



# Growing for Good

SOUTHSIDE COMMUNITY LAND TRUST

Fresh news from Southside Community Land Trust

SPRING 2020

## Plant Sale 2020: Same great variety, very different format

To safely manage the huge volume of plants and customers, shoppers will purchase online and pick up plants and other resources curbside over a week-long period.

It's hard to believe that just two months ago we thought the Plant Sale would unfold as it has every spring for the past 28 years. Already, seeds were germinating inside City Farm's greenhouse, new staff were hired and local musicians were contacted about performing over Plant Sale weekend.

Then the coronavirus exploded, and it seemed doubtful the Sale would take place. Even so, Farm Steward Rich Pederson continued to plant seeds day in and day out. People would still need to eat, he thought, and he could grow a lot of the plants that would feed them. He and Alejandra Mayorga, the Assistant Steward, kept on working.

After numerous planning conversations, the Sale was reinvented as a streamlined, contact-free event (See *How to order your plants this year* on page 2). Soon, staff established safely guidelines so that more than two people could work in the greenhouse at the same time. But, social distancing would make it impossible to involve the dozens of volunteers who usually work at the Farm every spring.

By early April, Rich and Alejandra were joined by two hires: longtime farm volunteer and youth staff member Nirajan Poudel, and returning City Farm apprentice Rex Wood. Their experience at the Farm has made them invaluable. In mid-April, this year's

*Cont'd on page 2*



Poster art by Cathy G. Johnson

## Pandemic focuses public's attention on diet-related health disparities

SCLT staff adapt programs to expand food access and protect farmer safety

COVID-19 has shone a bright light on health disparities in this country, where underlying medical conditions, coupled with increased exposure to the virus, are causing a shockingly disproportionate number of Black and Brown people to die from the disease. These conditions, including heart disease, type 2 diabetes and obesity, largely result from nutritious food being out of reach of most low-income Americans. Now, working on the front lines, in grocery stores, hospitals and nursing homes, their risks are magnified.

The health crisis makes SCLT's mission to help people grow and buy healthy,

affordable food more urgent than ever. We are here for people who lose their jobs and want to grow food to feed their families. Our

community gardens relieve the burden on the emergency food system while empowering people to control this aspect of their lives. Just as importantly, growing food itself has health benefits, from exercise to stress relief.

We are also here for small-scale, local farmers who must find new markets because so many restaurants are closed. SCLT resources and programs will help them weather this storm so they can continue to provide food now, and after, the pandemic.



SCLT will provide bi-weekly farm shares to 30 families and seniors in Pawtucket this year in a pilot program.

*Cont'd on page 3*



## Food lovers like you show your generosity in times like these

Greetings,

One positive outcome of the coronavirus pandemic is seeing how swiftly people mobilized in response to restaurant closings and other food supply disruptions. School lunch providers opened outposts so families could find nutritious meals while schools are closed. Farmers and vendors set up online ordering and “touchless” deliveries to keep people safe. People around the country organized fundraisers for laid-off restaurant workers and food donations for first responders.

SCLT is familiar with the generosity of people who care about food. From the start, our supporters have encouraged our efforts to expand access to affordable, nutritious food, and our advocacy for healthy (chemical-free) food production.

This spring, we’re counting on you to renew your support for SCLT by using the enclosed envelope or donating online: [www.southsideclt.org/donate](http://www.southsideclt.org/donate). Our staff have quickly adapted programs and events to meet the challenges of the coronavirus, and with your generosity we’ll continue to help people eat well and keep their businesses going strong.

Stay healthy,

Margaret DeVos, *Executive Director*

Rochelle Lee, *Board President*

## How to order your plants this year

**As we go to press, we’re setting up an online shop for the 2020 Plant Sale.**

**Here’s how it will work:** We will email SCLT members a link to the online shop on May 11, including a promo code for the 10% member discount. We will share this link with the public on May 12 and on our website, [southsideclt.org](http://southsideclt.org), and social media @southsideclt.

You will be able to order plants through May 21. For safety reasons all payments must be made in advance online.

**How to pick up:** When you place your order, you will be prompted to schedule a time between May 16-22 to retrieve your purchases outside City Farm. Staff, wearing gloves and masks, will meet you along Linden Street and place your purchases directly into your trunk.

**Compost pickup:** Members may collect their organic compost at 54 Hayward Street anytime leading up to the Sale, or during scheduled pickup times. Please respect social distancing practices.

In light of the coronavirus, SCLT will be donating 3,000 plant starts to local gardeners in need. **Plant Sale customers are invited to make a donation along with their purchases to help defray this cost.**

Thank you in advance!

## 2020 Sale *Cont’d from front page*

apprentice Dannel Marrow, came on board. Before long, the greenhouse was brimming with thousands of tender seedlings.

“We’re going to have a lot of great plants,” says Rich. “People are really stepping up—City Farm staff, land trust staff, the Plant Sale Committee—everyone’s really bringing it. It’s going to be different from any previous Plant Sale—it’s going to be weird, but it’s going to be fun!”

We’ll all miss our beloved Plant Sale traditions and face-to-face reunions with old friends at City Farm. But, we’re grateful to be able to offer you the same fabulous plants you’ve been looking forward to this year, despite the pandemic.

Rest assured, Rich promises, “next year we’re going to come back bigger and better.”



*Taking a stand: Alejandra, Rex and Rich staying safe in the greenhouse.*



# Pandemic *Cont'd from front page*

**Here are other, specific ways SCLT is responding to the crisis:**

## **Food Access**

Preserving the Plant Sale to support home and community gardeners, as well as local nonprofits, has been our biggest challenge this spring.

“I knew we couldn’t distribute thousands of plants safely in one weekend, so we designed an online ordering system with prepaid, curbside pickup, spread over seven days,” said Development Director Shana Santow.

