This conservation aims to preserve various kinds of plants. Because many types of plants are rare, therefore it is necessary to do conservation so that these plants do not become extinct. We also urge everyone not to damage the environment so that the sustainability of plants is maintained.

To build a neighborhood rooted food and land system through community leadership development and land-based strategies in West Philadelphia.

OUR MISSION

To build a neighborhood rooted food and land system through community leadership development and land-based strategies in West Philadelphia.
Executive Director Statement

Urban Tree Connection is a project that has developed out of a rich history of people, land, and the resolve to materialize a progressive change in Haddington, West Philadelphia.

There are many people, named and unnamed that have contributed to UTC's success. Whether brief or lasting, direct or indirect, each addition brings us to where we are today. For that, I am thankful for each of you.

This year, like many, we faced crises that tested our ability to forge ahead in our food sovereignty work. We fought to save Memorial Garden in our #NoDevelopmentWithoutCommunityInput campaign and navigated relentless heatwaves and droughts. We grounded ourselves in our vision and values, grew community, and skilled up.

A key lesson that emerged is we must ORGANIZE, ORGANIZE, ORGANIZE to build the people power we need to survive, and to build a thriving community and world. This age-old lesson proves itself critical at this moment in history. As Boggs wisely shares, we must restore our humanity; that sea level change requires great collective efforts. We invite you into this moment with us.

—GRACE LEE BOGGS

LOVE THE PEOPLE
FEED THE PEOPLE!

In solidarity,

Noelle Warford
The Team

Devin Esch
Food Distribution Coordinator

Jen Ruiz
Office Manager

Mike Jones
Land Stewardship Coordinator

Rebecca Fruehwald
VISTA & Outreach Coordinator

Sarah Almendarez
Community Organizer

Yarrow Briggs
Food Production Coordinator

Board of Directors

Ayanna Moore, Chair
Deb Bentzel, Secretary
Dustin Klein, Treasurer
Khari Graves

Lisette Enumah
Nekia Rosado
Kahfii King
Meg DeBrito
Urban Tree Connection (UTC) is a place-based project in Haddington, West Philadelphia that creates space for neighbors across ages to participate and take up leadership in building a community-governed food and land system.

Alongside organizers, activists, and political workers across the U.S. and Global South, we hold a vision of a **Just Transition**. In a just society, the political economy’s purpose is **NOT for the accumulation of wealth and power for a few**, but **FOR the social and ecological wellbeing of all people, living things, and the planet.**

Through the vehicles of food and land sovereignty, **UTC’s purpose is to develop progressive Black working-class leadership in Haddington.** Through self-determining practices and collective work we are developing our vision, skills and practices to usher in and lead a more just world.

**FOOD SOVEREIGNTY, DEFINED BY HADDINGTON LEADERS:**

"**We, the people of Haddington, recognize, honor and celebrate our right to real, locally grown food. We claim health, wellness and a regenerative (life-giving) relationship with the earth as part of our heritage. We nourish our minds and bodies through community care, cultural traditions and the sharing of knowledge across generations. We choose joy and self-empowerment as we work together to care for each other and our neighborhood.**"
Building A Community-Led Food & Land System

UTC members working together, with the land to grow cultural foods using regenerative practices

Neighbors leading efforts to supply the community with fresh local produce

Growing skills and collective action to sustain a food/land system that meets critical needs

LOVE THE PEOPLE
FEED THE PEOPLE!
Production

Together UTC’s two main sites of food production, Neighborhood Foods (NF) Farm and Pearl St. Community Garden, grew over **2,500 pounds** of food in 2022!

At the end of 2021, we held our annual crop planning meeting with neighbors to determine crops grown this season. Here are some crops we grew:

- Root veggies: carrots, onions, beets
- Leafy greens: kale, lettuce, swiss chard
- Culturally important crops such as okra and heritage varieties of tomatoes
- Medicinal herbs and flowers such as lemon balm, calendula, and mint

**SPECIAL PROJECTS**

- NF Farm: new benches, hand-washing station and upgraded counter space at the pavilion
- Queen’s Garden: a multi-barrel rain catchment system which provides an accessible source of rainwater for the garden

*Special thanks to Justin Levy whose skills and labor helped make these projects possible*
As the droughts and heatwaves worsened this Summer, agroecology practices guided us to build resilient people and crops.

