

Fleet Farming: The Journey to Food Deserts

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Fleet Farming is a bike-pedaled urban agriculture program which converts lawns into productive micro farms called “farmlettes”. This program provides a community-driven solution that counters the environmental costs of the agriculture industry. This self-sustaining program was created by an Orlando-based 501(c)(3) non-profit organization and accredited NGO of the United Nations, IDEAS For Us (IDEAS). The mission of IDEAS is to develop, fund and scale solutions to the world’s most pressing social and environmental challenges. IDEAS is the official parent non-profit of Fleet Farming. Together, these teams tackle many of the environmental, social and economic hardships globally affecting the natural world. At the local level, Fleet Farming’s mission is to transform underutilized land and resources into community assets.

Fleet Farming is directly relevant to Conference Sub-Theme Number Seven: “Education for Sustainable Development: An Issue of Consciousness and Values.” This urban agriculture program strives to educate people of all ages on the important factors affecting national food security. In order to achieve these ends, Fleet Farming offers free bi-weekly communal events called “Swarm Rides.” These events are seen as a much needed tool to highlight the environmental costs of the agriculture industry and demonstrates an urban farming technique that empowers individuals while “farming farmers.” The produce harvested from the plots can be sold at local farmers markets and restaurants, cycling food from the hyper-local sphere to vendors throughout the neighborhood. Effectively, this program is creating jobs, strengthening community members and battling the environmental costs generated by the current food system.

One of Fleet Farming’s goals is to lower carbon emissions of the agriculture industry with the use of bicycles for food distribution and by creating new branches in areas that have low access to organic, fresh produce. Generally, food deserts can be seen as the most underserved sectors of the food dispersal process. In low-income areas, grocery suppliers are not as invested in setting up locations servient to these neighborhoods versus middle to high income areas. Fleet Farming embraces this as an opportunity versus an obstacle. On many occasions, other solutions have come into burdened neighborhoods in hopes to address the present issues. However, over time some organizations lose momentum and community engagement. This can lead to a distrust of existing and future initiatives seeking to come alongside these communities in areas already experiencing challenges.

Most directly, Fleet Farming targets Conference Sub-Theme Number Fifteen: “Sustainable Development Challenges in Urban Areas.” The program offers a model for communities to work together towards food security by developing urban farming plots. This creates an opportunity to distribute organic produce throughout poverty-stricken neighborhoods using underutilized land. This solution incorporates economic growth in a socially inclusive model. It strives to create jobs, keep funding within a hyper-local sphere and generating a sustainable program that will solve the food security challenges within a food desert. Upon expansion, Fleet Farming networks with community leaders and residents to tailor this model of urban agriculture to their

community. Several gatherings will be held to connect all integrated members in hopes to inform every group within the food desert neighborhood about the program's cause. In doing so, this initiative can be seen as a community-run tool to tackle these challenges. Thus, food desert residents can feel a sense of ownership within the Fleet Farming branch in their vicinity.

To date, Fleet Farming manages 20 farmlette plots within the Audubon Park area with plans of expanding to 25 by the end of the year. Thanks to a Farmer's Market Promotion Grant from the United States Department of Agriculture, Fleet Farming and their partners will engage into the next stage of development to embark on the first food desert in West Orlando. By Summer 2017, Fleet Farming will activate their urban agriculture model to counter the challenges found within food desert communities. Exploring this will open the door for future initiatives to follow in the footsteps of the program while demonstrating the necessity of micro-farming in urban areas. Fleet Farming is one piece of the puzzle needed in the race to sustainable development in every community across the nation.