



Live a New Ideal - Become an Urban Farm Family

Free Pass-along

By Wally Satzewich, Owner/Operator, Wally's Urban Market Garden

Notice – Proprietary Information – All Rights Reserved

This material is property of Wally Satzewich and Roxanne Christensen. They reserve all rights to the ownership, use, reproduction, distribution and publication of this document and the intellectual property herein. No copies for commercial use may be made whatsoever of the contents herein, nor any part thereof.

Copyright © 2008 Wally Satzewich, Roxanne Christensen

Permission for non-commercial use and distribution of ***SPIN-Farming: Live a New Ideal - Become an Urban Farm Family*** at sustainability forums, eco-expos, green gabfests and any other gatherings deemed appropriate by the authors can be obtained by contacting Roxanne Christensen at rchristensen@infocommercegroup.com

Copy and share ***SPIN-Farming: Live a New Ideal – Become an Urban Farm Family*** with others at sustainability forums, eco-expos, green gabfests or any other gathering that is deemed appropriate.



It's time to bring agriculture back home

Table of Contents

Meet the Family	4
City Farm Sites Become Available	4
A Plan Emerges	5
Product Line	5
Customer Base	5
Targeted Weekly Sales	6
Land Base	6
Major Start-up Investments	6
Delivery Vehicle	6
Irrigation	6
Growing Season	7
Farm Layout and Revenue Targets	7
Growing Plan	7
Planting the Farm	8
Debut Market in Late May	9
Summer Sales	12
Fall Sales	12
Year End	13
Looking to the New Year	13
Photos	
About the Authors	

*A society not only must have its ideals; they must from time to time, be re-constituted in a way that sparks our imaginations and guides our strivings. That is what is happening now. Across several countries, at countless sustainability forums, eco-expos and green gabfests, people are coming together to think things through again, make certain re-appropriations, create a new ideal. For many, especially those in cities, this new ideal includes farming. And so the question gets asked, **How can you farm in cities?** One way is described here. While the last few decades have seen many last harvests as cropland was turned into concrete, this is for those who will tend cropland amid concrete. May SPIN-Farming pave the way for many first harvests.....*

LIVE A NEW IDEAL - Become an Urban Farm Family!

Meet the Family

John and Betty are both in their mid-40's and have two teenagers, Allan, who is 15 and Lucy, who is 13. They live in a large northeastern U.S. city. Betty has a well-paying job, earning \$80,000 a year with a telecommunications firm. John, who is a software engineer, lost his job to outsourcing. He received a severance package and is now thinking about what to do next in life. John grew up on a family farm in a corn state. He had always felt guilty for having left the farm, but he had thought a city job was the future. Now he was unsure about things, but what he did know was that he did not want to work for a large company, and he wanted to be his own boss.

John's backyard was ripe for a farm...

Over the years John maintained his connection with his brother, Pete, who still farmed. Pete had read articles about people starting sub-acre urban farms all over the U.S. and somewhat jokingly suggested that, since John had left the family farm, he should start up another one. At first John laughed, but Pete started to explain how many cities were beginning to lease small parcels to farmers. He also described how people were farming in their backyards and front lawns. John's backyard was ripe for a farm, Pete claimed. Eventually John took the idea seriously. The idea of an urban family farm appealed to him in a way he couldn't quite understand. He had a feeling that he might have found a new future for himself.

City Farm Sites Become Available

When John started to do his online research on urban farming he was surprised at how big the movement seemed. It certainly looked like something important was happening. Since he came from a farm background, he easily connected with what he read. He certainly saw the value of a locally-based food system. One day John read in his paper that the city was beginning an experiment in local farming. This must be fate, he thought. He contacted the urban farm site project leader who explained that the city was offering an acre of land under a 5 year lease at a cost of \$1,000 per year. The city supplied water, and the area was already fenced. The city did not provide for any structures or farm or irrigation equipment; however there was a common area that included a restroom and a small covered seating area. John had to agree to use organic-based

farming methods and to keep his plot in production, well-maintained and clean of weeds. To be considered, farmers needed to submit a business plan. This all sounded very reasonable, if not generous, to John. He was particularly excited by the location, which was only a 20 minute drive from his house.

