Organizational Overview: Urban Tree Connection (UTC) is a grassroots non-profit organization, founded in 1989, whose mission is to work with residents in Philadelphia's historically marginalized urban communities to transform abandoned open spaces into safe and functional places that inspire and promote positive human interaction. UTC has partnered with residents in the Haddington neighborhood of West Philadelphia over the last two decades to redevelop 29 vacant lots into community-driven greening and gardening spaces, including our ¾ acre urban farm. Together, we have repurposed these spaces for communal gathering, sustainable food production, and multi-generational community health and wellness education.

Guiding Framework: Our aim is to build a people’s food and land system that is sustainable, just, and community-led and governed. As such we adopt an Agroecology framework + Food Sovereignty principles in our work. Agroecology is people-centered agriculture that recognizes a long history of oppression and exploitation in our food/land systems; and aims to repair it through people-centered agriculture that puts us in a better relationship with the earth, our environment, and one another.

Food Sovereignty Principles:
- **Food for People**: We grow healthy, culturally and regionally appropriate produce for and with our neighbors in West Philly.
- **Values food providers**: We partner with farmers/growers across the city and state committed to sustainable growing practices; we value their labor and uphold their/our dignity.
- **Localizes food systems**: We believe that the primary value of food is sustenance for people and families. We are particularly focused on securing food and land resources for historically marginalized communities, like Haddington, a majority Black, working class neighborhood.
- **Puts control locally**: Food is a valuable local resource that belongs in the hands of those that use them to be used and shared in socially and environmentally sustainable ways which conserve diversity.
- **Builds knowledge & skills**: We are reclaiming agricultural knowledge of our ancestors, and passing down agricultural knowledge and developing skills through multi-generational leadership development.
- **Works with nature**: We are developing production and distribution systems that protect natural resources and reduce harm to the environment.

Neighborhood Foods (NF) Farm: This growing season our farming sites produced 6,105lbs of chemical free and culturally significant produce for neighbors while continuing our efforts to strengthen our sustainability practices through projects like: soil remediation, irrigation system upgrades, seedkeeping, and building an apothecary.

Soil remediation this season has significantly contributed to the health of our produce at NF Farm. We tested the soil over the winter, and learned that we needed to lower the pH of our soil (a common challenge for urban growers). Our remediation plan included soil amendments and planting flowers and herbs (i.e. Yarrow and Echinacea) to support soil health, enrich the local ecology, and combat pests. To share our learning with other farmers and growers, we offered a class in October on high tunnel repairs and soil remediation strategies. We had 11 growers across Philadelphia attend.

Figure 1: High Tunnel / Soil Remediation workshop @ Neighborhood Foods Farm
With funding support from the Philadelphia Committee of Garden Clubs of America (PCGCA) we upgraded our irrigation system and tested our water. NF Farm now has a much more efficient and effective watering system. During the installation process, we partnered with Penn State Extension and the Pennsylvania Women’s Agricultural Network (PA-WAgN) to host a workshop for rural and urban farmers on installing, upgrading, and repairing irrigation systems to effectively manage critical resources like water. We had 18 growers attend.

In 2017, we partnered with the Philadelphia Seed Exchange to learn seedkeeping techniques with crops from the African diaspora. We continued our seedkeeping efforts this year, saving seeds from our Paul Robeson Tomatoes, Burgundy Okra and Asparagus, which are currently being processed and tested to be stored at our farm and sold through a local seed company True Love Seeds. Seedkeeping prompted us to think about dry storage through the winter, which expanded into the idea of an apothecary. Nykisha Madison, UTC Farm Manager (pictured below) shares the origin story:

“In 2017, we noticed countless herbs with tremendous medicinal value growing wild on our farm. Without us planting or cultivating them they’ve selected our farm to be their home, and we lovingly welcomed our plant friends. These herbs like Stinging Nettle, Burdock, Mugwort, Curly Dock, Plantain, Shepherd’s Purse, Japanese Knotweed alongside our planted Rosemary, Lavender, Calendula, Echinacea and Yarrow, yield significant medicinal properties that can be used by community members to practice healing traditions passed down from generation to generation, from pillars of our families who have crossed over into the realm of the ancestors.”

