

January 2008

# FOOD NOW ATHENS

A publication of the Athens Urban Food Collective (AUFC)



## WHAT IS FOOD NOW ATHENS?

By many accounts, Athens is a picturesque college town. The classic city is a unique combination of rural and urban, a collision of the traditional and the modern. But beneath the red brick facades and beyond the legendary arch is a starkly grim reality.

Athens-Clarke County is one of the poorest counties in the state with roughly 23% of the non-student population living in poverty. Nearly one in four children lives in poverty. While much ado has been made lately about the abysmal poverty rate in Athens, little attention has been placed on the unfortunate consequences of rampant poverty. One such consequence is the problem of food insecurity. A family or individual is food insecure if that family or individual does not have the financial means by which to acquire or procure nutritional, socially acceptable, sustainable foods. In an effort to raise awareness about food insecurity and poverty, a coal-

ition of University of Georgia professors and students has created the Athens Urban Food Collective (AUFC).

The AUFC is a progressive student organization dedicated to educating the public about food insecurity and poverty, promoting the cultivation of urban agriculture and the equitable access to culturally appropriate, nutritional food, and developing local solutions to the local hunger crisis. In so doing, the AUFC hopes to spark public dialogue about ways to revolutionize the manufacture and production of local food to counter the problem of the local hunger. This dialogue is fundamental for the change necessary to promote equitable access to nutritional and socially acceptable foodstuffs.

Two major goals of the AUFC are to identify concentrated areas of food insecurity in Athens Clarke County, and to investigate possible remedies for the problems of food insecurity.

One such way that the AUFC seeks to remedy the effects of food insecurity is through the cultivation and development of urban agricultural projects, such as raised bed, or other community gardens. What the AUFC has done to combat food insecurity epidemic is to begin a productive rooftop garden.

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## IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN STARTING YOUR OWN PRODUCTIVE FOOD GARDEN...

Incorporating agriculture into the urban environment is neither a new idea nor a difficult proposition. There are multiple places within cities that are both accessible and adaptable for agricultural use. If you are interested in starting a productive food garden, the following locations are prime examples of land in the city that could be used to do so.

### -Power Line Right-of-Ways

- According to Georgia Power's website, "agricultural, horticultural or grazing activities are authorized" under power lines. However, Georgia Power itself owns very little of the land under the lines so the owners of the land must be contacted for permission to access land. Certain portions of power line right-of-ways are contained on Athens-Clarke County property which poses an opportunity people to communicate with ACC Leisure Services (the go-to branch of government for creation of parks) about enabling access to the land. Mike Wharton, Division Administrator of Natural Resources, is a good person to contact with in Leisure Services at 706.613.3800

### -Abandoned or Vacant Lots

- Many urban food gardens are started on abandoned/vacant lots but issues like redevelopment could be problematic. To avoid this, the property owner of the lot must be contacted before large scale planting can occur. The owner of any piece of property in Athens-Clarke County can be found through the County Tax Assessors office (325 E. Washington Street, Room 280, 706.613.3140) or online at [www.qpublic.net/clarke/](http://www.qpublic.net/clarke/).

### -Public Parks

- ACC has plenty of parks across the county that provide great public areas for planting and many can be found within walking distance. Each individual park will have its own concerns regarding the creation of gardens, but through discussions with the park manager and officials at Leisure Services, a publicly demanded area for food gardening is possible. A full list of parks can be found at [www.accleisureservices.com/facilities.shtml](http://www.accleisureservices.com/facilities.shtml).

### -Schools

- Alps Road Elementary has a teaching garden which serves as a model for creating

urban gardens across Athens using school owned land. Permission of the school, and possibly the Board of Education, would be necessary prior to planting on other school owned land. The inclusion of a teaching garden within the larger garden plot will increase the probability of the school permitting their land to be used for a food garden. Ellen Walker, teacher at Alps Elementary, is the lead contact for the educational garden. She can be reached at [walkerel@clarke.k12.ga.us](mailto:walkerel@clarke.k12.ga.us)

An extremely important step in deciding on an area for food production is the figuring out the condition of the soil. A soil test should be done prior to planting especially if there have been gas stations, laundry mats, or any type of industrial use. The ACC Extension Office provides all the materials necessary for accurate collection and testing of soil. As a service to residents they will test any soil that is mailed to them in one of their kits. The Extension Office can be found at 2152 W. Broad St, Athens, Ga. 30606, 706.613.3640 and online at [www.ugaextension.com/clarke/index.html](http://www.ugaextension.com/clarke/index.html)

Any questions regarding sites for gardening or the process for acquiring or using land can be directed to us at the Athens Urban Food Collective. We can be reached at [aufc@riseup.net](mailto:aufc@riseup.net)

## WHAT DOES THE ACC FOOD SYSTEM LOOK LIKE? FOOD POLICY COUNCIL AIMS TO FIND OUT...

We in Athens Clarke County are fortunate to have a Food Policy Council. Food Policy Councils take on different tasks in different communities. Our Food Policy Council is developing a list of recommended policy changes for ACC that make more room in the county for a locally-based food system. Future plans include a community food assessment that documents diverse food practices, distribution networks, areas of food insecurity, and other concerns about the food system. Community food assessments are used to recommend policy changes to decision-makers who can reshape food systems.