A Plan Emerges

John did further research on sub-acre farm models and based his business plan on that. He wanted to clear \$50,000 from his farm, which would boost the family income to well over the \$100,000 level. John planned on a three season operation, from April to late October. This would allow him an off-season in which he could do freelance software design to keep up his skills, or maybe just hang out at home and be a house husband. His farm would be a true family farm, putting to work all members of the family at one time or another. Betty said she was willing to help after work during the evenings and on weekends. The kids said they would help during the summer months when they were off from school. He gauged that between the four of them they could get all the farm work done without the expense of paid labor. From what he had read on sub-acre farming, he felt he could target gross farm income of \$66,000. He budgeted his total start-up and operating expenses at \$16,000.

Product Line

John's growing plan included a wide range of produce items that would provide a steady and consistent cashflow throughout his entire season. He planned on a minimum of 20 marketing weeks, extending from late May to late October. John's product line included beets, carrots, chard, cucumbers, green beans, garlic, herbs, lettuce, onions, potatoes, micro greens, radish, scallion, shallots, spinach and summer squash.

Customer Base

A big advantage to urban farming is its proximity to a variety of sales channels, and John decided to experiment with several of them. He wanted to offer a small Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program to 20 members at \$500 per share. This would provide his \$10,000 "seed" money that would easily pay for a large portion of the season's operating expenses. To make logistics easy, pickup would be at the city-owned farm site each week. This would also be a good opportunity for John to show off the farm. He approached several of his ex co-worker friends, and Betty spread the word at her office, to recruit CSA members. They sold out the 20 shares very quickly, as their friends were highly supportive and were kind of bemused with John's urban family farm idea. He also planned to participate in two weekly farmers markets, which were a 20 minute drive from his house, and to develop restaurant clients.

Targeted Weekly Sales

John worked out a marketing plan that set a total sales target of \$56,000 from two weekly farmers markets and restaurants. For a 20 week marketing period he targeted an average of \$2,800 per week. He targeted \$600 in sales from the Wednesday market, and at least \$1,700 at the Saturday market. He also planned for \$500 per week in restaurant sales.

Land Base

From his research John had learned that it was not necessary to have acres in production to earn significant income. John's farm would consist of the one acre of city land which, allowing for paths and infrastructure, provided 36,000 square feet of growing space. Along with his 2,000 square foot backyard and that of his neighbor's, which he would barter in exchange for produce, his growing space amounted to just about an acre.

Major Start-up Investments

John was surprised at how little investment was required. Relieved of the expense of a tractor, he decided to invest in a top-of-the line 10 HP rear tine BCS for \$4,500. When he told his brother, Pete exclaimed that he had to spend \$4,500 just for a tractor repair last summer. Being convinced of SPIN-Farming's high-road harvesting approach, John also budgeted \$4,000 for two used upright produce coolers which he would place in his garage where they would run off existing electrical outlets. Each cooler was 30 inches deep, 4 feet across, and 6 feet high. Other investments would include a garden seeder, a few standard-issue gardening tools, harvesting bins, market tables, display baskets and a digital scale, along with some garden hoses and sprinklers. Most of his gear could be bought at a local home hardware store and would last for many years. If repairs were needed, they would cost very little. Start-up investments totaled \$9,400, and John planned to pay for them out of his severance package. If all went well, he could recover all of his costs, easily, in the first year. Based on the sub-acre farm models he researched, John budgeted his operating expenses at \$6,600. Pete wished him luck and joked that he might follow in John's footsteps.

From his research John had learned that it was not necessary to have acres in production to earn significant income.

Delivery Vehicle

Since the family had two vehicles, one of which was a mini van, John could use them as his farm vehicles.

Irrigation

John decided to use a variety of irrigation methods. He didn't want to spend a lot of money putting in a fancy system that might not be appropriate for his diverse crop production, so he limited his equipment to several strip sprinklers connected to some garden hoses and a manifold. He used 25 foot sprinkler strips in some areas, such as in the carrot and leafy green plots, and he used soaker hoses in other areas, such as in the plot for the warm weather crops. He also planned on trying drip tape, drip hose and emmitors and also planned on hand watering many areas. He wanted to see what worked best for him in each area. This is in contrast to

conventional farmers who use large-scale irrigation systems requiring central pivots and wheel lines costing thousands of dollars, and who sometimes have to relocate their irrigation pumps due to fluctuating river levels. John was grateful not to have that kind of burden, and he could also feel confident of water quality since it is the city's responsibility to ensure a safe water supply.

