

THE FOOD PROJECT OF BOSTON

Youth and community central to urban food system

For 16 years, *The Food Project of Boston* (TFP) has encouraged social change through sustainable agriculture. Jen James, Associate Director of *The Food Project of Boston*, heralds the diversity of its participants and a commitment to local produce as keys to the project's success. "One of our tag lines is 'land, food, and community.' When staff come to us they are usually attracted to one part of it; once they are part of *The Food Project* they begin to see the whole and see that it takes all three parts to make it work." TFP applies a multifaceted approach to sustainable agriculture. It works with both urban and suburban Boston communities, and youth participation is pivotal.

The core of the organization's work is the Summer Youth Program. One hundred high school students are employed to work on a 31-acre farm in Lincoln and 2.5 acres of food lots in inner-city Boston. Up to 20 of those youth can choose to continue their work during the Academic Year Program leading Saturday



PRODUCE IS GROWN AND SOLD BY YOUTH

QUICK FACTS

LOCATIONDorchester, MA

POLICY JURISDICTION

Local State Federal

POLICY ORIENTATION

Policy Poised Education

APPROACH

Environmental/Institutional Services/Programs

EQUITY FOCUSStrong

ISSUE AREAS . . . Nutrition

POLICY DOMAINS

- Agriculture/Sustainable Food Systems
- Food Access/Anti-Hunger
- Land Use/Planning/Zoning
- School/Afterschool/Childcare Nutrition

WEBSITE www.thefoodproject.org

volunteers and exploring issues such as homelessness and hunger. The food they grow is donated to homeless shelters, distributed through a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) Program, and sold at farmers' markets.

The produce from the Lincoln farm, as well as from urban farms in Dorchester, is distributed through a CSA program that enables an estimated 12,000 people to access healthy locally grown food weekly. Produce is also sold at TFP farmers' markets that reach about 2000 people each season. TFP farmers' markets are located in lower-income communities and allow consumers to use food stamps and Electronic Benefit Transfer cards. TFP markets are possible, in part, due to



YOUTH LEARN AND
PRACTICE SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

the city of Boston's generosity. The city leases urban farm plots to TFP for minimal costs. Additionally, in 2007, TFP built 75 raised-bed gardens in areas like Dorchester and supplied them with organic compost in order to further inspire and support others in the Boston area to grow fruits and vegetables.

Though *The Food Project* is primarily program-based, it is beginning to consider policy as a potential tool. Currently, the group is advocating for support of the Farm Bill, specifically to fund the USDA Community Food Projects. These grants support organizations like *The Food Project* and enabled it to launch its Leading in Food Systems Training, a program which provides training to groups working to change food systems.



TFP CONVERT URBAN LAND INTO FARMS

The sustainable agriculture movement has grown significantly since *The Food Project* first started its work more than 15 years ago. TFP finds itself competing for resources with newer organizations which have cropped up to do similar work. At the same time, demand for food system training and summer farming is also growing. TFP sees policy as an important way to institutionalize resources and programs. As the organization has expanded to other parts of the city and considers further growth, there is still an unmet need for healthy fruits and vegetables and positive youth engagement. For TFP, staying true to its original mission is part of growing and helping partner organizations provide youth development opportunities, foster stewardship for gardens, and distribute fresh food to people who otherwise would not have access to it.