With support from our partners PCGCA, The Food Trust and Media Star, we were able to purchase a drying rack, a generator, and a storage shed for our seeds, herbs and plants to build our apothecary.

Finally, in 2018, we practiced a technique we are calling “cultivating resilient roots.” Each year we are seeing increased variances in the weather, due to climate change, that require us to grow resilient plants that can sustain themselves through unpredictable weather patterns. This season we had an extraordinary amount of rain and very high temperatures – and as such we pruned minimally and watered sparingly. One of our successes included having four consistent leafy green crops over the summer despite very difficult growing conditions.

Community-Led Markets & Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Program: Produce grown at NF Farm was distributed from May to October through farmers markets, a low-income CSA program, and food donations. We operated four community-led markets in Haddington and West Philly: a weekly Saturday market and a summer youth-led market at NF Farm, a bi-weekly market at the West Philly YMCA, and a monthly market at Shepard Recreation Center. To increase the accessibility of our markets this season, we partnered with the Philadelphia Corporation for Aging (PCA) to have our market locations act as distribution sites for Senior-Farmers Market Nutrition Program vouchers; and The Food Trust to offer cooking demonstrations and food incentives that could be used at our markets.

This season we launched a low-income CSA program, $5 bags of produce to diversify our food distribution efforts.
Our market locations, in addition the NF Farm, served as pick-up locations for CSA bags. Any excess produce we had from markets/CSA shares was donated to Community Solutions CDC, a local feeding program in Haddington. This year our produce reached 1,339 households and families through operating over 50 markets, and distributing 127 CSA bags. In 2018, UTC redeemed more senior vouchers than in previous years, allowing us to bridge some of the barriers seniors encounter in accessing fresh produce.

UTC’s markets are distinct in that they are operated by local residents. Our first market and NF Farm was founded in partnership with 3 block captains, and we have adopted this model as we expanded our market locations. In 2018, we trained 17 neighbors, including youth apprentices in farm stand operations in the areas of Sales, Merchandizing, Food Handling and Safety, Community Engagement, and Sustainable Market Development. In addition to providing access to healthy food in food insecure neighborhoods, our markets promote local food production, health and wellness, and community engagement. We create a space for neighbors to interact with the farmers that grew their food, share recipes and health tips with one another, and we encourage participation in our community gardening and educational programs.

Youth-Led Market: UTC’s youth apprentices launched and operated a second market at NF Farm from July to August, where they explored cooperative economic principles and practices. Each market day began with an assessment by the youth on what needed to be done in preparation for the market, including produce to be harvested, price points, potential revenue they could generate and who would be responsible for which tasks. During the market, youth split into two crews, one to sell at the stand, and the other to recruit customers from the neighborhood.

As a pilot project, building a customer base was a crucial part of a successful market. Apprentices walked through their neighborhood in pairs, handing out flyers and talking to neighbors about the market. The crew that stayed behind engaged the customers as they arrived, educating them about the vegetables and handling transactions. At the end of each day, after breaking down the market and cleaning up, we debriefed the day, discussing successes and growth points as individuals and as a team.

Learning to work cooperatively challenged both youth and adults, who had to practice the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity in order to navigate this new way of working together. Karyn and Marquis (pictured above), quickly emerged as leaders among their peers and were challenged to step into greater responsibilities of coaching their peers, taking initiative on unforeseen tasks, modeling consistency and mood management, and managing cash flow. Both apprentices met the challenges of leadership with some resistance at first, however they rose to the challenge to coordinate successful markets even on difficult days.