Shana anticipates Plant Sale customers will take home roughly 15,000 plants, which significantly adds to the local supply of fresh produce. In addition, SCLT will donate 3,000 vegetable starts to gardeners in need, helping hundreds feed their families this summer and beyond. As in the past, SNAP payments will be accepted at the Sale. “My hope is that we reach as many people as we can,” said Shana.

This year we are piloting a program with Brown Family Medicine, the Pawtucket YMCA and Groundwork RI, funded by the Integra Community Care Network, that will benefit 20 Pawtucket families enrolled in Medicaid. Each family will receive a bi-weekly share of fresh produce grown by farmers in our Produce Aggregation Program. Families will also receive nutrition, exercise, cooking, and gardening education. Thanks to a grant last month from the COVID-19 Response Fund, 10 additional seniors in Pawtucket will also participate. “Data shows that when people have access to fresh produce and other health supports they have better health outcomes,” said SCLT Project Director Jazandra Barros.

## **Community Gardens**

Right now, our network of community gardens in Providence, Pawtucket and Central Falls provides garden-fresh food to 3,000 people per year. This number grows annually as we open and expand our properties. This spring we have new plots at the Charles Street and Sideyard Community Gardens.

To keep gardeners safe, Community Gardens Coordinator Andrew Cook has been reaching out to garden leaders about social distancing protocols. He has posted information about COVID-19 at every SCLT-owned garden, translated into the languages most used at each, including Kirundi, Swahili, Nepali and Hmong. Staff are building hand-washing stations at gardens and farms, and will be providing face masks to farmers and their families.

## **Support for Farmers**

Craig Demi, SCLT’s Operations Director, says staff have called each farmer in our Produce Aggregation Program about the coronavirus, and that they speak regularly about how it’s affecting their operations. “Some farmers are keeping production the same, hoping to take advantage of new marketing possibilities, while others are scaling back their staff,” he said. “Everything changes from week to week, so some aren’t sure about their production plans at this point.”

Craig and other staff are advising farmers on implementing safe work protocols, marketing opportunities and loans or grants related to COVID-19. Training workshops will be cancelled, or postponed, but staff will offer remote or in-field training.

## **Farmland Access**

Following a Farmland Access Mixer in January attended by 80 people, SCLT staff and other members of the RI Land Access Working Group are continuing to facilitate conversations between landowners and land seekers.

This summer, SCLT is partnering with Movement Ground Farm to grow on SCLT-leased land in Tiverton. We will sell half of the food harvested there through SCLT’s Produce Aggregation Program.

We know that increased unemployment and disruptions in the food supply will perpetuate negative and disproportionate outcomes in communities of color. Sebastian Interlandi, SCLT’s Director of Programs, is advocating for a response that includes making more farmland available for people who can build the local food supply in communities where fresh, affordable food is scarce. Two potential new sites are in Newport County and another two are in North Kingston.

Safeguarding access to healthy food is especially critical so we can help the most vulnerable among us, in particular, to stay strong. It is only through investments that SCLT and our supporters have made over the past 40 years that we are able to rely on community gardeners and urban and rural farmers to help when our communities are in crisis.

We are committed to helping gardeners, farmers and their families make it through this dark time. When the virus is behind us, we’ll resume building more farms, gardens, and food businesses for a healthier future.



**In a time of financial insecurity, SCLT is especially dependent on loyal donors to help us navigate food sector disruptions as well as opportunities, and to sustain our ongoing work with low-income gardeners and farmers.**

**Please support us if you can!**

## This committee knows: gardening is essential

If you've been to a Plant Sale in the past 15 years, you probably recognize Roberta Groch. She's one of the tireless volunteers who works as a cashier, rain or shine, the entire weekend.

Like so many, she says it's her favorite event of the year (and not just because it's where she can buy Cherokee Purple tomato starts). She loves seeing how happy everyone is at the Farm, discovering new plants and anticipating being in their gardens again.

A city planner by trade, Roberta has served on SCLT's board of directors since 2006 and chaired the Plant Sale Committee for the past four years, working closely with many long-time volunteers.

Soon after convening this year's Committee on March 9, she realized Providence was not going to issue permits for large events because of the coronavirus. "I was sure it wasn't going to happen," she recalls.

Not much later, she got a detailed e-mail from SCLT's Development Director, Shana Santow, laying out how they could save the event by putting it online. Roberta's response was emphatic: "This is so crazy! How's Rich going to grow all those plants without his staff and volunteers? There's so much to figure out!"

It did seem like a logistical reach. City Farm grows roughly 20,000 plants every year, including hundreds of different varieties, and hosts 2,000 people at the event.



*SCLT board member and Plant Sale Committee Chair Roberta Groch (left, with Judith Queen) and other volunteers play a huge part in making the Plant Sale a success every year.*

But this spring, the Committee in particular, was determined to make it happen.

"Folks need access to plants for nutritious food now more than ever, as well as the cathartic value that gardening provides," said Shana. "I've watched other businesses in different industries adapt and thought, 'if they figured out a way to do it, why can't we?'"

Over the following weeks, Plant Sale Committee members, including Shana and Rich, pulled everything together behind the scenes. Roberta marvels at the enormous amount of work it's taken. "It's such a wonderful event, and we're thrilled to be able to keep it going this year," she says.

"I think people are just going to be so happy to get their plants!"

—Jenny Boone, Grants & Communications Manager



**SOUTHSIDE COMMUNITY LAND TRUST**

Southside Community Land Trust's mission is to provide access to land, education and other resources so people in Rhode Island can grow food in environmentally sustainable ways and create community food systems where locally produced, affordable and healthy food is available to all.

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