According to the Food Policy Council's working mission statement, the group is working toward "a food system where everyone has access and entitlement to real food, in a structure that supports local growers and encourages entrepreneurship, and in a system that bridges

gaps based on socio-economics, race, class, and gender". The Food Policy Council welcomes ideas, input and participation from other members of the community. For more information, contact Shannon McBride at [hands4sg@bellsouth.net](mailto:hands4sg@bellsouth.net).

## HIGHLIGHTING P.L.A.C.E.

P.L.A.C.E. (Promoting Local Agriculture and Cultural Experience) is a fairly new organization, but completely central to Athens, GA. It was started by a group of people who were exploring the consequences of our country's industrialized food system.

Executive director Craig Page says the US's industrialized food system leads to the loss of small farms, and a lack of access to growing land as well as endangering the livelihood of farmers abroad. Eventually the founders of P.L.A.C.E. realized they could help solve some of these problems by promoting one simple solution: buy local.

P.L.A.C.E.'s utmost goal is to bring the benefits of a locally supported food culture to Athens, GA. The group is involved with a few different projects, one of which is called the Athens Food Activist Networking Session. P.L.A.C.E. hosts an event four times a year where local food activists can get together to share what they've been working on as well as project ideas. People that attend this session are also given the opportunity to meet fellow local food growers and create bonds and support. P.L.A.C.E. is also involved in building and upholding community and educational gardening. P.L.A.C.E. is currently seeking non profit status, for more information visit their website at [www.localplace.org](http://www.localplace.org).



AUFC members build rooftop garden

# THE AUFC INTERVIEWS JAMES TALKIN OF FOOD NOT BOMBS. OCTOBER 2007.

**AUFC:** Could you put into a couple sentences what Food Not Bombs does? How would you describe it?

**JT:** It's a protest group that reclaims food that's going to be thrown away, or already has been thrown away, turns it into a nice tasty meal, and makes it available to whoever is hungry. We're just trying to bring to light the mishandling of food.

**JT:** One of the things we do is a vegan meal, because it's a peaceful protest and that is the most peaceful way because you don't have to harm any animals either. A lot of local farmers know about us, so if they have a lot of, say, eggplant, or just have too much of something, they'll bring it by. We get a good bit that way.

**AUFC:** Where do you collect food from regularly?

**JT:** Right now we get most of it from the food bank, which gets it from all the local supermarkets and local food places. The whole idea is to reclaim food not to create food.

**AUFC:** About how many people take advantage of the meals a week?

**JT:** Anywhere between twenty and forty, usually upwards towards forty. Anywhere between four to a dozen help cook and clean.

**AUFC:** Who usually comes to eat?

**JT:** There's a pretty good mix, a good bit of homeless, at least a couple of families who come down pretty regularly. They have a place to live, [...] but just barely [...] and they don't know if next month they will. And they definitely don't have enough money for food. There are some

**"There's plenty of food to go around, but if you don't have money you can't have it."**

people who just like to get free food; it's a very fun, socializing event.

**AUFC:** What are your thoughts on hunger in Athens, do you think it's a problem that most people are even aware of?

**JT:** It's definitely a problem. Athens is really, really poor as far as cities and counties go. There are far more hungry people out there than come to Food Not Bombs. It's visible to some people; I guess people at the university don't really get to see it.

**AUFC:** What do you think perpetuates the cycle of hunger and what might help end it?

**JT:** I think it all boils down to not having money, so they can't really buy food. And if they do buy food, it's usually food that's been overly processed and really cheap, which isn't very nutritious. There's plenty of food to go around, but if you don't have any money you can't have it. It's getting thrown away but if you don't have the money you still can't have it. It was really eye opening going to the food bank because they have two warehouses that are full of food, and the only reason it's there is because people wouldn't buy it and then there are people going hungry every day.

**AUFC:** How could more people get more involved in Food Not Bombs?

**JT:** If they just want to get involved on the basic level, just come have food with us and just have more of a presence downtown. They could come help cook or clean. We serve pretty regularly Monday and Wednesday and sometimes Saturday.



## COMMUNITY CALENDAR

### FOOD NOT BOMBS

**COMMON GROUND**  
Located at 151 N. Newton St. 1 block west of downtown Athens. Call 706-548-6011 for info.

### FOOD NOT BOMBS CONTD..

Mon- Cook 11-1, Serve 1-2:30, Clean 2:30-4  
Wed- Cook 4:30-6 Serve 6:30-8 Clean 8-8:30  
Serving some-times on Sunday.  
Cook 11-1 Serve 1-2:30 Clean 2:30-4.

