VISTA Project: Urban Farm Incubator Network

The urban farmer training program and incubator farm network seeks to mitigate low food access and low community resiliency in Marion County by training urban farmers and supporting community-based food production in a high-poverty neighborhood of Indianapolis. From 2015-16 a beginning farmer program was adapted to the urban context, with a business planning course and a farm incubator space where urban farmers can obtain hands-on experience with little to no upfront costs. Graduates of the business planning course program produced a business plan and strategies for overcoming the unique constraints of growing on urban land. The incubator sites were offered, via a competitive application process, to beginning farmers for free. Farmers will begin cultivating on the incubator site in April 2016 and will participate in workshops and community building activities. These two programs jointly seek to transform urban land into more productive space, generating food, entrepreneurs, and stronger communities. In addition to pioneering a training and incubator farm program for Purdue Extension, the proposal includes partnership with faculty to measure the impact of such programming, on both the soil and the social networks in the urban landscape.

The VISTA member will work through the Marion County Purdue Extension Service to mitigate urban land vacancy, low food access, and low community resiliency in Marion County by managing the incubator project site, coordinating program elements such as workshops and participant recruitment, developing a governance strategy for the incubator site, evaluating expansion to additional satellite sites, developing education opportunities for farmers within the farm incubator project as well as other growers in the neighborhood, and increasing inclusion of the local community by developing and expanding community outreach strategies. Overall, the program seeks to transform urban land into more productive space, generating food, entrepreneurs, and stronger communities by expanding the community’s network of resources to enhance economic and food security.