into winter, the rains we all hoped would come could bring weeds, but cover crops help crowd them out. And, with winter, the farm is less productive, so it's a good time to restore nutrients depleted earlier in the year. Adam explained that soil tests revealed that their soil is rich in all the important nutrients, except nitrogen. Pac, who has been a farmer at Dig Deep longer than anyone else and knows more of the farm's history but otherwise does not have a background in agriculture, explained that they applied tons of compost 1-3 years ago. Now, Dig Deep's goal is to get the nitrogen levels up, while stabilizing the levels of other nutrients. The varieties of clover we would plant as cover crops would help do this.

Following our discussion, Adam asked if the group wanted to do some hands-on work or see the areas where they planted cover crops already. The group was ready to do some work. So, Adam pulled out seeds, mostly different varieties of clover and we talked about the benefits of those varieties. Most importantly, the selected varieties would help increase the nitrogen levels. Other considerations had to do with additional functions, such as weed suppression and covering pathways.

Adam showed everyone how to inoculate the seeds with a small quantity of inoculant so that the plants are able to fix nitrogen in the soil. He explained that different types of inoculants help fix different nutrients. Someone asked if it is possible to use too much? The short answer was no. Adam added that he wasn't skimping on it because he had more than they would need until before the inoculant expired. This sort of practical consideration varies from year to year and farm to farm. He put seeds in a container, added some inoculant and water, and mixed. They were just moist enough to stick to your fingers without feeling wet and we all touched the seeds to see for ourselves.

Once the seeds were inoculated, Pac demonstrated how to broadcast the seeds and rake them so that the soil barely covers them. The seeds, once inoculated and moistened, clump together, so raking is an important step. Without this step, the clover grows in patches, as it had begun growing in a small section Adam pointed to south of where we stood. The Dig Deep farmers learned this lesson the hard way. Meanwhile, Pac inoculated a larger quantity of seeds and distributed them to the group in paper cups. He showed us the right quantity to broadcast. Patrick had another question: when in the plants life is it best to plant cover crops? "I

Cover Crop Workshop



From top to bottom:

Damian Scipio, Adam Hale, and Mika Tesfaye chat before the workshop.

Pac Rucker inoculates clover seeds.

Kale plants slightly past the ideal stage to plant cover crops

Photo credits: Katie Bradley

don't know," Adam said modestly, but then he gestured to some young kale plants and added that it's best to put them in when the primary crops were a little smaller (see picture).

Adam showed us which rows and pathways should be planted with cover crops and we went off in pairs with cups of seeds and rakes to work in different areas of the farm. By combining our efforts, we completed a several hours task in minutes. It also gave us a chance to chat with someone new, and learn about the different jobs, skills, and interests we each have.

Lesson Learned: Experiential Expertise and Leadership Development

One of our core values states that we all bring something valuable to the group and thus are all important contributors. In the cover crop workshop, we connected this value with other objectives, like leadership development and providing practical lessons.

First, we provided unstructured time at the beginning and end of the workshop. People used this time to learn a bit about planting strawberries and to ask about the advantages and drawbacks of a particular type of sprinkler, for example. Dig Deep Farms & Produce farmers were able to answer these questions because they had experiential and place-based knowledge.

Secondly, most EBUFFS members are not highly interested in a technical justification of why cover cropping is more sustainable than using synthetic fertilizers and herbicides. Instead, most participants in EBUFFS want to know what practical considerations they'll need to make when they plant cover crops on their own farms and, maybe, when they explain the practice to a volunteer. Furthermore, most members are not interested in the biology of nutrient fixation. Only one participant wanted to talk about the rhizobium in the inoculants. So, it was appropriate that Adam didn't spend a lot of time discussing rhizobium and nitrogen fixation. Adam, who has a masters degree in International Agricultural Development, often downplayed his expertise, leaving room for others to answer, such as when Pac, who learns on the job, explained the history of applying compost at that site. Focusing on experiential expertise and lessons leveled the playing field and encouraged novices to engage.