### ATHENS FOOD ACTIVISTS NETWORKING SESSION (AFANS)

**March 1, 2008**  
Growing into the 2008 season at Alps Road Elementary School

### AIDS ATHENS

**aidsathens.org**  
Volunteers needed Mon/Tues morning to pick up/stock food. Pickups from 9:30-11 am. Food pantry open Tues and Thurs from 9-3.

## For Many Athenians Water Isn't Only Shortage

According to ACC, Athenians met the required 10% water use reductions ahead of the December 1st deadline. Athens-Clarke County is one of the first counties in Georgia to accomplish this goal. With that same sense of dedication, commitment and awareness to our community, we can also use our efforts to make an impact in alleviating another crisis: HUNGER. Though hunger is silent and unseen, the first step to fixing it is knowledge of its existence. The Food Bank of Northeast Georgia ([www.foodbanknega.org](http://www.foodbanknega.org)) estimates that "thirteen percent of Georgia's population is...food insecure and 3.5% suffer from hunger throughout the year." This translates to around 320,000 people in Georgia reported to be persistently hungry. Additionally, "Clarke County has the highest poverty rate of all the 14 counties within the Food Bank's service area at a whopping 28% (the average rate in the service area is 15.59%)." And where there's poverty, there's also the lingering ache of persistent hunger which affects many in our county each day.

Some of Athens' residents resort to augmenting their diets with backyard or community gardens. Such gardens provide at least a small portion of the required daily intake of healthy fruits and vegetables. But home gardens are threatened due to county-wide restrictions on water. Home and neighborhood gardens were spared throughout the first phases of the Athens Water Management Plan, yet under the current Phase Four, food gardens are not allowed. Ironically, while residential use is strongly prohibited, commercial car-washes are still allowed which for many simply doesn't add up. Under emergency drought conditions, private, commercially-operated car washes can still keep washing as long as they comply with water re-use regulations. This situation is made even stranger considering that community organizations hoping to raise charity money through car washes are also prohibited from doing so, even if one-hundred percent of the proceeds are donated to good causes.

Food scarcity is nothing new to many Athenians; they live with it every day in conditions that often go unseen. Countless children feel the pains of hunger, and so do many adults who simply can't afford healthy and nutritious meals on a regular basis. As the drought persists, the problem of water scarcity is on all of our minds. Athens' other crisis, rampant hunger and food insecurity, should be too. As your consciousness about hunger and commitment to alleviating it expands, take steps to explore opportunities for action. Donating canned goods,

cooking at Common Ground Athens, or the simple act of giving part of one's afternoon lunch to another are all small ways to help. Avenues are also available for those interested in community policy through local organizations like the Food Policy Council, Athens Food Activist Networking Session, or Partners for a Prosperous Athens. On an even larger scale, calling or e-mailing local elected officials concerning local hunger builds valuable support for a pressing issue that affects this community daily.

If you are hungry right now and live in the Athens local area, please visit the Food Not Bombs table for a free and tasty meal. For more information on upcoming events, check our community calendar. For your community contacts, see bottom of this page.

## 3rd Athens Food Activist Networking Session

For the fifty or so of us who attended the 3rd Athens Food Activist Networking Session (AFANS) at Alps Road Elementary School on December 1st, it was clear that important things are happening around grassroots food activism here in town. To see so many different stakeholders networking together and building new coalitions for the sake of bringing positive change signals both the early triumphs of local organizing efforts by groups like P.L.A.C.E, but also shows the viability of producing a more just, healthy and sustainable local food scape.

The success of AFANS rests in the ability to bring together people doing varied things that make our local food system so dynamic, ranging from farmers growing organic vegetables and seeking secure long-term markets for their locally grown produce to activists interested in direct action anti-hunger politics.

While the range of issues discussed were varied, the meeting itself lacked the demographic diversity that makes Athens such a vibrant community. This glaring homogeneity was not lost on the group fortunately and some discussions were directed at strategies for increasing the racial and ethnic representation at future AFANS meetings. The future of food activism in Athens will not only be dependent upon highlighting, talking about, and understanding the problems we have to overcome, but will also require working together as a community of committed activists to do something about them. The meeting also allowed newly formed coalitions to make concrete plans about next steps regarding the kinds of food activism that will hopefully occur in the months leading up to the next AFANS meeting in March. Check the P.L.A.C.E website [<http://www.localplace.org>] for details.

### Contacts:

- ACC Commission: Doug Lowry  
(District 1) 706-613-8443

-Athens Emergency Food Bank:  
706-353-8182

- Athens Food Activist Networking:  
Session (AFANS): Craig Page, website:  
[www.localplace.org](http://www.localplace.org)

- Athens Food Policy Council:  
[hands4sg@bellsouth.net](mailto:hands4sg@bellsouth.net)

- Common Ground Athens: Andrew  
Hunt, website:

<http://www.commongroundathens.org>

- Partners for a Prosperous Athens  
(PPA): Joe Whorton, or Sandy Christopher,  
website: <http://www.prosperousathens.org>

## FOOD NOW ATHENS

Send us your comments and  
story ideas!

[aufc@riseup.net](mailto:aufc@riseup.net)