Growing Season

John's growing season includes a usually frost-free May, but sometimes early to mid-May frosts occur. Summers can be hot but are usually accompanied by frequent rains. First fall frosts start during late September and early October, so warm weather crops, such as cucumber, beans, and summer squash can be damaged at this time. Cool weather crops can be grown throughout October, with snow usually arriving in late November.

Applying the SPIN relay cropping system, he planned on getting three different high-value crops, worth at least \$100 each, per bed from his own plot and that of his neighbor.

Farm Layout and Revenue Targets

John submitted his business plan to the urban farm project, and after several interviews he was ecstatic to be chosen as one of the first three "guinea pigs." As mentioned previously, in addition to the one acre city plot, John's land base would also include 2 backyards. John's backyard plot was 2,000 square feet. His neighbor's backyard plot was 1,500 square feet. Production in the two backyard plots was limited to leafy greens, micro greens and fresh herbs. John also used an additional 500 square feet along the side of his garage for micro greens planter production. He set up a small post-harvesting area on another 500 square feet just outside his back porch. All wash water was recycled back into the plots. He also constructed a non-permanent post-harvesting area on the city-owned farm site. It consisted of a few umbrellas and picnic tables and a few wash bins.

John's plan for targeting revenue was as precise as his cropping strategy. Applying the SPIN relay cropping system, he planned on getting three different high-value crops, worth at least \$100 each, per bed from his own plot and that of his neighbor. Including the micro greens area, he targeted \$9,000 in revenue from his home plot and \$4,500 from his neighbor's plot. At the one acre city-owned site, he targeted revenue of \$1,000 per 1,000 square feet of growing space, except for the carrot area. There, he targeted \$200 per 2 foot by 25 foot bed since he knew that carrots can be an extremely high value crop.

Growing Plan

As you would expect from a software engineer, John developed a very systematic and detailed growing plan. Here is what it looked like.

Urban Farm Family Model Growing Plan Item	Selling period
Baby dill beginning late May until end of season	available throughout
Basil beginning late May until end of season	available throughout
Cilantro beginning late May until end of season	available throughout
Lettuce - beginning late May until end of season	20 weeks
Micro greens - beginning late May until end of season	20 weeks
Radish - beginning late May/June and Sept./Oct	8 weeks
Salad mixes beginning late May until end of season	20 weeks
Scallion - beginning late May until end of season	available throughout
Spinach - beginning late May and then again in Sept./Oct	5-8 weeks
Beets (red, golden and chioggia) - beginning early July until end of season	15 weeks
Carrots - beginning early July until end of season	15 weeks minimum
Chard beginning early July until end of season	15 weeks
Potatoes - beginning early July until end of season	15 weeks minimum
Cucumbers - beginning mid-July until late Sept	8 weeks minimum
Dry garlic - beginning mid-July until late Sept	8 weeks minimum
Dry onions - beginning mid-July until late Sept	8 weeks minimum
Green beans - beginning mid-July until late Sept	8-10 weeks
Summer squash - beginning mid-July until late Sept	8 weeks minimum
Shallots beginning August until early October	10 weeks

Planting the Farm

Home Plot

John's first planting occurred the first week of April with several beds of spinach, lettuce, and scallion. He made several consecutive plantings until the middle of May, with each planting separated by a couple of weeks. At the beginning of May he planted several beds of radish. He began micro green plantings during the second week of May. His aim was to have all these crops ready for a debut market toward the latter part of May. Following the SPIN relay planting system, all beds would be replanted to other crops when initial harvests were completed in each bed. As mentioned previously, John aimed to plant and harvest at least three different crops in each bed.

Because it made both economic and environmental sense, John fertilized using all-organic soil amendments: alfalfa meal, blood and bone meal, coffee grounds from Starbucks, dried molasses, soybean meal, and wood ash. He then tilled his beds using his new rototiller which he kept in his garage at home.

Neighbor's plot

During mid-April John planted much of his neighbor's plot to beets and chard, as well as fresh herbs. He used the same soil amendments as in his home plot. He staggered some of his beet and fresh herb plantings, and initial planting was completed by mid-May. As with his home plot, each bed here would see the planting and harvesting of at least three different crops during the course of the season.