- **Making strong soil**: we enriched our soil using compost, natural amendments like lyme and potash, and no-till methods

- **Planting resilient crops**: we planted organic, heritage crops and used traditional Indigenous growing methods like companion planting

- **Introducing beneficial pollinators**: we grew pollinator plants like sunflowers & echinacea, and introduced beneficial insects like butterflies, ladybugs & praying mantises

When the growing got tough we asked our strong system of partners for help. Here’s the support they provided us:

- **Carversville Farm Foundation & Sankofa Community Farm**: provided plant starts to NF Farm and Pearl St. Garden throughout the growing season

- **Xerxes Society**: provided pollinator plants and insects

- **Philadelphia Orchard Project**: made multiple visits to Conestoga St. Orchard to support tree health, landscaping, and planting new crops & flowers
In 2022, UTC continued our **second year of the Food Sovereignty Share Program (FSS)**. Co-created with block captains, FSS develops the leadership of neighbors, builds an engaged membership through a ‘share’ food distribution model, and raises consciousness through food sovereignty practices.

As conditions in Haddington change and therefore impact the lives of neighbors, we adapt our programming in response. Based on member feedback, we made the following changes this season:

- Each block received produce biweekly
- An emphasis on member participation through monthly 4th Saturday workshops and the Fall Farm Party

This season we focused on developing and uplifting the leadership of our Food Sovereignty Leaders (FSL). They were actively engaged and played key roles in:

- FSS Member recruitment & retention
- Weekly food share distribution
- Community outreach & check-ins
- End of year member surveys
One of our newest additions to the FSL team, Mr. Garry never fails to bring joy to our work. Here is what he enjoyed about the season:

"...I enjoyed interacting with my neighbors distributing produce. The events that UTC had during the Summer were very informative. I enjoyed all the produce I received this year. To me, Food Sovereignty means a source of naturally grown vegetables locally, without the preservatives and that didn’t come from a supermarket."

In addition to her 2nd season as FSL, Lisa and her daughter Mila started growing at our Pearl St. Community Garden. This experience increased her understanding of food sovereignty:

"Food Sovereignty in Haddington means options and accessibility. I loved the experience of growing this year (my first year!), but more than producing was the agency around being able to give it a try, knowing how and having a resource to explore that potential."

As a seasoned member (3 years), Ms. Mary recruited and trained Mr. Garry to become a FS co-lead on their block. Here is how the program impacted her:

"The Food Sovereignty Shares provided vegetables and herbs to the neighborhoods that lacked understanding of nutritional value. They received the free vegetables and herbs along with the People’s Forum, which gave information and education on how the vegetables and herbs are grown. Through this, some of the older neighbors began to remember their farm years."
Food Sovereignty Leaders

A new FSL this season, we were blown away by the 30 members Miah recruited across several blocks. Here is what she shared about being a FSL:

“...Seeing happiness in my hood. It was a great season. I hope to do more with bringing in the youth!”

After helping shape the pilot stages of this program in 2020, Sheila returned as an FSL leader. Some of her highlights from the season included:

“...Attending end of season Fall Farm Party, watching all the people who came and supported the farm. Also this season, I had a chance to pack [food sovereignty share] boxes [on harvest day], and it made me more appreciative. Food Sovereignty meant knowing my residents had access to fresh produce from UTC available to live a healthy life. Everyone should see and work the farm.”

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Working together here’s what the FSS Program accomplished in 2022:

- Coordinated with 5 Food Sovereignty Leaders to recruit 74 families across 6 blocks
- Welcomed 2 new Food Sovereignty Leaders to our team
- Distributed 814 share boxes between June and October
- Distributed 11 editions of UTC's community newsletter, The People’s Forum, to connect neighbors to events and activities at our farm and gardens
Community members became actively engaged this Spring, by joining our efforts to save Memorial Garden from development.

Direct Participation

In 2021, UTC partnered with Urban Health Lab & Pennsylvania Horticultural Society to redesign Memorial Garden.

We canvassed neighbors and held two community meetings to create a design informed by their concerns and desires. Memorial Garden is not just for neighbors but by neighbors.

In April, the rebuild was completed and we hosted a re-opening event to welcome neighbors back to the park.

Days before the event we learned that Memorial Garden had been sold to a developer (alongside 35 other lots) and was at risk of being destroyed.

This led to UTC's first land justice campaign.

New Garden Features:
- Refurbished sign in dedication to the lives lost to violence
- Walking path for easy access to the whole garden
- New fence, trees, plants, and planters
- Natural sitting area for reflection

#No Development without Community Input!
Memorial Garden Campaign

#No Development without Community Input!