During the mid-year evaluation, two EBUFFS members pointed out that many new farmers often do not realize they have something to teach and as a result, it can take months or even years to develop the confidence to share. Therefore, providing settings for casual inquiry and explanation and deliberately engaging novices in the learning process as teachers and learners are small but impactful ways to cultivate leadership skills.

Farm Field Trip

In September, EBUFFS members took a field trip to the University of California, Santa Cruz's Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems (CASFS). Christoff Berneau and Derryl Wong, the Farm Garden Manager and Farm Site and Research Lands Manager, agreed to facilitate a hands-on discussion about water conservation and leave time for our group to meet with apprentices, some of whom had begun organizing around anti-racism.

We drove there in two vans and arrived to find a chilly fog surrounding the farm. We met Darryl and Christoff, who usually work with interns who live on site for six month stretches and were curious to hear about our motley group. On that day, Dig Deep Farms & Produce brought everyone on their farm staff, including their experienced farm manager, senior farmers, and three employees new to farming. For one of them, this field trip was his second day of work. Deepa Iyer, a beginning farmer and a program manager for IRC's New Roots program was there, as was Leo Stegman, a community activist from POOR Magazine, who was interested in urban agriculture. Katie Bradley was there also, as the program coordinator for EBUFFS. We stood in a circle and each said our name and what we wanted to learn — “as much as possible,” weed management, household water conservation, “check out a farm,” using timers on irrigation, water and weed management, and composting.

After these quick introductions we began walking around the farm. The farm has Pacific Ocean views and flowers attracting beneficial insects at the end of most rows. The beauty, orderliness, and productivity of the farm struck us. Stopping periodically to look closely at something and ask questions allowed EBUFFS members to guide the discussion. We discussed weed management and how it related to water conservation. The best time to weed, we learned, is usually 10-14 days after planting when the weeds are just little threads, and when the soil is dry. Keeping the weeds out of the beds helps ensure that the water that is applied goes to cultivated plants. One of the newer farmers from Dig Deep asked if the 10-14 day window is longer in drier climates. Darryl explained that it isn't necessarily the case, since the drier climate might also be warmer.

As the group continued walking through the farm, we asked more questions about their practice of raising some of the rows above path level, maintaining compost, and applying it. Sometimes the

UC Santa Cruz Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems



From top to bottom:

Joe Howard sniffs and feels basil on the self-guided portion of the tour.

Photo credit: Katie Bradley

Cover crop test plots. The further plot crowded out more weeds.

Photo credit: Pac Rucker

answers to the questions were straight forward and practical. Other times, they were detailed, technical, and above some of our heads. But, there was something for everyone.

Eventually, someone asked how CASFS farmers decide how much and when to water. Darryl explained that the very first thing to know is exactly how much water is used on the farm. That way, a farmer can compare those numbers with publicly available data about how much water various crops need in specific micro climates. Some of their strategies for reducing water usage include mulching, growing fewer greens (because they need a lot of water, despite growing well in their climate), and increasing the amount of time between waterings. This last strategy sometimes results in lower yields, but might still be worthwhile, depending on a farm's priorities. At CASFS, they're also experimenting with growing new crops that produce well with little water, such as barley, cucumbers, and summer squash.

Christoff and Daryl also explained some of the political issues that affect their farm and water usage. They use city water, which in Santa Cruz, comes from local sources. Christoff explained that Santa Cruz is unusual in California in that in the local watershed and average rainfall can sustain average water usage. Nevertheless, the University of California just told CASFS that they need to reduce their water usage by 20%, which will be hard because they're already trying to conserve water. The farm also has a well that was dug a few decades ago, but they don't use it. Neighbors of the farm are concerned that drawing on the well would dry up springs that flow through their properties. Although UCSC has done tests and concluded that the aquifers are not connected, the political work of allaying neighbors concerns is more work than they have time for and the well remains unused.