One Acre City-Owned Plot

At the beginning of April John arranged for a load of composted manure to be delivered to his city plot. It cost him \$300, and he used a wheel barrow to dump small loads all over the plot and then he used a rake to spread it around. In mid-April he borrowed his friend's mini-trailer to haul his rototiller to the one acre plot. After he unloaded his rototiller and looked out over the field, he started to appreciate how physically demanding farm work really can be. But he felt that he and his rototiller could manage it. He wanted to get an area prepped for his carrot, garlic, onion and shallot plantings. It took him all morning to till 33 beds for his initial carrot plantings. He then had an onsite lunch.

Betty helped quite a bit on the weekends, as well as the kids, and they were starting to feel like a farm family.

The two other farmers were there working their land too. Lyle was putting in a one acre garlic planting, while Barry was going to plant gourmet fingerling potatoes to fulfill a restaurant contract. They had lunch together under the sheltered seated area, and the three of them discussed their backgrounds and plans, and how they all came to be urban farmers. He immediately bonded with these other two farmers, and he also liked the freedom he sensed he was achieving. No boss, no career ladder to climb, just him, his farm, and his rototiller. After lunch, he set up the irrigation in the initial planting of carrots.

John came back the following day and waved to Lyle and Barry who were already working. Lyle was planting garlic, while Barry was rototilling. John set the sprinklers to water the carrot beds and started to rototill the garlic, onion, and shallot areas. Since carrots are "light feeders", he had not fertilized the carrot area, but he did add the same soil amendments to the other areas that he had used at his home plot. He then rototilled the areas to beds and was done by day's end. Over the next week he planted the beds to onion sets, garlic, and shallots.

Betty helped quite a bit on the weekends, as well as the kids, and they were starting to feel like a farm family. Lyle and Barry also had some family members at the farm, and it seemed like a holiday when they were all together. Lyle's wife, Carla, was the same age as Betty, and she also had a corporate job. She and Betty joked about their farmer-husbands who were turning them into weekend slaves. They liked being outside for the exercise and the change of pace it offered from their office environments, though. By the middle of May John's farm had been completely planted. All the crops were looking good, and those in his backyard were almost ready to harvest for the first farmers market.

Debut Market in Late May

By late May, some crops were ready to harvest. The coolers were plugged in and ready to go. The first farmers markets were coming up on Wednesday and Saturday, and the 20 member CSA was due to start. Here is how John's week went.

Monday:

John starts at 8:00 AM by harvesting a 1/2 bed of scallion which yields about 100 bunches. He washes and preps them himself and places them in the cooler. He has a quick lunch and then drives to the acre farm and does some watering and weeding. He gets home by 4:00 PM, and joins the kids, who had just arrived home from school, and together they start to prepare dinner. Lucy and Allan harvest some spinach and lettuce, as well as some radish and micro greens. John instructs them on how to make a salad. He expects them to become proficient at this task because he will be relying on them all summer for the salad mix business. After dinner Betty and Lucy harvest and wash 100 bunches of radish from their backyard plot, while he and Allan go to the acre farm to do some weeding. They work for an hour, and there is still time for Allan to get in a couple of hours of homework. Lucy finishes her homework after the radish work is complete. School will be over in a couple of weeks, and the kids are already looking forward to a summer of farming.

Tuesday:

John works entirely in the backyard plots today. In the morning he harvests, washes, and bags 100 .35 lb. bags of spinach. In the afternoon he harvests, washes, and bags 100 .25 lb. bags of salad mix. He makes dinner for the family and, after they eat, he goes to the acre by himself to get in some more watering and weeding. Betty does some weeding at home and then harvests a few planters of micro greens and washes and preps 50 .15 lb. bags.