Youth Apprenticeship Program: UTC’s Youth Apprenticeship Program hires and mentors around 10 high-school aged youth annually during the growing season. This unique five-month (June to October) paid Apprenticeship introduces young people of color that primarily live in Haddington, to urban agriculture. Each Apprentice receives one-to-one mentorship from Staff and community leaders. Youth participate in weekly leadership sessions that dig deeper into issues of food, land and environmental justice – in relationship to our local work, and the world at large.
This season we mentored 10 youth, primarily from Haddington; six returnees, and four new apprentices. Youth apprentices held one of three positions: NF Farm Apprentices assisted in all aspects of farm operations from planting to weeding, harvesting and packaging for farmer’s markets and CSA shares. Apprentices also supported our sustainability efforts including seedkeeping, and drying herbs. Market Apprentices operated their own market in addition to supporting the other community-led markets. Community Engagement Apprentices assisted in rehabilitating and maintaining our network of community gardens and parks; they removed trash, cleared brush, mowed/weed-whacked, mulched, repaired fences, and led volunteer groups. Community Engagement Apprentices also participated in a door-to-door canvassing neighborhood-wide listening project.

Neighborhood Canvassing Project: The canvassing project was the first step of UTC’s Neighborhood Engagement Project, a multi-year plan intended to build stronger connections between the organization and Haddington residents. Under the instruction of the Land Stewardship Coordinator, apprentices were trained in “deep canvassing”, a method of canvassing designed to stimulate in-depth conversations between canvassers and residents. This training included role plays on various strategies to handle a wide-range of scenarios that could occur during canvassing.

Apprentices worked in pairs, with one guiding the conversation and the other recording answers, asking residents questions such as: “What do you enjoy about your neighborhood?”; “What challenges do you face living in your neighborhood?”; and “If you had to see your neighborhood organized to fight for one thing, what would that be?” Apprentices began with a lot of shyness and anxiety about speaking to strangers, but after knocking on over 400 doors, and having 122 conversations with neighbors, they became more confident public speakers and conversationalists. While all of the youth apprentices displayed considerable personal and professional growth over the course of the project, Q’mara and Azjan (pictured above), emerged as key leaders. In their debrief sessions, apprentices dug into discussions about residents’ responses and how they compared and contrasted with their experiences of living in Haddington. Recognizing that they shared many experiences, concerns, and aspirations with their neighbors, was an important realization.

The final stage of the project further sharpened apprentice’s hard skills as they learned how to use Microsoft Office Excel to enter and aggregate the data. The findings were presented back to neighbors in a culminating ‘community self-determination’ dinner and visioning workshop at Shepard Recreation center. Two apprentices actively participated in the dinner, alongside 13 other neighbors.
Youth Exchanges and Field Trips: An important aspect of our Apprentices' learning occurs when we connect them to other youth of color working with urban farms and gardens across Philadelphia. This year youth apprentices participated in several youth exchanges:

- **Hoodstock**, annual summer festival hosted by the youth of Urban Creators at Life Do Grow Farm.
- **Norris Square Neighborhood Project**, toured their Afro/Latino-centered gardens and participated in a youth-led neighborhood clean-up in North Philly.
- Celebrated Haitian Independence & Black resistance across the diaspora with youth from African Family Health Organization. Youth cooked Haitian *soup joumou* with vegetables from the gardens and learned African rhythms on the drums.
- **Brightspot Farm**, a youth-run farm in Delaware where both youth groups worked side-by-side.

Lastly, our youth attended the *Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group Conference* (NESAWG) in October, which reinforced what they had been learning in their apprenticeships; and allowed youth to connect to peers and food systems leaders both in Philadelphia and across the region.

Community Gardens & Volunteer Support: This season, community leaders primarily managed three of our community gardens, with UTC providing resources such as plants, seeds and volunteer support. Our Girarden, Queens, and Pearl Street-Conestoga community-led gardens continue to be thriving spaces for active community gathering and growing together. Pearl Street Garden hosted several community events including:

- Community Planting Day (May), 15 neighbors helped weed and plant up the garden.
- End of School Year Celebration (June), hosted by a neighbor that provided snacks and summer resources to 15 children and their families.
- Harvest Party (October 31), annual end of season celebration with a community potluck, music, games and crafts, and a final harvest from NF Farm and garden sites for the season. This year, Owen from TrueLove Seeds joined us to share seed-cleaning techniques with youth apprentices and neighbors.

