

# 2023 Urban Farm Impact Report

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## Year at a Glance

2023 was a productive growing season, thanks to our committed crew of field apprentices, program participants and the Urban Farm team. The year started with a newly-constructed rooftop greenhouse, funded by a generous donation from Chartwells, Compass Group Canada Ltd. Production highlights in 2023 include the first elderberry harvest in the Indigenous Foodways; a yield increase in the Three Sisters garden; the introduction of collard greens, gungo peas (pigeon peas), and sorrel (roselle hibiscus) to the Black Food Sovereignty (BFS) Learning Circle; and the best fall crops in 10 years of production in the Ecological Market Garden. The brilliant blooms from the new cut flower farm in the Ecological Market Garden were an immediate community favourite, both at the Farm Stand and with the rooftop pollinators! The year ended with an art exhibition in the greenhouse: Residue, by Design Fabrication Zone Creative in Residence, Alyssa Alikpala, and allowed us to reflect on the movement of matter, and cycles of growth and decay as another season on the roof was brought to a close.





## Engagement Overview

The overarching goal of 2023 was to continue to increase opportunities for interaction and connection at the Urban Farm. The results were exceptional, with the launch of several new programs including the Harvest Collective for TMU's Black Faculty & Staff Community Network, the Indigenous Foodways volunteer group, and the Summer Open Farm on the DCC rooftop. We added new sessions to our various workshops, including how to make salves and floral bouquet arrangements. We saw an increase in the number of people who participated in the BFS Learning Circles, Workbee Wednesdays, Ecological Market Garden tours, and the Living Lab Roundtable event.



# Engagement Highlights



Hosted **1,100+** guests  
across two rooftops:

**36**

chartered tours

**8**

educational workshops

**5**

experiential learning food  
sovereignty events



# Engagement Highlights



## Knowledge-exchange

### 75 attendees

at the Urban Farm's Living Lab Roundtable featuring guest speaker, Celeste Smith

### 15 consultations

on urban farming and rooftop agriculture

### 19 presentations

at conferences and events, including 7 classroom presentations

### 35 collaborations

short-term or one-time (provided information and/or materials)

### 5 Living Lab partnerships

### 10 media publications

# Engagement Highlights

Piloted event space rentals on the DCC roof with **6 community events**

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Launched Summer Open Farms on the DCC rooftop, welcoming over **600 guests** to enjoy the space every Wednesday in July and August, featuring a pop-up produce stand, flower bouquets and fresh iced tea.

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Embarked on a project with the City of Toronto to develop a supplementary resource for the **Green Roof By-law, Guidelines for Urban Agriculture on Green Roofs**, to be completed in 2024.





# Engagement Highlights

Partnered with over **15 TMU departments and student groups** including:

- Indigenous Student Services for “Medicine in the Garden”
- Campus Store for Garden Grab Bag pickup
- Food Services to provide farm-to-table dishes highlighting culturally significant crops
- Positive Space for the TMU Pride kick-off
- School of Nutrition on a cookbook
- Tri-Mentoring Program and *noire girls plant* to host “rooted” for first-year Black-identifying students
- TRSM and *Unbounded Well* for a rooftop cold plunge
- Recreation and Athletics Centre for rooftop yoga for Wellness Week



# Indigenous Foodways Program Overview

This growing season, the [Indigenous Foodways Program](#) created an Indigenous Foodways volunteer/meetup group for students, faculty and staff on campus. We hosted 5 meetup sessions where students and staff came together to harvest medicines and the Three Sisters' crops, and braided together sweetgrass. During our sessions, we also made tobacco ties that were distributed to participants while the rest were donated across campus. We harvested sage from both ENG and DCC and donated approximately 6 crates' worth of sage to organizations such as the [Native Women's Resource Centre](#) and [Aboriginal Legal Services Toronto](#). This was the second year of growing the Three Sisters on mounds.





# Indigenous Foodways Program Highlights

Donated more than **6 crates of sage** harvest to community members and agencies including Aboriginal Legal Services Toronto, Native Women's Resource Centre, Gdoo-maawnjidimi Mompii Indigenous Student Services and TMU students, faculty and staff.

We hosted our first **Indigenous student-led event “Medicine in the Garden”** in partnership with Gdoo-maawnjidimi Mompii Indigenous Student Services on the DCC rooftop garden. It was the first event hosted at the DCC as part of the Indigenous Foodways program where we served traditional food.





# Indigenous Foodways Program

## Highlights

Led tours, including Rebecca Beaulne-Stuebing group from York University

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Hosted a **terrarium-building workshop** for the third year in a row, using plants propagated in the Urban Farm greenhouse.

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Second year **collaborating with Miziwe Biik**, creating an ongoing partnership.

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**Expanded distribution of medicines** to include yarrow, mullein and elderberries

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This growing season, the elderberry tree planted on the farm was the **first fruiting tree to successfully bear fruit**. This will introduce a new crop for distribution next year.





# Black Food Sovereignty (BFS) Harvest Collective and Learning Circle

## Overview

The third year of the Harvest Collective & Learning Circle program saw the expansion of Black-led programs at the Urban Farm. We welcomed many Black-identifying youth, students, faculty, staff and community to the DCC rooftop through programs, collaborations and events. One special frosh week event included a collaboration between TMU's Tri-mentoring Program and *noire girls plant* to co-host the "rooted" workshop for 35, first-year Black-identifying students. This season also marked the second year that George Brown College's first-year Food Studies students visited the DCC for a chartered tour to kick off their *Food From the Land* class, which looks to become an annual event.