• We canvassed neighbors around the lots sold to the developer to inform them of the "affordable housing" being proposed in the community

• Neighbors overwhelmingly responded that they were not notified or included in the new housing project process, and expressed concern that the garden would be demolished

• Nearly 100 neighbors signed a petition and organizational allies wrote letters of support & testified to save Memorial Garden

• Ultimately, we were able to save half of the garden (learn more here)

• Memorial Garden is one of many gardens across the city that have been lost to development (learn more here)

• The fight to preserve Memorial Garden is one that continues

KEY LESSONS LEARNED

• It is crucial to organize, educate and empower neighbors to be involved in key decisions impacting their lives

• Land fights MUST build a strong & aligned base of community members and leaders

• Land justice is a critical to the development of UTC's food sovereignty work
Land Stewardship

After the Memorial Garden Campaign, it was more important than ever for community members to step into lead positions that encouraged learning, skill development and cultivated a relationship with the land.

UTC'S COMMUNITY GARDEN STEWARDS

Lavon & Khabirah

Lavon & Khabirah are members who live near Memorial Garden. As Land Stewards for Queen's and Memorial Gardens, they increased their knowledge and developed skills around:

- Planning & outreach for community events at the gardens
- Facilitation of check-ins, community agreements, and educational conversations with garden members
- Regenerative growing practices
- Climate, food, and land justice through UTC 4th Saturdays and a field trip to the People's Forum in New York City

Khadijah

As the garden steward for Pearl St., Khadijah helped grow food at Pearl St. Garden and built relationships with neighbors. Here is what she learned this season:

"...Although I had some experience...with gardening I discovered a lot of new ways to naturally grow (and) harvest, and gratitude for nature. I love seeing the ecosystem, bees bugs, soil and compost in action!"
Land Stewardship

We welcomed various new and returning members to NF Farm this season. Each of these stewards contributed to the success of NF Farm.

UTC'S FARM STEWARDS

Dan

In his 2nd year as Community Landscaper, Dan cared for all of the farm’s landscaping needs, even on very hot days. This season he grew his participation by attending 4th Saturdays, and community events; and deepened his relationships with other neighbors.

Tiana

During a challenging growing season, Tiana showed up mid-season and helped make the load lighter for everyone. As Lead Farm Assistant she planted and harvested crops, and maintained the natural beauty of the farm.

Ona

A new community member to Philly and Haddington, Ona stepped up as the farm’s Community Outreach Lead. They educated neighbors about UTC, NF Farm and upcoming events. They also participated in community meetings and conversations.

We appreciate each of our land stewards for all they contributed throughout the season!
NF Farm Stewards

UTC’s land stewards include young people and elders from our community. To grow an active and engaged base, a key aspect of our place-based work is that it is multi-generational. We facilitate spaces where collective wisdom and practice is valued.

Youth stewards Valencia, Bunny and Brooklynn spent their Summer learning about and using agroecology practices. They learned the historical, environmental, cultural and political importance of agroecology. Each steward brought fresh energy and perspective to the farm.

In her 2nd year of membership with UTC, Trina participated with food processing on harvest days and weekly food share distribution. She did outreach for events and led an elderberry syrup demo at the farm.

"Nurturing and being nurtured by the land, having the opportunity to nurture community from the rewards of a bountiful harvest, this is life sustaining. Nature building natural resilience is like heaven on earth...Building safe, life sustaining sanctuaries through commitment, shared land sovereignty, and collaborative community effort is truly peace on earth. Thanks to UTC stakeholders, and neighborhood sovereignty leaders. I am grateful for the blessings I receive from you and the sanctuary we are building in our community."

-Trina
Community Events

UTC held weekly and monthly events to provide neighbors with access to land and the resources to grow food for themselves, build community, and learn together.

WEEKLY EVENTS

- Community garden hours & compost drop-off at Queen's and Pearl St. gardens
- Harvest days at NF Farm

4TH SATURDAYS

From June to August, UTC held monthly 4th Saturday events at NF Farm. They included:

- Farm tours
- Community conversations on Black land-theft & sovereignty, health & wellbeing and trash & community care
- Hands-on gardening and medicinal workshops with herbs from the farm

GARDENER FEATURE

JR, a Haddington resident and new gardener with UTC, embodied 'direct participation.' He helped create a welcoming space for neighbors, and was an excellent caretaker of the land at Queen’s Garden. JR volunteered at the farm and participated in various community events. His contribution was invaluable this year.
Community Events

Community members participated in numerous community events this season. While the themes and activities varied, they shared a common goal to build unity and solidarity.

SPECIAL EVENTS

- **Memorial Garden Block Party**: Co-hosted with the [Party for Socialism and Liberation](#), this event focused on building community and featured a BBQ and water slide.

