

## 2014-2017 Northeast SARE State Program Project Plan for [University of Rhode Island](#)

### Project Title: [Rhode Island Urban Agriculture](#)

#### PROJECT TOPIC AND JUSTIFICATION OF TRAINING NEED

Rhode Island is an urban state, being the second most densely populated state in the country. Urban agriculture has been increasing in RI since Southside Community Land Trust (SSCLT) started farming on a vacant lot in 1981. Since then, SSCLT has transformed 55 acres of land which has enabled farmers to grow produce and sell their crops at Farmers Markets. Currently 21 urban farmers in Providence produce vegetables and sell at city farmers markets, restaurants, wholesale markets and CSAs.

Over the last few years many organizations have formed in Providence, committed to increasing the amount of local food produced and sold at markets. Through the ongoing efforts of the City of Providence's 'Lots of Hope' program, the African Alliance of RI (AARI), the West Elmwood Housing Development Corporation's (WEHDC) Sankofa Community Farm and Brown University's 'Fresh To You' mobile market, many urban farmers are growing and selling at markets.

In 2012, the City of Providence started a Healthy Communities Office (HCO) and as part of its work, the HCO is coordinating the City's 'Lots of Hope' urban agriculture initiative. This project converts city-owned vacant lots into urban farms, enabling farmers to grow and market local produce. Lots of Hopes' first major project involved creating a farm that provides residents and newly-arrived Rwandan and Burundian refugees the opportunity to grow ethnic food to sell in Providence markets.

The African Alliance of Rhode Island (AARI) is a local 501c3 non-profit supporting recent African immigrants and refugees in RI. In 2013, 7 farmers grew produce from their native countries and successfully established a retail sales stand at the Armory Farmers Market in South Providence. In 2014, AARI will erect at high tunnels to extend the season for its farmers. Right now, AARI has a waiting list of 6 African immigrants waiting for land to start a farming business. Through 'Lots of Hope', land should be found in 2014.

These initiatives are wonderful, but there is a lack of knowledge with regards to soil health and crop production. In the past Extension has not had easy access to these farmers, but AARI and Lots of Hope have requested crop production training from URI Cooperative Extension. The Ag Service Providers (ASP) at three of the organizations eagerly request help from Extension in training these new farmers. Their surveys have shown that in addition to land these new farmers want training in all aspects of farming.

In addition to these organizations, URI Cooperative Extension personnel (Andy Radin and Heather Faubert) have recently communicated with 15 new urban farmers and they have expressed interest in receiving training from us. All of these farmers are beginning farmers and NRCS and FSA have initiatives to serve beginning farmers.

Rhode Island's three-year SARE PDP project will assist this under-served farming community by providing training on crop production techniques to ASP from various organizations serving urban farmers in addition to the typical ASP from NRCS, FSA and other agricultural agencies. We have a verbal commitment from 3 ASP stating they will participate in our trainings and we are recruiting 3 additional ASP to serve as our core ASP to urban farmers.

#### 5. BENEFICIARY AUDIENCE DESCRIPTION and RECRUITMENT EFFORTS

##### Beneficiaries

15 beneficiaries will be recruited to participate. Individuals will include personnel from Southside Community Landtrust, Africa Alliance Rhode Island, Lots of Hope Program, Sankofa Urban Farm, West Elmwood Housing and Development Corporation, Social Enterprise Greenhouse. NRCS, FSA, and Conservation District personnel will also be recruited.

##### Recruitment Efforts

-Email invitations for workshops will be sent to all appropriate organizations. Flyers will be posted at community gardens and urban farms in Providence.

-Thumb drives containing all SARE publications will be offered as a resource collection to participants.

#### 3. LEARNING OUTCOMES

-ASP will increase knowledge about crop production practices for urban farms. Knowledge will include: Soil health, Soil testing, Soil fertility & plant nutrition, Crop selection & rotation, Planting techniques, Irrigation, Pest management, and Composting. As a result of learning, ASP will be better able to advise urban farmers on growing crops.

-ASP will also learn about SARE resources and other resources to aid urban farmers. As a result of learning, ASP will be able to direct farmers to reliable sources of production information. ASP will also learn about resources to farmers through state and federal programs as well as RI grower organizations.