Wednesday:

John loads up the mini van and arrives at market, which is only 20 minutes away, and sets up his table and produce which includes: 100 bunches of scallion, 100 bunches of radish, 100 bags spinach, 100 bags of salad mix, and 50 bags of micro greens. He follows the SPIN mix-and-match multiple unit pricing and sells the radish and scallion at \$1.50 per bunch or any 3/\$4.00. The other items are sold for \$3.00 per bag or any 2/\$5.00. When he sets up at market, which only has about 20 other farmer members in attendance, he notices he is the only one with produce! Many of the other produce growers have large operations that are more directed towards summer sales. This really offers proof of the micro climate advantage provided by urban farming. The market runs from 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM. John was sold out of everything by 1:00 PM . It seemed like he had talked non-stop for three hours. Customers were asking him where he got his produce. They had trouble believing that he had grown it in the city until he showed them photos. He became an instant celebrity. When he got home he counted up his sales and it was close to \$900. Betty was impressed and jokingly said she should quit her job. John was off to a better start than he expected and had a good feeling about the rest of the season.

Thursday:

In the morning, John receives a phone call from a restaurant that he had made a pitch to by showing photos of his plots. The chef placed an order for 100 bags of salad mix and 100 bags of micro greens and told him if he liked what he saw he would order on a weekly basis for the rest of the growing season. John's pricing was \$2.50/bag, with 1/3 lb. of salad mix

He follows the SPIN mix-and-match multiple unit pricing and sells the radish and scallion at \$1.50 per bunch or any 3/\$4.00. The other items are sold for \$3.00 per bag or any 2/\$5.00.

per bag, and .15 lb. of micro greens per bag. By 1:00 PM John processes the order and makes the delivery, and the chef liked what he saw. This order met his restaurant sales target, and from here on out he would turn restaurants down because he did not want to overextend himself. He is back by 2:00 PM and stops off at the city plot to water and weed. He is back home by 4:00 PM and makes dinner. The whole family is getting addicted to fresh salad and micro greens. After dinner, John and Betty do farming work, while the kids put in an hour of homework. Afterwards they help John harvest a bed of scallion. By 9:00 PM, they have prepped 200 bunches.

Friday:

John gets up early in the morning and starts harvesting, washing, and bagging spinach. By 10:00 AM he has 150 1/3 lb. bags of spinach. He then starts on the lettuce work, and by 1:00 PM has processed 100 .35 lb. bags of salad mix. He added a bit of chard and beet greens to the mix. He has a quick lunch, and does 50 .15 lb. bags of micro greens. When the kids get home, they all get dinner ready. Afterwards he and Betty do 150 bunches of radish and are done by 8:30 PM. Their plan for Saturday is for Lucy and John to go to market, while Betty and Allan stay at home and prep the 20 CSA baskets. Pick-up for the CSA members is at the city plot's post-harvesting station, from 12:00 noon and 1:00 PM on Sunday.

Saturday:

The market starts at 8:00 AM and ends at noon. John and Lucy load up the mini van and head off to market, which is only 20 minutes away, and are there by 7:00 AM. When the market opens, there is already a small swarm of people by their stand. Only one other vendor has spring produce, which amazes John. Next year he definitely plans on growing much more spring produce. His prices are the same as at the Wednesday market, and Lucy does a good job of interacting with customers. Lucy likes the excitement of the market and hopes some of her friends from school come by. By 11:00 AM they have very little left. By noon they are sold out. Sales total \$1,200. John is ecstatic. Their sales for the week were \$2,500, and they are just getting started! They get home by 1:00 PM and see that Betty and Allan have finished with the CSA baskets and have placed them in the coolers, ready to go for tomorrow. John proposes that they reward themselves by having a night out at the local restaurant that buys their greens. He wants to see how the chef prepares them so he can start doing the same at home.

Sunday:

Betty and Lucy take the baskets to the city plot for the CSA pickup between noon and 1:00 PM. All the members show up and are pleased by their first offering. They are amazed by the farm and remark that it's like going to the country without having to leave the city. Betty and Lucy stay on to do some watering and weeding and are back by late afternoon. In the meantime, John and Allan do some work in the backyard plots. John tills up some beds previously planted to radish and onion, and they replant them to more onion and radish. They also replant some micro green planters. They will wait another week to get another cut of spinach before tilling in the spinach beds. They will also try to get several more cuts of

The whole family is getting addicted to fresh salad and micro greens.

lettuce before turning in and replanting their early lettuce beds. By Sunday evening, the urban farming family goes to bed tired but looking forward to another week.

