

My name is Tyler Ray, I am a lifelong North Philadelphia resident. I have seen my neighborhood evolve many times in the past few years. I recall when North Philadelphia was considered to be “shot-out”, to evolve to its current state of new construction, newly forming community-based organizations, and the reclamation of vacant lands.

This neighborhood is steeped in history, every generation who has lived in North Philadelphia can recall where their favorite childhood memory took place in this neighborhood. Everyone, regardless of location has that certain “place” that they remember. Whether it’s indoor or outdoor, this “place” holds a special value to us. Our greatest memories may have been created in this “place”. Living in North Central Philadelphia, there are many “places" people have enjoyed.

Being that this neighborhood is so historic, there are many locations that I consider to be my “place”. But one that I have firsthand seen the dedication to serving the needs of the community is the Life Do Grow farm established by the Philadelphia Urban Creators.

Located in the Hartranft neighborhood of North Philadelphia, Life Do Grow farm serves the poorest neighborhood of Philadelphia. The average annual income in this community is \$19,130. Hartranft is considered to be a food desert due to supermarkets being more than a 15 min walk away, and the majority of residents we serve are elderly.

My very first job as a teenager was at Life Do Grow farm. Many systematic issues that I was not aware of were instilled to me by my work at the Philadelphia Urban Creators. I was not the only one to experience this. Many youth, who may have had a hard time trying to find employment, or just emotional support have all found their home at Life Do Grow farm by the actions of the Philadelphia Urban Creators.

Our biggest impact was reclaiming 1 acre of vacant dumping land, and transforming it into a hub of community resources such as growing fresh fruits and vegetables, serving as an artistic venue, youth employment site, and being an entrepreneurship incubation center. The most well received actions from us was the growing of fresh produce.

As evident, most inner cities have fast food stores on every corner. Very rarely do they serve life-sustaining foods. The Urban Creators was able to serve as that middle man to give the People the foods they need and deserve. We always knew Hartranft was a food desert, but that did not become more obvious until the COVID-19 pandemic.

North Philadelphia was heavily affected by COVID-19. At the time, 60% of COVID hospitalizations in Philadelphia were African Americans and 39% of COVID related deaths were African American’s concentrated in North Philadelphia. With the forced closures of “non-

essential” businesses, many residents of North Philly who work multiple part time jobs are now in dire need of both money and preserving their funds. Food insecurity was truly recognized due to supermarket lines, and the elderly not able to leave their houses.

In July, 12th Street Catering reached out to us to form a partnership to help us fight food insecurity. With their help, we were able to add prepared foods to our Mobile Market in addition to the produce that we grew on our farm. We realized that we are one of the main food sources of the 19133 zip code

By mid-August, restrictions started to loosen up. We decided to scale back from traveling around North Philadelphia, and focused on bringing people to our farm.

Even though people were appreciative of the food and supplies, there was still a disconnect between the food and where the food was sourced

We wanted to still stress the importance of land sovereignty and the production of organic produce.

Since the farmland is 1 acre, we also used this opportunity to allow local businesses to vendor at our farmers markets in our way to support the local economy.

By the end of 2020, Urban Creators was able to provide 61,000 lbs of produce, 32,310 lbs of prepared food, 21,300 diapers, 94,872 fem. hygiene products, and 350 books.

We are currently unsure if we can continue our impact next year. The lease for the farm is officially over in February of 2022, with no guarantee of renewal by the City government. While we are in open communication with the City and the Land Bank, there are still many deed restrictions that are in place that would not allow us to function the same way ever again. This problem is also larger than Urban Creators. Many urban gardens and farms are also at risk of their land being stripped away by private development regardless of their community impact. I ask that when the notion of food insecurity is discussed, the conversation of land sovereignty, and the recognition of communal ownership is also included. The biggest opponent of food insecurity is community gardens and farms, but the access to ownership of these lands is far too difficult. Without legal aid to protect community gardens and farms, the conversation of food insecurity will always continue.

Thank you.