

A CLOSER LOOK AT:

June 2015



Buffalo Street Farm



Chris McGrane is the owner of Buffalo Street Farm. He grew up in Detroit, but left the city to travel. His travels took him far and wide, from Texas to the New England states, where he spent time working on various farms. He discovered his love for growing food and quickly realized that his home of Detroit had the available land to make his own dreams of urban farming a reality. Chris returned to Detroit and started Buffalo Street Farm in the Hamtramck area in 2009.

McGrane purchased a house and enough lots to intensively farm on 3/4 of an acre. Crop diversity is very important at Buffalo Street Farm and provides a good balance for when some crops do not do as well in a given year. This year, the strawberries are producing enough to market wholesale, and carrots and chard are expected to be big crops at harvest time. Raspberries are also doing very well and will likely be a fruitful producer. The fields of asparagus, blackberries, bulb fennel, garlic, table grapes, and cut flowers are surrounded by fruit trees that are just beginning to mature and produce fruit. The farm also raises chickens for both eggs and meat, selling to customers who are in search of local free-range products. McGrane is clearly thinking in both the short and long-term when it comes to his production. He said, "We are always trying to figure out how to get things done. We're happy with what we have so far."

Buffalo Street Farm was recently a cost-share participant in the 2013 Wayne County Local Food Initiative, a program that uses USDA Natural Resources Conservation funds to assist urban farmers with installing seasonal high tunnels. Chris remarked that, "It was the easiest process to work with NRCS." Thanks to this program, he constructed a hoophouse on the property in mid-2014. With this hoophouse, he now has a thriving warm-season crop of vegetables that will be ready for harvest well before farms that have only sowed field crops. Planted early, and helped by interior row covers, these crops were protected from late-spring frosts and give Buffalo Street Farm an advantage over the risky challenges of the growing season. The hoophouse is filled with tomatoes, Asian varieties of eggplants, poblano peppers, watermelons, and mircogreens. After these are harvested, McGrane intends to sow another round of crops that will enable him to continue growing throughout the cold season. Altogether, the hoophouse allows him to grow year-round and to better diversify his farm.

The fact that McGrane is participating in a USDA Environmental Quality Incentive Program initiative is not surprising. Many aspects of the farm show his commitment to a strong conservation ethic. The farm is organic, avoiding synthetic pesticides and fertilizers. They enrich soils with cover crops of clover and rye, practice careful crop rotations, mulch heavily to suppress weeds and retain soil moisture, and run ground irrigation lines that efficiently distribute water throughout their cultivated areas. Buffalo Street Farm even works to protect the naturally-occurring milkweed plants that grow on the site, in an effort to help support dwindling monarch butterfly populations in the area.



Buffalo Street Farm was the site of the first hoophouse demonstration build with the *Detroit-Wayne County Seasonal High Tunnel Educational Initiative* in June 2014. Led by Adam Montri and Kido Pielack, 28 people contributed a total of 225 hours over three days to construct the 70' X 30' hoophouse. The event covered all aspects of construction, from assembling and erecting the frame, securing ground posts, building endwalls, attaching the plastic, and installing roll-up sides.

To see more from the build, please visit the slideshow at: <https://goo.gl/uGkUCu>.



Overall, Buffalo Street Farm has come a long way in six short years. In 2014, the farm was also awarded a \$10,000 challenge grant to expand their business from the New Economy Initiative. This grant program, NEIdeas, "celebrates existing businesses in Detroit, Hamtramck, and Highland Park – rewarding those with the best ideas for growth." The farm is also part of the 65-member City Commons Community Supported Agriculture initiative that pools crops together with other local farms to provide weekly "subscription" boxes of produce to customers in the city. They also market crops as part of the Grown in Detroit Cooperative at Eastern Market. The GID Cooperative also provides food to Fresh Food Share, a Gleaners community program that provides affordable access to fresh food. The farm has a great working relationship with neighbors in the community and has provided jobs and apprenticeships to other aspiring farmers in the area. Great things are clearly ahead for Buffalo Street Farm!

Contact the farm on twitter: [@buffalostreet](https://twitter.com/buffalostreet)

Find the CSA: citycommonsca.com

Learn more about Buffalo Street Farm's work with Fresh Food Share:

<http://goo.gl/0yofex>



This profile series is hosted by the Southeast Michigan RC&D Council, as part of their Detroit-Wayne County Seasonal High Tunnel Educational Initiative. Learn more at: <http://semircd.org/projects/hightunnels>. Funding for this initiative has been provided by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. Since late 2009, NRCS has been leading a Seasonal High Tunnel (SHT) Initiative as a part of its Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). The SHT Initiative brings financial and technical assistance to support installation and management of seasonal high tunnels or "hoophouses" in agricultural production. Both the NRCS and the SEMIRCD are equal opportunity providers and employers.