Summer Sales

By mid-summer the family was thriving on all the farming activity, and sales were going better than expected. Having the produce coolers really helped in managing workflow. Betty and John were glad to see that Lucy and Allan preferred being outside in the plots rather than killing time at the mall. John attributed his work ethic to being brought up on a family farm, so he's glad he's able to pass it on. Betty has been rewarded by the farm experience by having lost 10 pounds and gaining a good tan. All of them are entering their busiest time, ready for the challenge. They continued to service their restaurant client, their 20 member CSA and their two weekly farmers market. During some of their marketing weeks in summer their sales exceeded \$3,000. Carrots especially proved to be a big moneymaker for them.

A Typical Mid-summer Marketing Week Wednesday Market		A Typical Mid-summer Marketing Week Saturday market	
100	1 lb. bags of fingerling carrots	150	1 lb. bags of fingerling carrots
50	1 lb. bags of green beans	75	1 lb. bags of green beans
50	1.5 lb. bags of summer squash	50	1.5 lb. bags of summer squash
25	1 lb. bags of cucumbers	25	1 lb. bags of cucumbers
50	1 lb. bags of potatoes	75	1 lb. bags of potatoes
50	.35 lb bags of salad mix	50	.35 lb. bags of salad mix
25	.15 lb bags of micro greens	50	.15 lb. bags of micro greens
25	bunches of assorted beets	50	bunches of assorted beets
25	bunches of chard	50	bunches of chard
50	large bunches of scallion	50	large bunches of scallion
25	bags of assorted fresh herbs	50	bags of assorted fresh herbs
Total market sales:\$1,100		Total market sales:\$1,500	

Total market sales: \$2,600

Total restaurant sales: \$500

Total weekly mid-summer weekly sales: \$3,100

Fall Sales

In the fall carrots continued to be a cash crop. Production of their warm weather crops wound down, and they replaced them with radish, spinach, lettuce, and salad mix. Not many of the growers at market had any of these items in the fall, so they had a virtual monopoly on these items. They also did well with packaged garlic, onions, and shallots. The demand was prompting John to plan on expanding his garlic planting for next year. Lyle, the neighboring farmer with the one acre garlic planting, said he would sell some garlic to John for a fall planting. Barry, the other neighboring farmer who grew fingerling potatoes for a restaurant, offered to sell some potatoes to John for a spring planting.

A Typical Fall Marketing Week Wednesday Market	
100	1 lb. bags carrots
50	2 lb. bags potatoes
50	.35 lb bags salad mix
25	bunches assorted beets
50	.25 lb. bags spinach
25	bags chard
50	large bunches radish
50	large bunches scallion
50	.25 lb. bags garlic
25	1 lb. bags onion
25	.75 lb. bags shallots
25	.15 lb. bags micro greens
25	bags assorted fresh herbs
Total market sales:\$1,300	

A Typical Fall Marketing Week Saturday market	
100	1 lb. bags carrots
50	2 lb. bags potatoes
50	.35 lb bags salad mix
35	bunches assorted beets
60	.25 lb. bags spinach
25	bags chard
60	large bunches radish
60	large bunches scallion
50	.25 lb. bags garlic
30	1 lb. bags onion
25	.75 lb. bags shallots
35	.15 lb. bags micro greens
25	bags assorted fresh herbs
Total market sales:\$1,500	

Now that he and the family are more experienced, John will relay crop even more of his one-acre farm plot next year.

Total market sales: \$2,800

Total restaurant sales: \$400

Total weekly mid-summer weekly sales: \$3,200

Year End

By the end of October the family felt they had undergone a transformation. John and Betty had rediscovered farm living and its many lifestyle benefits. The kids had been diverted from becoming mall rats or couch potatoes. Lyle and Barry had become his best friends, and he looked forward to continuing to learn from them. During the last weekend of October, after John had rototilled the plots in preparation for winter, all three families gathered at John and Betty's for an urban farm family get together. There was much to celebrate. John had planned on making about \$2,800 per marketing week, but actually averaged \$3,000 per week. Combined with the \$10,000 CSA income, his gross farm income was \$70,000. The expenses were \$16,000, so he exceeded his net farm income target of \$50,000.

