

Published September 16th, 2009

## Residents Eager to Participate in Urban Farmers Pilot Program

By Cathy Tyson



Julia Myall's backyard, future home of a bounty of organic produce; plant-covered building in background is the future home of a chicken coop Photo Cathy Tyson

You provide the land and water and get free abundant fresh organic produce; The Urban Farmers provides expertise and labor. That simple concept has taken off like wildfire in Lafayette. The organization was looking for 20 homeowners to sign up their backyards for the pilot project, now there are 115, and counting, locals who want to get in on it. "The response has been unbelievable," said Siamack Sioshansi, Urban Farmers' director, all via word of mouth and in Lafayette school e-newsletters.

"It's a revolutionary idea in Lafayette," said Yvette Lindgren, "we have a large lawn that is just not sustainable anymore. This is going to change the way people think of their backyards. We are really excited about it." Beth Ferree, PhD, another participant said, "The whole slow food and local food movements have engaged a lot of people's interest." A gardener herself, she adds, "There is something about working in the garden that's healing." Chef, cook book author, and kitchen designer with Jack London Kitchen and Bath Gallery Julia Myall has a dream backyard waiting to be cultivated. Spacious, fenced, with existing irrigation, lots of sunshine and natural drainage,

she can't wait for the Urban Farmers team to bring in and set up raised beds. Because she wants to educate fellow participants about how to prepare the vegetables in their boxes, she's looking forward to setting up regular free cooking classes in her future outdoor kitchen.

The concept was germinated this summer by Sioshansi's son, Cameron and a good friend and fellow Lake Forest College student, Alexander Agosta. They were home for the summer and unable to find employment, so were prompted by Sioshansi to list their passions. Water, the environment, pesticide, reducing carbon footprints were some of their concerns.

This list ultimately morphed into a business plan that engaged the young men for ten hours a day until they had to go back to school in Illinois. Sioshansi is the founder and past CEO of Object Ware, formerly with Apple and IBM, and has a tremendous amount of technical expertise. Drawing on his farming background, he is tending the fledgling non-profit and watching it grow exponentially while the students are away at school.

How exactly does it work? Backyard farmers will get their generous share of organic communally produced fruits and vegetables. Homeowners can participate as much or as little as they please. Urban Farmers growers will design, plant, cultivate and harvest. Neighbors who don't have space for a garden can purchase boxes of fresh produce by paying in advance for weekly deliveries throughout the year. Fees paid go directly to pay a living wage to growers, and a portion of each harvest goes to charity.

For more information on the project, or to sign up for a Community Supported Agriculture box to enjoy the bounty of neighborhood edible gardens, go to [www.theurbanfarmers.org](http://www.theurbanfarmers.org) and look for the contact us section. The Urban Farmers is looking for volunteers and interns, see website for contact information.

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