UTC’s garden sites are also maintained through our local groundskeeper, Mike, who began with UTC as a regular gardener at Pearl Street garden and transitioned to become Staff.
UTC has a rich network of volunteers that visit each year providing support with garden and farm maintenance, trash collection, and special projects. Over the 2018 season, UTC hosted around 250 volunteers that contributed over 3,000 volunteer hours of work at our farm and garden sites. We hosted numerous regular volunteers that live in West Philly, along with volunteers groups from University of Delaware, Media Star, Mission Philly, First Presbyterian Church, Villanova University, Stanford Alumni, Vanguard Group, and Broad St. Ministries. In addition to their time and energy, these groups resourced us with tools, materials, and cleaning supplies. With their support we were able to complete special projects like building a new fence for Lemoyne’s Garden and an accessible bed at Pearl Street Garden. Additionally, Eli Seward of TreeTech donated 12 hours of tree work.

The success of our season was also made possible through college interns that supported everything from grant-writing, to social media, farming, and logistical support for our programs. We hosted interns from Penn State Extension, Drexel University, Civic House at University of Pennsylvania, Bowdoin College, and Bridging the Gaps Program (Jefferson University). UTC extended our farm as a learning site, hosting several farm tours for Messiah College, Haverford College, Food Moxie’s Bike Tour, North East Sustainable Agriculture Working Group (NESAWG), and Catholic Campaign for Human Development’s Summer Action Social Institute.

**Fire Cider Making Class:** We ended our events for the 2018 season in December with a community education workshop facilitated by Taylor Johnson-Gordon, from Sistah of the Yam LLC. Community members made this immune-boosting tonic, while discussing family recipes for curing ailments and herbs that are commonly used in Black healing modalities. 12 neighbors, including two graduates of our apprenticeship program attended.
Advocacy & Collaborations: We continue to collaborate and build partnerships both locally and state-wide. In 2018, we deepened our partnership work with Soil Generation, Pennsylvania Women’s Agriculture Network (PA-WAgN), The Food Trust, and the Philadelphia Area Cooperative Alliance.

- **Soil Generation (SG)** is Black & Brown-led coalition of gardeners, farmers, individuals, and community-based organizations working to ensure people of color regain community control of land and food. Alongside SG members, UTC participated in the Land Bank’s Strategic Planning process, monthly general and policy committee meetings, and the Threatened Gardens campaign to improve access to secure land tenure for growers. In October, SG coordinated an action outside of City Hall and the Philadelphia Land Bank, demanding:
  1. An end to the city’s 10-year tax abatement on new construction and renovations
  2. A call for a moratorium on sheriff sales of active gardens
  3. Increased operational transparency by the Philadelphia Land Bank
  4. Clear pathways to secure tenure and ownership of land for gardeners and farmers.

UTC helped develop the demands, write press releases, and supported our community gardener at Girarden, Muneerah, to speak about how the community garden she manages has been threatened through Sheriff sale and is at risk for private development.

- **PA-WAgN** is a network of women farmers across Pennsylvania. UTC Staff sit on WAgN’s steering committee, and we are a funded partner in their Rural & Urban Women Farmers project (WRUN) that aims to bridge the gap between women farmers. Through WRUN, UTC has hosted a Farmer’s Walk Kitchen Talk, a farm skill-share and tour at Neighborhood Foods Farm (18 rural/urban growers attended), and helped coordinate a webinar on the Farm Bill, entitled “Women, Equity & the Farm Bill” in November. Rural and women farmers spoke about key funding programs under the Farm Bill and advocacy steps to ensure that a fully funded and more equitable farm bill is passed. 42 people across the food system participated in the webinar.

- **South-West West Agricultural Group (SWWAG)** is a coalition of urban farming organizations in West Philly. In 2018, Bartram’s Garden Sankofa Farm was awarded a USDA Community Foods Project grant that will allow SWWAG to better coordinate our youth development work together including an annual youth grower’s market, leadership development, and a youth council. UTC is a grant funded partner in this initiative.

