**Urban and Small Farms Program Steering Committee Meeting**

Wednesday, November 17, 2021 @ 9pm

Meeting to be held in-person with virtual option available.

Talwar Leadership Center, Indiana Tech

Snyder Academic Center, Room 234

1600 E. Washington Blvd, Fort Wayne, IN 46803

Attendees: Jessica Merkling, Nellie Peffley, Lindsey Bluhm, James Wolff, John Mischler, Greg Lake, Jain Young, Mike Werling, Courtney Taylor, Mikila Cook, Joelle Neff, Tim Bomba

1. Partner Updates
   1. Purdue Extension
      1. Purdue is planning to do an Urban Ag program in the spring as well as a beginning farmer program. The Farmer program will be held in person and virtually; the virtual will begin in January followed by the in-person sessions. The beginning farmer program is geared towards teaching beginners the logistics of farming and production.
      2. Encouraging participants to enroll in both programs, currently seeking organizations to facilitate scholarships. Currently seeing if there is grant funding available for scholarships.
      3. Currently not doing soil samples as no one is contacting regarding having samples taken. Soil samples are available to anyone, including home gardeners through extension. Samples are $20 per sample; samples can be taken by the gardener/farmer or by Extension. A $20 site visit may be assessed.
   2. Dekalb SWCD-
      1. Recently met with Marian Rodriguezsoto from the IASWCD Urban program and hope to work more with them
   3. Adams SWCD- Not present
   4. Steuben SWCD- Not present
   5. Parks Dept.- Not present
   6. DNR
      1. First Junior Achievement job spark was held last week. A SWCD representative was present.
      2. Fort Wayne Weed Wrangles are in process.
      3. Rose Ave. education Farm- Talking to neighboring farms regarding natural habitat components
   7. USF
      1. Having lectures throughout the next semester. Seeking speakers.
   8. Indiana Tech- Not present
   9. Merry Lea
      1. Finished programming season for the year. 1,000 K-12 students attended the programs.
      2. Gearing up and getting ready for the next season. John will be teaching overseas this spring and will not be available in person
      3. Contemplating an incubator farm program. Seeking farmers that are interested in the plot of land. Plots will be located near Merry Lea, lodging will be available if someone is interested in living in the area.
   10. NRCS
       1. Have Equip sign up going on currently. High Tunnel applications are accepted until Dec. 17th. The practice is very competitive.
   11. Rose Ave. Education Farm
       1. Currently winterizing. Harvest season is winding down. Attended YLNI Farmers market beginning in June. Burmese farmers concluded that Americans do not eat vegetables. A Burmese market was established at The League in late July. Farm Markets are managed by Plow Shares Food Hub which is set up to accept EBT and Snap.
       2. Sales at the Burmese pop up market were substantial. Over 16 weekends over $100,000 was sold in EBT alone. Required 3 cashiers with 1-2 being Burmese speakers. A 15% charge was passed on to farmers to cover the cost of cashiers and fees.
       3. Awarded another grant, FMPP, three-year grant to develop farmer business. Covers an establishment for processing, account, and other services to get farmers started in farm business and markets.
   12. ISDA
       1. No updates
2. Watershed Display for Education Trailer
   1. Partnering with universities or other educational groups to design and develop a watershed display.
      1. Want to create a 3D Model of St. Joseph, St. Mary’s, or the Maumee.
      2. Hope to have display completed by Spring 2023
      3. Grace College in Warsaw has already created a watershed presentation and displays, may want to reach out to Grace.
      4. State Fair has an interactive display, Pathways to Water Quality. Need to reach out to see who was contracted to create the display.
      5. John Mischler will reach out to see if the manufacturing of this display can be done in the fall semester during the watershed courses.
      6. Need to reach out to PFW to see if they offer GIS classes and would be willing to help with the display.
      7. Mike Werling reached out to a company in Decatur, Hoosier Pattern, that has high end 3D printers and they are willing to look at the data once it compiled. Tim suggested working with state NRCS office to acquire data.
3. Where Do we Go from Here?
   1. Current Deliverables
      1. Currently researching companies to complete the education trailer. Working with two companies on quotes.
      2. Need to focus attention on conducting one workshop on developing and implementing a business plan and work with Urban and Small Farms to implement non-agronomic Best Management Practices. Seeking event opportunities for outreach.
      3. Suggested to hold an educational session regarding acceptable practices within urban areas. This session should include producers as well as code enforcers. Topics would cover local ordinances, planning services, and how to attain variances.
      4. Per Jain Young a food council and committee was previously in place through Purdue to help with policy barriers at city and county levels. A Comprehensive Plan will be coming out sometime this year that will have a stronger focus on urban ag. The new ordinances will be coming out early next year. Jain suggested at a future event we include the comprehensive plan committee to explain the new ordinances and contents of the new plan.
   2. What are the needs of our urban/small farm community?
      1. Merry Lea has a demonstration agri-forestry plot. Is there a need for small farmers to get more info about agri-forestry in addition to annual vegetables?
      2. Funding for community gardens, and resources available to local small and urban farmers.