



GROWERS OF FOOD, FLOWERS AND NEIGHBORHOODS  
A 501 C-3 nonprofit organization

GREENSGROW PHILADELPHIA PROJECT • 2503 E. FIRTH STREET • PHILADELPHIA, PA 19125-3110 • TEL: 215-603-2072 • WWW.GREENSGROW.ORG

Formed in 1998, Greensgrow Philadelphia Project is a nonprofit organization and the parent of Greensgrow Farm, an urban farm located in an area known as New Kensington, formerly a heavy manufacturing area of Philadelphia. A poster child of blight, the block was vacant, weed and trash strewn: the subject of a U.S. EPA Superfund action.

Determined to promote links to the local community, Greensgrow worked with the local community development corporation, New Kensington CDC to acquire the site and begin to build the farm. What began as a production farm, focused on a high-quality, high-value, hydroponically grown lettuce crops that were sold to restaurants morphed into a place where many, unanticipated developments occurred particularly after a suburban greenhouse (6,000sq.ft) was found, dismantled and moved to the site. Raised beds were built and lined with HDPE to accommodate growing a wider variety of vegetables. Soils were “made” from compost and imported clean soils. A nursery of annuals, perennials and vegetable starters took shape. The public walked through the gates. A CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) sprung up and continues to flourish with 240 members supporting some 60 growers within a 75 mile radius providing local, fresh produce, meats, cheeses and dairy.

Green roofs and living walls have been designed and grown. BioDiesel is made from “yellow grease” provided by the same restaurants Greensgrow supplies fresh food to. Vermiculture (worms) make high value compost from farm scraps that in turn re-feed the beds. Bees make honey from the ‘hood. And jobs were created. In 2008, Greensgrow employed 11 persons.

Along the way, one of the largest benefactors of Greensgrow’s success has been the very neighborhood where it is located. Greensgrow has served as an oasis, now offering the catch phrase that is “Growing, flowers, friends and neighborhoods!” Look beyond the reuse of a blighted, abandoned city block, and visitors and neighbors see green space, breath better air (from all of the oxygen being produced, to the fuel not being burned), they enjoy fresh, local produce, while supporting local farms. They learn about where their food comes from, how it is grown, watch as the bees pollinate the food they will soon eat and the flowers that have made their way through the community.

In general, for a farm to grow from a brownfield, several key elements need to be present:

**The Purpose**, Greensgrow wanted to demonstrate, on “recycled” real estate, that it could sustain a farm supplying fresh goods

**The Plan**, Greensgrow started growing mesclun lettuces, now it is a growing part of a growing community

**The Place**, cheap land is only slightly less attractive than free land

**The Precautions**, proper due diligence and monitoring in every sense of the word

**The People**, unusually strong leadership and vision

**The Process**, innovation, adaptability, resourcefulness... all tried and true traits of successful farmers everywhere.

Hydroponics and non-contact growing methods are not the only way to utilize a former cleanup site to grow on. But, on a block of former “bad land” in New Kensington, it was enough of a seed to germinate a model farm enterprise.

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Note: Greensgrow has continued its relationship with REPSG, an environmental engineering firm that performed the Environmental Site Assessment, on all matters related to working on a former brownfield.