

UPDATE: St. Mary's Youth Farm

Building Community Access, Harvesting Bumper Crops

By Daniel Green

St. Mary's Urban Farm is flourishing as a center for community gardening, youth training and jobs, and ecological education and restoration. This past summer, youth interns cultivated and harvested an impressive array of produce, while SLUG crews landscaped the area to improve community access.

Construction is complete on new access pathways onto the site, including an entrance stairway leading directly from the Alemany Housing community to the farm. Using recycled concrete, the SLUG crew built a handsome and functional patio around the tool shed and office structures, and a walkway from the pedestrian entrance on Alemany Boulevard. The crew is now preparing tree basins with drystone recycled paving retaining walls, planting holes, and irrigation for this winter's planting of the main hillside orchard.

This past May consultants from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service teamed with equipment operator Ken Jackson to complete a compacted-earth pad for midscale composting of chipped brush and other organic "waste." Community composter and SLUG intern Salvador Velasco has been supervising the drop-off of woody tree and shrub prunings (open to all, Fridays and Saturdays from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.) and is helping to organize the composting project.

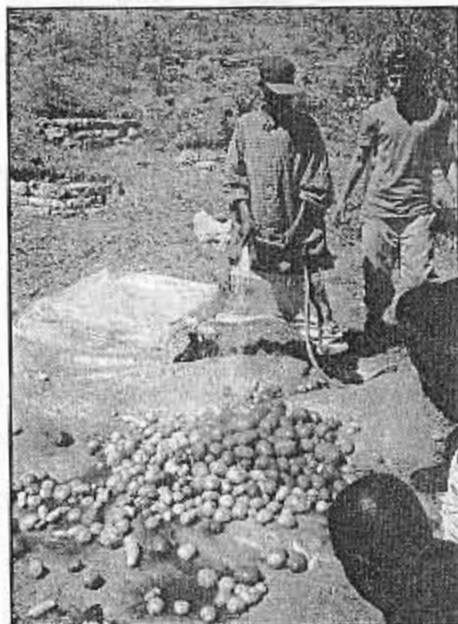
Meanwhile, Ken Hanks and the hipper crew continue to perfect the science of processing the brush into Tough Mulch" (for sale along with Mixed Mulch, at \$2 per bag at the SLUG office) and compost feedstock. In addition to building the compost pad, Ken Jackson has been putting the final touches on the pond/wetland system. A second shallow stormwater collection

basin was carved out above the existing seasonal pond. In preparation for the farm's future expansion, crews built a peninsular walkway between the two ponds, leading to an island where the farm's windmill will be located. The crew filled in a lower portion of the crop area that will be developed into a composting demonstration center.

A team of Youth Garden Interns, 25 members strong, completed a second summer at the farm, learning new skills and gaining valuable work experience while making the land more productive. In addition to a garlic crop which is now being used in SLUG's Urban Herbals vinegars, interns harvested bumper crops of lettuce, radishes, greens, beans and potatoes.

After the harvest the teens dug compost into the beds and prepared a rotation of buckwheat cover crop, which will be followed by another round of vegetables this fall. The youth have also been watering and maintaining the community garden, perennial borders, and orchard areas. Young fruit trees are thriving, and several of the apple trees are bearing their first crop of fruit.

The farm received a wave of public interest this summer. The "Festival at the Farm" on June 2 highlighted the Open Gardens Weekend. Visitors this season included U.S. Undersecretary of Agriculture Jim Lyons; staff from the



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Teen interns at Alemany unearth healthy crops of red, Yellow Finn, and Russian Banana potatoes.

California Integrated Waste Management Board; and work parties from the Overseas Development Network, The San Francisco Greens, The California Institute of Integral Studies, and Bike-Aid, which kicked off its 1996 cross-country fund-raising trip with a training ride out to Alemany and a couple of hours of gardening.

Add to that our faithful neighborhood volunteers, Seth, Ernesto, Cathy, and Judy, and all the community gardeners, youth activists, and environmentalists who have come to visit from places as far-flung as Seattle, Dallas, St. Louis, and Zimbabwe, and you get a sense for the vast number of people who have been excited and inspired by this project. ☀

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