- **Seed-Keeping and Resources Day**: This event connected neighbors living near Pearl St. Garden with community resources, and introduced seeds-keeping practices.

- **Queen’s Garden Open House**: After finishing the Queen’s Garden renewal project at the beginning of 2022, we commemorated the space with a community celebration. The event included interactive garden tours and the unveiling of a new garden sign.

ANNUAL EVENTS

- **Fall Farm Party**: This year's party featured delicious food from [The People's Kitchen](#), a wonderful speech by FS Leader Ms. Mary, and an artistic land and community envisioning activity.

- **Harvest Party**: In addition to distributing fresh produce, the party featured a quilting workshop and a community education session led by the [Women's Community Revitalization Project](#).
Neighbors' participation had a significant impact on UTC this season by advancing our mission to build a community-rooted food system.

*What impact did our work have with community members?*

“As a Native Hawaiian woman, I’ve been raised to understand the **importance between an individual and the land they come from and care for**. Through my internship with UTC, I’ve **witnessed the strength, unity, and compassion found in the Haddington community**, creating family from crops to cats to community elders and to children, our future leaders.”

-Doulton, Land Intern

"Very often, in my professional life, I am asked, *'what can we do to stop the violence in our city?'*

My initial thought is this requires complex systemic change and then I think, Hey come home with me, let me show you how to build an urban Garden of Eden where peace prevails and justice reigns.

**No land equity, no justice, no peace.**”  -Trina, UTC member

".. I love the interaction with the community that often visited with their **children to participate in our daily gardening routine**... A few times the children came to ask me if I can assist them with burying their kittens or cat that passed away. **These small experiences truly touched my heart in a beautiful way.**"

-Khadijah, Land Steward
UTC has made great strides in transforming from a charity-based model to a political project rooted in food sovereignty and land justice. Here are some ways we continued this growth in 2022:

**EDUCATION**

- Collective study together to ground our practice in social movements and struggles
- Midwest Academy's Organizing for Justice training alongside organizers from across the country to develop our base-building and campaign development skills
- U.S. and International Agroecology delegations to Cuba to learn from their significant advancements in regenerative farming, healthcare & other social spheres
- Black Food Sovereignty conference hosted by the Agraria Center for Regenerative Practices

**SECTOR ORGANIZING**

UTC is committed to strengthening our sector by underscoring the importance of being community-based and rooted in economic and racial justice. We advanced these efforts by:

- Presenting at the PASA conference on our Food Sovereignty Share program
- Building with organizations across the city engaged in land justice struggles to protect gardens and farms.
- Highlighting land struggles across the city in the press
We would like to give special recognition to UTC’s community of supporters including our monthly sustainers, donors, funder partners and advocates that make our work, mission, and vision more possible.

**OUR MAJOR FUNDERS INCLUDED:**

- The Reinvestment Fund (PFJI)
- Alfred & Mary Douty Foundation
- Sprouts Community Foundation
- Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church
- Bread & Roses Community Fund
- Samuel S. Fels Fund
- Rite Aid Foundation
- Rosenlund Family Foundation
- Leo & Peggy Pierce Family Foundation
- Merck Family Fund
- Philadelphia Horticultural Society & City of Philadelphia (DHCD)
- Allen Hilles Fund
- Focus for Health Foundation
- Greater Kansas City Community Foundation
- First Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia
- Claneil Foundation
- Independence Foundation
- Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia
- Justice 40 Accelerator
- William Penn Foundation
- Aceso Foundation
- Armstrong Foundation
- WaWa Foundation
- Phillies Charities
- The University of Pennsylvania
- The Non-Profit Alliance Fund
- Justice Outside
- Feet First Philly (Clean Air Council)
- Millrace Foundation
- Berkowitz Foundation
- USDA/NRCS (Peoples Garden)

**Fundraising & Financials**

- Individual Donors: 6%
- Grassroots fundraising: 1%
- Government 3%
Looking Forward

2022 was full of unexpected challenges and opportunities. As we prepare for the year ahead, we know that new tensions will arise. That's why we rest, reflect, and set goals; so that we continue to be grounded for the times ahead.

2023 GUIDING GOALS

- Build a shared culture of respect and care at all UTC sites
- Increase visibility & awareness of gardens
- Continue building the political & social development of community members through direct participation
- Identify challenges within Haddington and ways we can provide support & be in solidarity with neighbors
- Grow our land justice work
- Continue working with community members and other grassroots organizations to build Black, working-class power

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