UTC also worked with The Food Trust (TFT) and the Philadelphia Area Cooperative Alliance (PACA), two local organizations in Philadelphia. UTC’s Staff sat on TFT’s Farmer Market Initiative city-wide committee to help increase resources and farmers market opportunities for growers that are serving communities with limited food access. Through this initiative UTC was awarded funds for a generator, and helped other local farms secure resources. UTC has worked with PACA over the last two years to increase our knowledge on cooperative economics. In 2018, PACA provided UTC technical assistance in support of our summer youth led market. In October, UTC & PACA’s Executive Directors co-facilitated a workshop on Urban Farming & Cooperatives through a Just Transition framework at the NESAWG conference – reaching over 50 participants.
**Awards & Key Supporters:** UTC’s work is made possible through the resources that our funding partners invest in us. Our partners for 2018:

- Leo & Peggy Pierce Foundation
- Berkowitz Foundation
- SEI Giving Fund
- Tides Foundation
- Triskeles Foundation
- Lindback Foundation
- Independence Foundation
- Douty Foundation
- Claneil Foundation
- Merck Family Fund
- WaWa Foundation
- Bread & Roses Future Fund
- Penn Cares
- Philadelphia Water Department
- Cassett Foundation
- First Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia
- Philadelphia Foundation
- Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church
- Rosenlund Family Foundation
- Catholic Campaign for Human Development
- Philadelphia Committee Garden Clubs of America
- Henrietta Tower Wurts Memorial
- Union Benevolent Association
- Christopher Ludwick Foundation
- 1830 Family Foundation
- Dolfinger-McMahon Foundation
- Allen Hilles Fund
- Thomas Skelton Harrison Foundation
- Henry E. Niles Foundation
- Sprouts Foundation
- Fruit Guys Community Fund
- Providence Garden Club

UTC is honored to have been selected by our peers to receive the **Barra Award**. These unrestricted dollars gave us the flexibility to stay the course and experiment in our efforts to fulfill our vision of cultivating an equitable and community-based sustainable food system in the Haddington neighborhood of West Philadelphia.

**Strategic Planning & Looking Forward:** In 2018, UTC hired Davis & Gay Associates (DGA) to facilitate UTC’s strategic planning process. DGA led a participatory process including our key stakeholders (Board, Staff, and community leaders), convening us through individual and group meetings, community dinners and culminating retreat. In the process, we developed an 18-month operational plan (2018-2020) that will guide UTC’s work in 2019. During the process we developed a collectively articulated organizational vision, values, and goals:

**VISION:**

Our work goes beyond food and green space access and towards self-determining practices that engage people in governing resources together to meet the collective needs of the entire community. We envision a vibrant community-base in Haddington, West Philadelphia, in which the community stewards its own land, engages in alternative economies, and creates sustainably produced, chemical free, produce.

*UTC’s full operational plan with strategies and benchmarks can be provided upon request.*
VALUES:

- **Community Self Determination:** All of our work is based on the belief that people from historically marginalized communities have the right to determine their own futures. We aim to resist current and historic forces of systematic oppression by developing a self-determination project that builds community power.

- **Solidarity:** We are part of a greater, global movement. We stand with other like-minded organizations and people fighting against the destructive forces of hetero-patriarchy, racism and capitalism.

- **Mutuality:** As a community, we are bound together by collective values and with a shared vision of equity. We learn from each other and from the land. The more we nourish the land through sustainable practices, the more the land will nourish and support us.

- **Transformational:** We are committed to self- and community transformation. We take care of ourselves and respect one another; and understand that as we aim to shift material conditions and social relations we will have to change ourselves and be emotionally accountable to ourselves and each other.

- **Collective Wisdom:** We are a multigenerational organization. We recognize the dignity and wisdom of our entire community, from ancestors and elders, to families and youth. Our work re-members and builds on Black agrarian roots, practices, and traditions.

GOALS

From 2018-2020, WE WILL:

1. Adopt our updated Mission Statement, align our programming and practices; and actively communicate to internal and external stakeholders
2. Define + Refine UTC’s Community of stakeholders, while prioritizing organizational capacity
3. Develop clear ways to measure our impact
4. Develop short and long term plans for all UTC stewarded land
5. Rebrand UTC within the larger Urban Farming community of Philadelphia
6. Secure resources to support these goals