Lessons Learned: Outside Experts

The visit to the CASFS farm is telling of the types of lessons we learn in EBUFFS. Although all of our workshops focused on practices that promote agroecology and sustainability, such agricultural practices are not immediately highly productive. Since

many urban farms in the East Bay are newly established, the benefits of such practices can be abstract. Touring the CASFS farm, which has been operating since 1971 with sustainable practices, allowed EBUFFS members to see the long-term value of sustainable practices first hand and inspired inquiry. Furthermore, Darryl and Christoff, two highly experienced facilitators who are also teachers, explained connections between the various topics of interests, like weed management, composting, and water conservation, to EBUFFS members. And, for EBUFFS members, watching teachers teach is a form of training farmers to be peer educators and thus works towards our goal of leadership development. Although EBUFFS will continue to prioritize teachers with diverse types of training and levels of experience, we also recognized the value of visiting an established farm and learning from experts outside of our group. We plan to build more field trips into the 2015 schedule.

We continued touring the farm, getting a chance to see some cover crop test plots, and before long, the guided portion of our visit was over and we were left to wander the farm and meet the interns who were scattered about doing different tasks. The first woman we encountered was harvesting lettuce. Someone from our group asked her why she decided to do the apprenticeship program. She told us that her decision was influenced by her sister, an EBUFFS member, as well as her own involvement in the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, an organization advancing black self-determination in Oakland.

When we finished the self-guided portion of our farm visit, we found some picnic tables for lunch. We made peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and ate other food we brought from home. Three apprentices came over to where we sat, hoping to have a meeting about organizing a reunion for apprentices of color at CASFS. They delayed their meeting to chat with us a bit, one of them telling us about her home in East Oakland and another about her dream of starting a healing farm for transgender people of color. Although our interactions with the apprentices were few and brief, several EBUFFS members found common connections to friends, neighborhoods, and activism back in Oakland.

Lesson Learned: Anti-Racism in Urban Agriculture

This farm visit, and especially the opportunities to interact with new farmers of color in the apprenticeship program, reinforced the importance of our commitment to anti-racism and anti-oppression. Many new farmers, including many of the constituents of the organizations that are part of EBUFFS do not connect around shared food justice verbiage in the same way that long-time activists, program managers, and students do. With this farm visit, we deliberately sought a site that would provide opportunities for new farmers in EBUFFS to interact with farmers of color who have developed their own resonant verbiage, as well as a political framework for their work with food and farming. The interactions on this field trip were brief, yet important: given one EBUFFS member's reflection that there are more than enough urban farming training resources in the Bay Area that are widely accessible to well-educated white people and that she is very sensitive to being in white dominated spaces, more anti-racist and anti-oppression spaces are needed in the region's food movement.

Summary of Activities in 2014

Workshop/Event	Number of Participants	Facilitator	Host/ Location
Planning Meeting (January)	16 Individuals/ 10 Organizations	Eric Holt-Giménez (Food First) Katie Bradley (Project Coordinator)	Food First/ Oakland
Crop Planning (January)	13 Individuals/ 7 Organizations	Kate Casale (Project EAT)	Acta Non Verba/ Tassafaronga Park, Oakland
Fruit Tree Planting (February)	34 Individuals/ 9 organizations	Mallika Nair (Growing Together) Daniel Miller (Spiral Gardens)	People's Grocery/ California Hotel, Oakland
Fruit Tree Pruning (March)	13 Individuals/ 8 Organizations	Kim Allen (Berkeley Youth Alternatives)	Acta Non Verba/ Tassafaronga Park, Oakland
Fertigation and Fertilization (April)	8 Individuals/ 4 Organizations	Max Cadji (Phat Beets)	Dig Deep Farms & Produce/ Unincorporated San Leandro
Propagation and Cutting (May)	4 Individuals/ 4 Organizations	Max Cadji (Phat Beets)	Dig Deep Farms & Produce/ Unincorporated San Leandro
Square Foot Gardening (June)	26 Individuals/ 6 Organizations	Victory Lee (Victory Garden Foundation) Wanda Stewart (Obsidian Transformations)	IRC/ Franklin Elementary School, Oakland
Mid-Year Evaluations (July & August)	9 Individuals/ 9 Organizations	Katie Bradley (Project Coordinator)	
Water Conservation (September)	10 Individuals/ 3 Organizations	Darryl Wong and Christof Bernau	UC Santa Cruz Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems
Composting Workshop (October)	10 individuals 2 organizations	Pac Rucker (Dig Deep), Deepa Iyer and Zach Redman (IRC New Roots)	IRC New Roots / Laney College Garden
Cover Crop Workshop (November)	10 individuals 4 organizations	Adam Hale (Dig Deep)	Dig Deep Farms & Produce / San Leandro
Year End Evaluation (December)	11 Individuals/ 11 Organizations	Eric Holt-Giménez (Food First) Katie Bradley (Project Coordinator)	