## **Black Food Sovereignty (BFS) Harvest Collective and Learning Circle**

### **Overview**

More than a dozen external speaking invitations were extended, which included two notable, inaugural events: Women's College Hospital's *Healthy Cities, Healthy People Symposium*, and the University of Toronto's *Campus Food Symposium*. The year ended with an uplifting and culturally significant gathering to celebrate the progress being made to continue building BFS across the GTA, including the work being done at the Urban Farm at TMU. This event was co-hosted by the *City of Toronto's Confronting Anti-Black Racism* unit and *Black Food Sovereignty Toronto*.





# Black Food Sovereignty Harvest Collective and Learning Circle

## Highlights

2023 saw a 40% **increase in the number of Black youth, students, faculty, staff and community members** who visited and/or engaged with the Harvest Collective and Learning Circle.

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Welcomed more than **200 people** to the DCC from across the Black community including youth farmers, post-secondary students from across TMU and other institutions, as well as newcomers to Canada from across the African continent.

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Expanded crop plan to include a greater variety of culturally significant **African diasporic foods and medicines.**





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# Black Food Sovereignty Harvest Collective and Learning Circle

## Highlights

As a Community Supported Agriculture program (CSA), launched a weekly pilot run of the Harvest Collective for TMU's Black Faculty and Staff Community Network, which has led to **three invitations to collaborate on various projects** across faculties in 2024.

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Hosted over **20 Learning Circles and Workbee Wednesdays**.

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Featured in a podcast of *Green Roofs for Healthy Cities Sustainable Futures: Food, Social Justice & Community Healing*.

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Featured in an episode of the *Nature of Things: Ultra Processed Foods*.



# Ecological Market Garden

## Overview

2023 was a year of expansion and growth in the Market Garden. A 500 sq. ft. plot was converted into a cut-flower farm, which sold out of flower bouquets each week at the farm stand and provided learning opportunities through two workshops. In the fall, the Ecological Market Garden continued to offer Workbee Wednesdays, which saw eight to 10 volunteers from the TMU community donate their time every Wednesday for six weeks. Six educational field workshops were offered in the Ecological Market Garden, including a harvest and distribution workshop for the Toronto Farmer's Network, garlic planting, potato harvesting, herbal infusions, lacto-fermentation and composting.



## Ecological Market Garden Highlights

**40+ crops and  
80+ cultivars**



**Expanded pollinator garden** to support local ecosystems, with more varieties of Ontario native flowers such as Yarrow, Scarlet Bee Balm, Wild Columbine, Blazing Star and Purple Coneflower.

Distributed nearly **2000 kg of produce** following our model of thirds: **32%** sold at market value, **23%** sold at affordable student prices, and **45%** donated to the Good Food Centre and other community partners.

Flower Farm sold **121 flower bouquets** at the Farm Stand, provided over **400 stems** for the Muslim Women's Student Association workshop, and created **24 bouquets** for events on the DCC rooftop.



# Ecological Market Garden Highlights

**Plugged 17 reclaimed urban logs** with spawn for shiitake, oyster and chicken of the woods mushrooms.

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**Collaborated with TMU Campus store** as a pickup point; continued to partner with social enterprise A-Way Express for deliveries; and **increased Garden Grab Bag sales by 64%**.

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Contributed to the **School of Nutrition's Farmers Market Cookbook** featuring recipes inspired by the Ecological Market Garden's weekly harvest.





## Living Lab Collaborations

Recirculation of stored stormwater for irrigation on the ENG roof to implement and investigate a blue-green roof water recirculation system for irrigating the cultivated crops on rooftop farms to further close the water cycle with **Principal Investigators:** Afsana Alam Akhie, BSc and Dr. Darko Joksimovic, PhD.

Design Fabrication Zone Creative in Residence program: exhibition in the Greenhouse on DCC “Residue”, by Alyssa Alikpala, which featured works largely created from waste materials from the Urban Farm.

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Monitored temperature, precipitation, wind speed and direction, humidity, and certain types of solar radiation using the meteorological station installed on ENG by Prof. Claire Oswald, PhD, for teaching and research (ongoing since 2022).

Farmer-led research in partnership with Ecological Farmers' Association of Ontario included a Fava bean (*Vicia faba*) Variety Trial for Field and Rooftop Farms in Southern Ontario to identify the most productive varieties of fava beans across different farms in Ontario.

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School of Fashion added flax, wode, coreopsis, sunflowers, indigo and amaranth to the Natural Dye and Fibre Experiential Garden with **Principal Investigators:** Rachel MacHenry (MA) and Joseph Medaglia (MA).



# Media Features

CBC's [Nature of Things](#): Irresistible: The Ultra Processed Food Story

[Living Architecture Monitor Sustainable Futures Podcast, Episode 7](#): Food, Social Justice, and Community Healing

[Living Architecture Monitor, Spring 2023](#): Rooftop Farm Living Lab: Research Takes Root at the Urban Farm at TMU

[Toronto Met Today: How TMU's Urban Farm is revolutionizing food production and driving sustainability in the city](#)

[Nordic-Canadian Fellowship](#): How Urban Farmers Grow Green Minds

[Youth Mind, Volume 3, Issue 1 \(page 20\)](#): Origins of a green thumb: Exercising ecological and agricultural resilience from an Indigenous perspective

TMU School of Journalism, On The Record: [Lots of Potatoes, Not a Lot of Students: TMU Urban Farm's Harvest](#)

[Radio Canada: Green Roofs in Toronto, L'heure du monde \(aired June 15\)](#)

[National Observer](#): Green roofs reap climate benefits. How do you build one?



## Urban Farm Donors

The Urban Farm would like to acknowledge and thank the following donors who invested in our success in 2023. We appreciate the support and generosity of these individuals and organizations who helped fund many of the accomplishments the Urban Farm team achieved this year.

- Graywood Developments
- MakeWay/Harbinger
- Dawn Davis
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Rodney Yip on the DCC rooftop farm