



Growing for Good

SOUTHSIDE COMMUNITY LAND TRUST

Fresh news from Southside Community Land Trust

FALL 2023

Land to call their own

They were Providence’s first urban farmers, and their descendants form the backbone of today’s urban agriculture movement.

Hmong refugees began arriving in 1976 in the city’s South Side, where they were resettled from Thai refugee camps after the Vietnam War. They helped found SCLT in 1981, and were instrumental in creating the Broad Street Farmers Market in 2002. They make up a large portion of our community gardeners and 40% of the lease-holders at SCLT’s rural farms, selling significant amounts of produce through our Farm-to-Market Center.

Blia Moua, who runs Wilson Community Farm with his wife Mai Lee, describes his people’s enduring passion for growing food: “We gave up our land in Laos,” he said. “When we came here we needed a place to teach our children how we planted crops in our country. We needed to cook our food to remember Laos, and to show them how hard we work.” He added, “We needed to teach a lot of things.”



Chang Dang Xiong at the Hmong United Farm in Cranston, circa 2010.

The Hmong ethnic group originated in China, which many left under duress close to 200 years ago for Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam. In Laos, they lived peacefully in isolated villages in the mountains, subsisting on what they grew. Most had never seen cars before they were recruited by the CIA to fight against Communists in their midst during the Vietnam War. After the American withdrawal in

Cont’d on back page

With USDA funds, SCLT-network farmers feed thousands in need



SCLT’s Food Program Coordinator Kakeena Castro fills the van with local produce shares before making a delivery.

SCLT is known for our programming to bring equity to local food production and access. Within this work, the collection, or aggregation, and distribution of fresh produce has been turbocharged since 2022, when SCLT and other food sector partners entered into an initial \$475,000 contract with the state. The contract was funded by a \$400 million federal investment to fortify food supply chains in 46 states, with an emphasis on supporting farmers of color, aggregators, and food-insecure individuals.

The USDA’s Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement program emerged in response to the pandemic, “to procure and distribute local and regional foods and beverages that are healthy, nutritious, unique to their geographic areas and that meet the needs of the population,” according to the USDA. “The funds will help build and expand economic opportunity for local and underserved producers.”

LFPA funding grew to \$864 million in 2023, with a total of \$1.7 million coming to Rhode Island through June, 2025. Here, the Department of Environmental Management has subcontracted with Farm Fresh RI to use its partnerships with SCLT, the African Alliance, the Commercial Fisheries of RI, and the RI Food Policy Council to buy and distribute locally grown produce and seafood.

Cont’d on page 2





Transplanted to Rhode Island, Hmong have built a thriving legacy

Dear friends,

SCLT's impact has expanded in a big way in 2023. One reason for this is the added capacity of 404 Broad Street and our Farm-to-Market Center. Another is our participation in the ARPA-funded Local Food Purchase Assistance program offered by the USDA. This funding has enabled us to connect food grown by farmers in our network with 9,750 people this year alone. At a time of rising food insecurity, the program has made a crucial difference in many Rhode Islanders' lives.

SCLT's ability to make this difference is rooted in decades of partnering with Rhode Island's Hmong community. We couldn't fulfill our mission without the skills, determination and generosity of thousands of Hmong gardeners and farmers. This newsletter

features two stories about the community's impact on and leadership of food system change in cities and towns across the state.

We are all stakeholders in this effort. Please do your part to keep up the momentum by contributing to our 2023 Annual Fund by using the enclosed envelope or going to our secure website: southsideclt.org/donate.

With gratitude,

Margaret DeVos
Executive Director

Rochelle Bates Lee
President, Board of Directors

USDA funds give major boost to state's emerging farms *Cont'd from front page*



Garmai Mawolo at the Armory Park Farmers Market.

"We love partnering with SCLT because of its deep roots in the community and its ability to so effectively work with farmers," says Farm Fresh's Director of Value Chain Strategy, Eva Agudelo. "SCLT meets the mission of this program perfectly."

Farmers growing on SCLT land have been selling their produce through our Produce Aggregation Program for the last five years, distributing it to people through our community partners and food relief agencies in Providence, Pawtucket and Central Falls. This includes our VeggieRx partners

Integra Community Care, Lifespan Hospital and Clínica Esperanza.

With LFPA funding, SCLT has significantly increased the amount of fresh produce it buys from 27 farmers in our network and provided it free to roughly 7,650 of the state's most vulnerable children, adults, and seniors in 2023. These

include 5,000 students in the Providence public schools through our collaboration with Sodexo and 2600 individuals who've received free produce through our community partners and from produce giveaways at events in the neighborhoods where SCLT works. LFPA also funded 50 additional VeggieRx participants this year. The complex logistics of sourcing and distribution has been overseen by SCLT's Kakeena Castro and Amelia Lopez.