Looking to the New Year

Now that he and the family are more experienced, John will relay crop even more of his one-acre farm plot next year. He will increase the size of his garlic planting, as well as expand his product line with red and purple carrots and fingerling potatoes. He thinks he can target \$80,000 next year. The city had monitored the three farmers closely throughout the season and were pleased with their professionalism and sales levels. Lyle and Barry want to continue next year, and based on the results they all achieved, the city is going to expand its one acre farm site program to include another three urban farmers. Many have expressed interest and there is now a pipeline of aspiring farmers, some of whom already live in

the city as well as others who wish to re-locate there. The urban farm project leader has asked John if he would be interested in becoming certified to teach SPIN-Farming so it could be offered to city residents who aspire to farm professionally. His “off season” is shaping up to be a busy one. But he joked with his brother Pete, that whenever he was interested in downsizing, he'd offer the course to him for free. It is the least he could do to thank him for launching his new career.

KEEP UP WITH SPIN
Whether you are seeking a new career or one to compliment your existing one, SPIN-Farming can help you fit farming into your life. Visit www.spinfarming.com to see how in more free pass-alongs. You're welcome to download them and share them at sustainability forums, eco-expos and green gabfests.



The urban farm family needs to get at least part of the farm into early production, and this is where a city's heat island effect is an advantage. Work can start as soon as the snow starts to melt in the spring. Backyard farm plots can be planted to spring greens such as spinach, lettuce, and scallion and, since urban farmers can be first to market with these items, sell outs are almost guaranteed.



At an urban farm, the "back forty" is measured in beds instead of acres, but the satisfaction that comes from practicing intelligent, dedicated, craft and soil-based farming is the same as if you owned large acreage in the country. What is not the same is the hardship - large debt loads, assembling and managing large work crews, dependency on chemical controls and complex irrigation systems. All of that is missing in small plot urban farm operations.



A rototiller makes quick work of getting the land ready for planting at an urban farm. It is the only mechanized equipment necessary, and at \$4,000 for a top of the line new model, it represents one of the most expensive investments you'll need to make. Used ones, which can work just as well, can be had for \$1,500. This one is a 10 hp BCS, one of our favorites. This size tiller works well for farms up to an acre in size.



Here is another standard piece of equipment every urban farmer needs - an Earthway seeder. It works for a variety of crops and makes quick work out of planting. Seeders are widely available and cost about \$100. This entire 1,000 square foot plot was planted in a half hour.



A wheeled cultivator comes in handy for making rows where potato seed pieces will be placed. This tool makes it easy to get straight rows in. Unlike gardeners, urban farmers never use string to mark out rows. It takes too much time. Some home gardening practices have to be "unlearned" on the way to becoming a farmer.



Over time, urban farmers get better at laying out their plots. What looks good is usually worth a lot of money at market. You can see why urban farmers don't have a tough time getting land. Usually they start out in their own backyards, but when friends, neighbors and relatives realize they can have a yard fit for a magazine cover, without having to lift a finger, urban farmers end up having more land than they know what to do with.



Many question how the soil is maintained on small plots that get worked so intensively. Here's how - locally sourced, organic-based fertilizers like alfalfa pellets, soybean meal, dried molasses, wood ash, bone meal, blood meal. SPIN farmers also use their own compost materials when they can. But because their operations produce such little waste, they get help from their local Starbucks which contributes their coffee grounds. So remember, the coffee you drink there in the fall might be transformed into garlic by some SPIN farmer the following spring.



Here is a great way to put all those mini-vans, SUV's, or pickups to good use. Turn them into true work vehicles! Many urban farm families use their personal vehicles as their farm vehicles.



Here you can begin to see the advantage of a standard size bed. It makes harvesting, planting and seeding quick and easy. To hand harvest a spinach bed, all that is needed is a sharp knife. This bed can be harvested in about 10 minutes, and beds this size are worth at least \$100, or more. Spinach is a quick-growing crop and ideal to use in relay cropping.



After a rough day at the office, picking green beans is a good way to relax. Work can be done while seated, and all the stresses of the day can be put behind you. But on the weekends.....



...harvesting radish makes for more vigorous exercise, and this workout has a purpose. Urban farmers are rewarded for their physical exertion with a highly lucrative crop.



Farming provides quality family time. It is fun to work, husband and wife. One person talks, and the other listens.



