**Black Environmental Thought and Practice (BET) Summer**

A small garden circle in Legacy Village homes was a meeting ground for educators, activists, gardeners, families and youth on National Night Out. Okra, basil, tomatoes, broccoli, corn, potatoes, zucchini—these and other vegetables will form the fall harvest of this freshly seeded community garden.

The Legacy Village community garden is just one of 45 garden sites all over the Twin Cities participating in BET Summer. Samuel Grant, Action Research Facilitator of AfroEco, says that 250 young people just in Northside, mostly of high school and middle school age, have learned how to garden this summer.

Throughout the project, master gardeners have come to schools and garden sites to teach young people how to grow their own vegetables. Growing food involves the youth movement, environmental justice movement, and urban agriculture movement around issues of food security and economy, explains Grant.

“We have been engaging young people in conversations around gardens across the Twin Cities around these intersections. How is our relationship to land implicated in our relationships with health, with economy, with democracy, with broader environments? BET Summer is an opportunity to do some intergenerational listening, dialogue, and organizing around all of these questions,” he says.

The project has also created a network of black urban growers in economically marginalized communities who are growing their own food and selling it directly at area farmer markets. In the fall, Grant will analyze the figures to get a baseline about the sale of the produce, but he notes that a crucial aspect of the project has been learning about the community.

“Right now we’re learning where the community is in order to develop long-term organizing strategies. We’re engaging people about their relationship with land on their own land. This summer we have 45 garden sites. Hopefully we’ll go to more than 100 gardens next year,” says Grant.

Grant says that the emergent nature of the project makes the IAS an excellent organization to partner with. In September, the Black Environmental Thought Collaborative at the IAS will host a conference to share ideas and practices from the summer work.

“What we’ve been able to achieve this summer, we want to showcase that process of organizing at the September conference so other communities can apply the process to their own communities. BET Summer intends to be a multi-year initiative engaging the African and African-American community.”

The National Night Out event at Legacy Village was spearheaded by Northside Fresh, a coalition of urban food growing partners, which includes AfroEco and Project Sweetie Pie.
Michael Chaney, founder of Project Sweetie Pie, which has 10 garden sites in Northside, says that these community-oriented groups are working to create an “infrastructure for healthy food systems” where young people, in particular, can become connected to the food they eat. “We’re really trying to get people to realize that a green thumb is a terrible thing to waste,” says Chaney.

It doesn’t require a lot of space to grow vegetables either, and the urban agriculture phenomenon has been growing for many years now. A small garden plot like the one at Legacy Village can grow hundreds of pounds of vegetables, says Michelle Horovitz, Co-coordinator of Northside Fresh, and Founder & Director of Appetite for Change. Horovitz explained that to get started all one needs is to put the seeds in the ground and water them, adding that one learns as they go.

Latrell and Loreal McKelvy, a 6th grader and 4th grader, respectively, were two young people at the garden circle who had learned to grow their own vegetables. Asked of her favorite vegetable, Loreal, without a moment’s hesitation, gleefully named carrots.

BET Summer was organized as a long-term strategy to lead up to a BET Conference occurring this September 21-23 at the University of Minnesota. Grant says a "protocol for change" will be presented in a Saturday afternoon workshop and in the closing panel of the conference. The protocol will be based on lessons learned from the BET Summer experience and offer key recommendations for an organizing strategy that links economic, environmental and cultural justice through the urban agriculture movement.