Core Values

At the first meeting in January, EBUFFS members developed a list of core principles, which have guided the group. They were identified through open, collaborative dialogue. And, these following principles have shaped the EBUFFS' goals for participation and pedagogy described below:

- * We are committed to anti-racism and anti-oppression in terms of organizational missions and how we relate to each other. We will be a community that is welcoming of people of all races, classes, sexualities, ages, learning disabilities, and histories, including by supporting teachers with diverse backgrounds and identities.
- * We are committed to sustainable, ecological practices.
- * We acknowledge that we all bring something valuable to the lesson and the group. We are committed to fostering openness and respect, reserving judgement, looking for the positive, and maintaining spaces that are safe to ask questions. In creating this environment, we expect that everyone comes to EBUFFS as an active contributor and participant.
- * We strive to create equitable access and reduce barriers to participation.
- * At every gathering, we will discover, work, and learn together.
- * We are committed to building a unified food sovereignty movement and creating systemic transformations.

Group Agreements

At the January meeting, members also developed a set of group agreements, intended as loose guidelines for how to recruit new participants and manage stipends. Many of these have been difficult to uphold or proven unnecessary.

- * Each organization makes a commitment to have at least one person participate each month but may bring more participants (up to roughly three additional people). There will be a stipend paid to each organization of \$15 per hour, plus transportation costs.
 - * In practice, the first of these agreements was difficult to uphold. Some organizations could not participate every month. More outreach is needed by EBUFFS, in coordination with member organizations, to raise awareness among member organizations' constituents. Additionally, there were three workshops in which a member organization asked and was allowed to bring a group consisting of more than three people. This did not pose a problem and we will likely continue to allow one group per workshop to bring a larger group.
- * Failing to attend twice means that an organization will no longer receive a stipend, but is still allowed to participate.
 - * This agreement was intended to incentivize participation but proved to be irrelevant. Irregular participation was more a result of the need for greater outreach and organizing between EBUFFS and member organization.
- * There will be a three month initiation period, in which members of core organizations may refer other organizations or individuals to participate. This process will repeat at the beginning of the second year. New participants must agree to the core principles.
 - * This agreement was intended to foster a cohesive core group of participating organizations. Because participation varied from month to month, excluding new members after the three month initiation period seemed unnecessary and we did not uphold this rule. All new members were sent the core values to review before participating.
- * We will use modified consensus when making decisions, and we will make decisions within one meeting.
 - * No decision making arose in 2014 that required the use of a modified decision making process following the initial meeting. The process was useful in establishing the core values and group agreements.
- * We agreed that we weren't ready to set rules about some things that we haven't had to deal with yet, like when individuals not associated with a farm or organization want to participate.
 - * We will continue to evaluate the need for further rules and agreements in 2015.

2015

Based on the success and lessons from EBUFFS in 2014, there are several adjustments we will make in 2015. We intend to hold 12 workshops.

We will take several measures to increase participation among new farmers:

- * Schedule will be made in January for the entire year and workshops will be held at a regular time and day.
- * Distribute promotional materials with art solicited from individual members and member organizations.
- * Reach out to backyard farmers, especially those looking to sell produce from their homes.
- * Recruit an outreach coordinator (through Food First) and local organizers to help promote workshops (through member organizations).

We will continue to promote sustainable agroecological practices, and will diversify the topics of workshops. A new feature of EBUFFS workshops will be a shared meal. This will help us strengthen our network of members. New workshops topics, based on mid-year and year-end evaluations, include

- * Food systems jobs
- * Environmental justice and it's connection with urban agriculture
- * Farm visits
- * Activist and non-profit burnout prevention and healing

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Report prepared by Katie Bradley.

The logo for Food First, featuring the words "Food First" in a stylized, cursive, grey font.

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