

Making Ripples

People Making Ripples: TriCycle Farms

by Amanda Bancroft

When holiday goodies overflow our tables, it's hard to see all the empty plates in our communities. Yet food insecurity is a problem almost everywhere: in 2013, approximately 19.7% of all Arkansans lived in poverty, according to the US Department of Commerce. Arkansas ranked first in the nation in food insecurity. TriCycle Farms in Fayetteville is doing their part to grow "community through soil" and end food insecurity in their neighborhood.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the community within a one-mile radius of TriCycle Farms consists of about 7,200 residents, of which 2,700 live below the poverty level and 650 households receive SNAP benefits. There are two elementary schools nearby with 41% of school children qualified for free and reduced lunch programs, where children's poverty rates are 44% and 55% respectively.

TriCycle Farms was founded by food insecure underemployed neighbors who dreamed of food security, sovereignty, and sustainability for all. "Current gardens provide nearly 20,000 square feet of bed space, and include The Diversity Garden, The Children's Strawberry Sunflower Circle and the Market Garden," writes TCF in its grant application for AmeriCorps*VISTA. The Thirds Share Initiative is a sharing process in which "a third of the harvest is shared with volunteers, a third is given to community meals and pantries and a third is sold through Crossroads Farmers' Market and local restaurants to support the organization." This provides further support for local rural and urban farmers, creating more income and addressing the additional problem of underemployment that often leads to food insecurity.

Education is another aspect of TCF's work. Their children's garden doubles as outdoor classroom, teaching children about the importance of nutrient dense food. The Rock House Community Center on the farm includes a kitchen, office space, and a classroom for the general public to learn about "growing and utilizing fresh fruits and vegetables, cooking, nutrition, natural herbs and plants therapies, gardening instruction, hoop-house management and more."

Almost all non-profits seek volunteers, but TriCycle Farms (a registered 501©3 organization) attracts them like moths to a light. The community has shown immense support for TCF's work, and partnerships have formed with neighboring churches, pantries, apartments, and other non-profits. The nearby Trinity United Methodist Church provides access to a commercial kitchen for cooking classes and workshops. The UA student organization Arkansas Engineers Abroad is designing a rainwater harvesting system to irrigate the gardens. TCF operates on large, event-based work days to get things done, and sees anywhere from 25 to 100 volunteers per event,

which are joyous celebrations of community while making a measurable impact on food insecurity in the neighborhood.

To raise money for long-term support of staff and space for food storage and classrooms, TriCycle has an IndieGogo fundraising campaign with perks for donors. To get involved and learn more, go to the farm at 1705 N. Garland Avenue in Fayetteville, visit them online at TriCycleFarms.org, or find them on Facebook.

Amanda Bancroft is a Master Naturalist and volunteers with her husband Ryan for their solar-powered online educational center on how to make a difference with everyday choices at: www.RipplesBlog.org.