-Some Urban ASP have had very little Ag training. We plan to take a problem-based learning approach, where ASP gain practice using new knowledge and skills to help solve problems likely to be encountered by the urban farmer.

#### 4. EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES PLANNED

-Farm production workshops will take place at urban farms and community gardens. Three half day workshops will be conducted each year.

-URI Cooperative Extension personnel, Heather Faubert and Andy Radin, will make personal urban farm visits, facilitated and attended by ASP.

-List of resources will be collected and sent to all ASP and farmers. Included in the list of production resources will be the Rutgers Sustaining Farming on the Urban Fringe website, The How-to-Guide for Aspiring Urban Micro-Agricultural Entrepreneurs, as well as other SARE publications such as books on pollination, soil, pest control, and cover crops. Resource list will also contain information about state and federal agencies and other organizations serving farmers in Rhode Island, such as the RI Raised Livestock Association and RI Fruit Growers Association.

-An Urban Farming Facebook Group will be established for farmers, ASP, and URI Cooperative Extension to network, ask and answer questions, and participate in an informal blog. The site would also service as a clearinghouse of information and resources. This Facebook Group would begin in Year 2.

**SEE ATTACHED MILESTONES FOR YEARS 1, 2 AND 3**

#### VERIFICATION OF LEARNING OUTCOMES

-All ASP will receive a pre-training survey to assess their current knowledge, skills and confidence on crop production techniques and resources available to urban farmers.

-All workshop participants will be given a short pre and post test based on the learning objectives for the particular workshop.

-All ASP will be surveyed 3-6 months following workshops. Survey questions will include crop production questions as well as where to find resources to aid urban farmers and specifically what resources were recommended to farmers.

-Informal questions will be posed during workshops and answers recorded. A sample question is, "What would you do if a farmer was concerned about an

#### 2a. AG SERVICE PROVIDER ACTIONS PROJECT PERFORMANCE TARGET

6 ASP will provide training to 25 urban farmers on proper crop production techniques relating to soil health, nutrient management, crop rotation, cover crops and pest control. ASP will also promote farmer resources available through state and federal programs as well as RI grower organizations.

#### 2b. INDICATORS OF AG SERVICE PROVIDER ACTIONS

-Number of crop production trainings held by ASP. Trainings may include soil assessment and amendments, pest management, and high tunnel production.

-Number of consultations with farmers about crop production

-ASP provide appropriate resources to urban farmers. Appropriate resources include SARE publications, Land Grant publications and websites.

-Number of urban farmers present at trainings held by ASP.

-Number of URI Cooperative Extension urban farm visits accompanied by ASP.

#### VERIFICATION OF PERFORMANCE TARGET

-ASP will be surveyed at the end of each growing season about the number of trainings and the number of farmers taught crop production techniques at trainings and during individual farm consultations.

-Included in the survey will be questions about what resources ASP are providing to urban farmers.

#### 1a. FARMER ACTIONS DESIRED

Farmers:

- Participate in one or more farm training workshops on soil health and crop production.

- Participate in one-on-one farm consultations, facilitated by ASP

- Take soil samples to assess soil conditions.

- Apply soil amendments based on science-based soil test results.

- Scout for insect, disease and weed pests

- Make pest control decisions based on scouting and other IPM techniques

- Plant one new crop in plot or high tunnel

- Plant cover crops in plot or high tunnel

#### 1b. INDICATORS OF FARMER ACTIONS

-Number of farmers attending training sessions.

-Number of farmers requesting one-on-one farm consultations.

-Number of soil tests taken.

-Number of farmers applying soil amendments based on soil test results.

-Number of farmers planting cover crops.

-Number of farmers planting in high tunnels.

-Number of farmers using IPM practices to make pest control decisions

#### VERIFICATION OF FARMER ACTIONS (optional)

Urban farmers will be surveyed about the number of trainings attended, number of one-on-one farm consultations, number of soil tests taken, number of farmers applying amendments based on soil sample results, number of farmers planting cover crops, number of farmers rotating crops, number of farmers using IPM to make pest control decisions.