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## Features

Time Out Chicago / Issue 63: May 11–May 18, 2006

### Seeds of change

These local groups are cultivating a new future, one sprout at a time

By Judy Sutton Taylor Photographs by Hayley Murphy



THIS LAND IS HER LAND Stateline Farm Beginnings helped Patty McPhillips leave her urban job for life on the farm.

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**Stateline Farm Beginnings**  
Turning city slickers into country folk

"I always saw myself as a farmer, just not the kind riding a combine and tending to corn and bean crops," says Patty McPhillips.

A former garden designer in Orland Park, McPhillips traded in her hoe for heavy machinery and runs Fresh Harvest Farm in southwest suburban Frankfort. Thanks to the Stateline Farm Beginnings program, she oversees four acres of organic fruits and vegetables and has her own Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program.

Stateline Farm Beginnings is a farmer-led mentorship/education program designed for people interested in

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starting their own sustainable-farm businesses. The program—started last year at the CSA Learning Center at Angelic Organics Farm in Caledonia—includes a series of bimonthly seminars, internships and workshops. The Stateline Farm Beginnings training also helps people develop a network of resources, which they can use to start their own farm.

McPhillips is one of a growing number who are heading back to the land. “It was our dream to start a business that would make a difference in our community,” says Jeff Miller, a former Oak Park landscape architect. He and his wife Jen completed Stateline Farm Beginnings and launched Dea Dia Organics in Grayslake.

“We teach goal setting and business planning,” says Parker Forsell, farmer development coordinator at the center. “This isn’t theoretical, it’s farmers providing examples from their own farms.” One highlight for participants is the chance to connect with a mentor, Forsell adds.

Learning from experienced farmers helps McPhillips in the tough times, she says. “Hearing stories about how they’ve overcome the same issues helps me realize I’m not alone.”

To grow your own with Stateline Farm Beginnings, go to [www.CSAlearningcenter.org](http://www.CSAlearningcenter.org).

### Edible Garden Project

Picking radishes at recess



Instead of Nintendo DS and Bratz dolls, the playground talk at Evanston’s Dawes Elementary School often revolves around things like cooking with kohlrabi. The school’s Edible Garden Project, begun in 2004, has transformed the students into a bunch of little gourmands, project founder Lynn Hindman says.

“The culture of the school has changed,” says Hindman, a retired Dawes teacher who created an organic garden on the school grounds. “The kids are interested in cooking, and the parents are more involved in what happens here.”

Hindman modeled her garden after Berkeley, California’s Edible Schoolyard. In both gardens, the kids plant and tend to the crops, then reap the fruits (and vegetables) of their labor.

“We conduct tastings of what we harvest at tables around the garden, and it’s then that the children are transformed,” Hindman says. “We give them a chance to savor textures, feels, smells. They get a sense of what good food is, and that’s not easy to do in our culture.”

But managing the Dawes garden hasn’t been easy: The Midwest’s short growing season and the school’s shoestring budget pose formidable challenges, Hindman says. Still, she wants to establish gardens in all Evanston schools, using Dawes as a model. “We want to mentor parents and teachers who want to do this, who see what a garden like this can do for curriculum and to combat childhood obesity,” she says.

To learn more lessons about the Edible Garden Project, e-mail Lynn Hindman at [lhynd@mac.com](mailto:lhynd@mac.com).



### Organic School Project

Replacing McNuggets with mesclun



Caterer Greg Christian says his true calling is to heal people—a lot of people—with food. “And not just some rich folks up in Lake Forest,” he says. “I want to change the way we feed our children.”

So Christian founded the Organic School Project to do just that. Starting this fall with a pilot program in three Chicago Public Schools, Christian aims to raise kids’ food-consciousness by serving them fresh, organic meals prepared with locally grown and raised ingredients—some from gardens the kids will tend themselves. “If all kids are eating is McDonald’s and Coke, we’ve got to get them to reconnect with the food source,” he says.

Christian wants to create a “mindful curriculum”—i.e., include instruction in things like yoga and relaxation techniques along with nutrition and cooking. His goal is to run the program in schools with different ethnic makeups to gauge what works within different cultures. “Meatloaf isn’t universally appealing, you know? The food shouldn’t all be the same,” Christian says. He’s already settled on two of the schools: McCorkle Elementary on the South Side and Louisa May Alcott School in Lincoln Park.

Christian has lined up researchers from Loyola University to evaluate the program, and he hopes to eventually partner with food-industry players like Perdue to make this a universal effort.

“I want to prove that if kids eat better and relax a little more, their grades will go up, their waistlines will shrink and they’ll be a lot calmer,” he says.

**To get schooled on the Organic School Project, write Greg Christian at [greg@gregchristian-catering.com](mailto:greg@gregchristian-catering.com).**