Partnership for Providence Parks, an early SCLT aggregation buyer, has received free LFPA-funded food to disperse in 2023. Helene Miller, lead organizer for the nonprofit says, "With bi-weekly distributions at eleven recreation centers between July and November, communities across Providence receive hundreds of pounds of fruits and vegetables to feed bodies, minds, and souls."

SCLT has given away LFPA-funded produce at more than a dozen community events this year, including collards and kale, carrots and garlic, tomatoes and eggplants, and other seasonal favorites. After receiving a bag of produce, an attendee at one such event remarked, "I work hard for my money and I want my family eating right, so this is awesome."

Beyond the impact on those receiving produce, this program has been a boon to local farmers. Those selling through SCLT's Farm-to-Market Center are on track to earn \$190,000 in 2023, doubling the previous year's total.

Garmai Mawolo, who grows at Urban Edge Farm, feels the "big difference between going to the market and not knowing what you'll sell," and receiving regular payments for all the produce she can grow because of the influx of LFPA funding.

As food insecurity continues to increase, all eyes are on how to sustain this funding.

"It's a major topic of concern," says Eva Agudelo. "Senator Markey and Senator Reed are working on it," along with others at the federal and state levels. Many hope there will be funding in the next Farm Bill.

Stay tuned.

Jenny Boone, SCLT Grants & Communications Manager
Sam Shepherd, SCLT Grants & Communications Coordinator





Fellow gardeners, family, and guests gathered to honor Ka Xiong at Peace & Plenty Community Garden in October.

Ka Xiong's spirit lives on at Peace & Plenty Community Garden



Approaching its 40th birthday, Peace & Plenty is today one of the oldest of SCLT's community gardens. But the Elmwood oasis was still in its infancy when Ka Xiong first put her hands into the soil. Vibrant at 79 years old, Ka was a master of DIY and an experienced

herbalist, known for taming climbing vines with ribbon scraps and sharing her herbal remedies with other gardeners.

Born in Laos, Ka married and had a daughter. After the death of her husband and a stay in a Thai refugee camp, she resettled in Providence in 1990. **Over more than three decades in the city, Ka built connections that transcended cultural and linguistic barriers.** Exclusively traveling by foot the dozen blocks from her home to the garden, she carried a tool basket on her back, regularly stopping on her route to dole out produce to passersby or to remove errant sidewalk weeds. Ka spread her bounty in the garden, burying a finger in the soil of fellow gardeners' plots and dropping in her coveted heirloom bitter melon seeds with a smile.

On August 6, 2022, Ka was struck by a vehicle while crossing Potters Ave, succumbing to her injuries the following morning. This year, under cloudy October skies, loved ones, gardeners,

community members, and legislators Senator Ana Quezada and Mayor Brett Smiley gathered at Peace & Plenty to remember Ka's life. Though Ka stood shy of five feet tall, her legacy here is towering. Marking the end of the first growing season without her in decades, mourners shared memories of Ka's kind and giving nature.

"Ka was a beloved member of the community. Her death was an entirely preventable tragedy," niece Robin Xiong said.

Signage was unveiled at the garden memorial, designed in partnership with the Cityside program at The Wheeler School, detailing the story of Ka's life. Since her passing, many in Ka's circle have gotten involved in efforts to improve public safety, engaging with legislators and community organizations to enact policies that protect pedestrians and avert vehicle-related deaths in Providence.

Peace & Plenty Garden Leader Doug Victor invited those gathered to choose a strand from a basket of colorful ribbons, left behind by Ka in anticipation of the next growing season.

"Ka's story deserves to be told and her life deserves to be remembered," Victor said. A rainbow of ribbons now decorates the garden's fence, a colorful reminder of Ka's enduring presence in the community.

— Sam Shepherd, Grants & Communications Coordinator

Thank you to our corporate, foundation, and government funders

CONTRIBUTIONS OF \$2,000 AND ABOVE TO SCLT'S PROGRAMS & OPERATIONS, JANUARY-JUNE 2023

Amica Companies Foundation

Anita L. Stafford Charitable Lead Trust

Bank of America Charitable Foundation

Center for Mediation & Collaboration RI

Citizens Bank Foundation & LISC RI,
Growing Communities Initiative

City of Providence, Department of Art,
Culture + Tourism

Haffenreffer Family Fund

Fidelity Foundation

Oomph, Inc.