Here's an added perk - eating some of the same "cuisine de marche" served by posh restaurants. In this case it is different types of summer squash courgettes. For the urban farm family, eating well becomes second nature.



Urban farmers find themselves growing crops they've never heard of before, like patty pan summer squash. Summer squash is one of the more profitable warm weather crops and not widely available. City dwellers are adventurous eaters, and urban farmers sometimes find themselves setting food trends.



Micro-green planter production is an important component of an urban farm. It can utilize areas such as driveways that would not otherwise be cultivated, and these small greens are worth big money.



No matter what you call it - sustainable, local, eco-friendly, organic, or all-natural - urban farming is, quite simply, a call to good eating.

About the Authors



Wally Satzewich operates Wally's Urban Market Garden which is a multi-locational sub-acre urban farm. It is dispersed over 25 residential backyard garden plots in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, that are rented from homeowners. The sites range in size from 500 sq. ft. to 3000 sq. ft., and the growing area totals a half acre. The produce is sold at The Saskatoon Farmers Market.

Wally Satzewich and Gail Vandersteen initially started farming on an acre-sized plot outside of Saskatoon 20 years ago. Thinking that expanding acreage was critical to their success, they bought some farmland adjacent to the South Saskatchewan river 40 miles north of Saskatoon where they eventually grew vegetables on about 20 acres of irrigated land.

“This was a site to die for,” Ms. Vandersteen said. “It was incredibly beautiful, but the pestilence was incredible to! We couldn’t believe what the bugs and deer could do. Not to mention the wind.”

“We still lived in the city where we had a couple of small plots to grow crops like radishes and salad mix, which were our most profitable crops. We could grow three crops a year on the same site, pick and process on-site and put the produce into our cooler so it would be fresh for the market.”

After six years farming their rural site, the couple realized there was more money to be made growing multiple crops intensively in the city, so they sold the farm and became urban growers. “People don’t believe you can grow three crops a year in Saskatoon,” observes Vandersteen. “They think it’s too much work, but the truth is, this is much less work than mechanized, large-scale farming. We used to have a tractor to hill potatoes and cultivate, but we find it’s more efficient to do things by hand. Other than a rototiller, all we need is a push-type seeder and a few hand tools.”

Mr. Satzewich points out that city growing provides a more controlled environment, with fewer pests, better wind protection and a longer growing season. “We are producing 10-15 different crops and sell thousands of bunches of radishes and green onions and thousands of bags of salad greens and carrots each season. Our volumes are low compared to conventional farming, but we sell high-quality organic products at very high end prices.”



Roxanne Christensen is cofounder and President of the Institute for Innovations in Local Farming. In partnership with the Philadelphia Water Department, the Institute operates Somerton Tanks Farm, a prototype sub-acre urban farm that serves as the U.S. test bed for the SPIN-FARMING method.

Ms. Christensen notes that as development erodes the rural way of life, agriculture is creeping closer and closer to metropolitan areas. "SPIN-FARMING leverages this trend in a positive way - by capitalizing on limited resources and space. Creating Somerton Tanks Farm using the SPIN method required modest upfront investment, and it keeps operating overhead low."

In 2003, its first year of operation, Somerton Tanks Farm, located in northeast Philadelphia, the fifth largest city in the U.S, produced \$26,000 in gross sales from a half acre of growing space during a 9 month growing season. Gross sales increased to \$38,000 in 2004; \$52,000 in 2005, and \$68,000 in 2006. In four years of operation the farm achieved levels of productivity and financial success that many agricultural professionals claimed was impossible.

"For aspiring farmers, SPIN eliminates the 2 big barriers to entry - sizeable acreage and substantial startup capital. At the same time, its intensive relay growing techniques and precise revenue targeting formulas push yields to unprecedented levels and result in highly profitable income."

Ms. Christensen's role at the Institute is to attract and support new farming talent. "SPIN-FARMING provides a way for independent farmers to once again have a viable role in the food production system that has tipped too much in favor of large-scale mass production agriculture. It is a method uniquely suited to entrepreneurs, and it provides a new career path for those who have a calling to farm."

As SPIN becomes established and is practiced more and more widely, Christensen says, it will create new farmland closer to metropolitan areas, which, in turn will produce environmental, economic and social benefits. "It offers a compelling value proposition."