

Profile from the Field

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Fieldhands and Foodways: A Cultural and Historical Urban Farm Program

Project Title: Fieldhands and Foodways

Coordinator: Venice Williams

Location: Milwaukee, WI

SARE Grant: \$2,000

Duration: 2010-2012

**To read the full project report, go to
www.sare.org/projects and search for
project number YENC10-034.**

For over 15 years Venice Williams has taught youth about sustainable agriculture at several community gardens, including Alice's Garden, a two-acre urban community garden in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The land was once part of abolitionist Deacon Samuel Brown's farm, and the location is rich in African American history. In 2010, Williams started Fieldhands and Foodways, a program that blends agriculture education with African and African American history and culture.

In the first year of the program, fourth and fifth grade students from a nearby school participated in a five-week program. They learned the history associated with two gardens, a Master's Kitchen Garden and a Slave Huckpatch (an allotment garden plot), and grew vegetables that would have been planted in each. They used produce from the gardens to prepare traditional dishes. The students also visited the Kenosha Civil War Museum and studied stories and history about slavery, Black Indians, and the Underground Railroad in Wisconsin.

Undergraduate students from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and students in the Garden Mosaics Earn and Learn project at Alice's Garden interviewed and gathered stories from African

American men and women who had arrived in Milwaukee during the Great Migration. Excerpts of the stories were published in a neighborhood newspaper.



Alice's Garden is a two-acre, urban, community garden in Milwaukee, WI, nurturing families and organizations to restore cultural and family traditions connected to the land and food.

Photos by Josiah Williams.

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Besides gardening skills, Milwaukee youth and families learn about the history and culture associated with specific types of gardens, and the produce grown is used to expose them to culinary traditions.

Photos by Josiah Williams.

African immigrants from Uganda, Cameroon, Somalia, and Ghana, living in Milwaukee, served as culinary instructors. They taught about their country by making traditional foods from their homelands. Students learned to make fufu, peanut sauce, fish stew, shaah (Somali tea), potato and pea sambusa, and other dishes.

Guest speaker, Kimberly Simmons, came to Milwaukee to discuss slavery and the Underground Railroad. She made history come alive by telling the story of her great, great, great grandmother, Caroline Quarlls, a fugitive slave who found safe passage thanks to the help of Deacon Samuel Brown.

Since 2010, 181 students, grades 3 through 8, have participated in Fieldhands and Foodways. Pre- and post-tests showed their culinary and farming knowledge increased from 65 to 80 percent.

Family participants learned that African American families have been engaged in sustainable agriculture for generations, and gained a better understanding of the importance of traditional food and cultural celebrations. Many families that participated in the project now celebrate the African American holiday, Kwanzaa.

Williams found that the community is eager to learn about cultural traditions related to food and farming. Interest has been so great, there is now a waiting list for the project.

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