Providence Rotary Charities Foundation

Rhode Island Foundation

State of Rhode Island,
Governor's Workforce Board

State of Rhode Island,
RIDEM Specialty Crop Block Grant

Tides Foundation

USDA Agricultural Marketing Service,
Local Food Purchasing Assistance

USDA National Institute of Food &
Agriculture, Beginning Farmer &
Rancher Development Program

USDA National Institute of Food &
Agriculture, Community Food Project

USDA National Institute of Food &
Agriculture, Food Safety
Outreach Program

USDA Natural Resources
Conservation Service

USDA Office of Partnerships & Public
Engagement, 2501 Program

Land to call their own *Cont'd from front page*



Improvements coming: An October meeting at the Hmong United Farm brought together (left to right) Annie Regan, Kylie Chartier, and Kate Bousquet from USDA-NRCS of Providence County; Charles Kue of Hmong United; Blong Yang and Matt Tracy of SCLT.

1975, Hmong who had worked with the U.S. Army were persecuted and thousands were killed. Roughly 100,000 walked for days to reach safety in Thailand.

As soon as they came to Providence, they sought open spaces to grow crops to maintain their plant-based diet and cultural traditions.

(SCLT's Blong Yang recalls his mother, Kia, and others finding a nice spot to farm in Roger Williams Park.)

In 1980, Bli's grandfather, Chuker Moua, a leader in the Hmong community, wrote to state officials at the Department of Environmental Management and the Department of Agriculture, making the case for a piece of land of their own. The community was granted a lease for 11 acres in Cranston's Curran State Park, where they built the Hmong United Farm.

The farm has been used by hundreds of families over the years, despite its limitations. It has a barely functioning well (but no power to run a pump), no irrigation pipes, and no reliable way to keep outsiders from entering the farm or illegally dumping trash. For years, Hmong growers transported a heavy generator back and forth from the city to operate the well.

This fall, the current President of Hmong United, Charles Kue, met with farmers, SCLT Land Access Manager Matt Tracy, and representatives of DEM and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service to discuss improvements to the farm. DEM and NRCS staff vowed to dig a new well (with a working pump) early next year, install signage, and build a reliable perimeter.

Meanwhile, Hmong United members are applying for grants for equipment and a shed to house it on the property. Bli recently won a \$10,000 grant from the American Farmland Trust for a plough and harrow to mow and till the land. Charles is hoping for a state-funded LASA grant to buy a tractor in 2024.

Talking to Hmong growers you get the impression they spend all of their free time working their land. Architectural draftsman Phillip Yang leaves his office every day during the growing season and heads straight out to his fields at Urban Edge Farm.

"We don't do it for the money," he says. "We do it because we love it."

– 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.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Rochelle Lee, PRESIDENT	Summer Gonsalves
Luis Vargas, VICE PRESIDENT	Andraly Horn
Candace Cooney, SECRETARY	Mike Isenberg
Rafael Yepez, TREASURER	Patrick Mattingly
Appoline Alphonsine, YOUTH REPRESENTATIVE	Edith Paye
Anini Almanzar, YOUTH REPRESENTATIVE	Jyothi Subramanian
Sue AnderBois	George Watson
Greg Dantas	Louis Raymond, BOARD MEMBER EMERITUS

STAFF

Margaret DeVos, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Appoline Alphonsine, FOOD SYSTEM INTERN
Annette Alves, EVENTS COORDINATOR
Ellen Asermely, YOUTH PROGRAM COORDINATOR & CITY FARM ASSOCIATE
Tarshire Battle, SPECIAL PROJECTS DIRECTOR
Jenny Boone, GRANTS & COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER
Makeena Castro, FOOD PROGRAM COORDINATOR
Andrew Cook, COMMUNITY GARDENS NETWORK DIRECTOR
Grace Feisthamel, GRANT WRITER
Nancy Ferguson, FINANCE DIRECTOR
Joshua Heredia, FOOD SYSTEM INTERN
Isabelle Izobankiza, FINANCE COORDINATOR
Frank Jolifer, FOOD SYSTEM INTERN
Tammy Kim, OFFICE & ADMINISTRATIVE MANAGER
Amelia Lopez, FOOD ACCESS ASSOCIATE
Indira Miller, YOUTH PROGRAM COORDINATOR
Rich Pederson, CITY FARM STEWARD
Raffini, YOUTH PROGRAM DIRECTOR
Dan Roberts, PROPERTIES AND EQUIPMENT COORDINATOR
Shana Santow, DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR
Riley Schornak, FOOD SYSTEM INTERN
Samantha Shepherd, GRANTS & COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR
Ben Torpey, URBAN EDGE FARM MANAGER
Matt Tracy, LAND ACCESS MANAGER
Josselyn Velásquez-Florián, DEVELOPMENT COORDINATOR
Chandelle Wilson, EDUCATION PROGRAM MANAGER
Alicia Yang, FOOD SYSTEM INTERN
Blong Yang, COMMUNITY GARDEN NETWORK COORDINATOR

Southside Community Land Trust
404 Broad Street, Providence, RI 02907
401.273.9419 | www.southsideclt.org



@southsideclt