

Tsai Ya



## MISSION: POSSIBLE

We pay homage to seven community projects based on the principle that a homeless kid can grow up to become a chef and that good food is everyone's right

**W**E'VE GOT THIRTEEN VARIETIES of tomatoes and eight of lettuce; we've got carrots, raspberries, strawberries, Icebox watermelons. Ever hear of those? They're delicious." Jen James, the managing director of the 15-year-old Boston-based **Food Project**, is reeling off a list of produce (almost a quarter ton of it) harvested from urban gardens in Roxbury and Dorchester, as well as from 31 acres in suburban Lincoln, Massachusetts. All of it is planted, tended, picked, and brought to farmers markets around the city by the program's teenage participants and adult volunteers. Some of the vegetables also end up mixed into the project's Farm Fresh Salsa (sold at farmers markets); others are delivered to homeless shelters; and still others are placed in bags for members of the organization's Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program. This summer, The Food Project is taking its participants from seeds to food service by recruiting chefs like Ming Tsai, of Blue Ginger, to cook up Community Lunches with the kids on the Dorchester land, using their produce. "It's about education and nutrition and working together, and it's about being a part of your community," says outreach coordinator Lisa MacCullough. It's also about looking toward the future. The Food Project partners with other organizations to support BLAST (Building Local Agricultural Systems Today), which, through conferences and training sessions around the world, promotes sustainability. Meanwhile, in Boston, the list of would-be farmers gets

longer. "We want to double the program," says James. "But we need more space to grow. We're looking for land." (781-259-8621; [thefoodproject.org](http://thefoodproject.org)) —*Nanette Maxim*

**A**ROUND HERE, you can buy two-hundred-dollar sneakers and every kind of cigarette, but forget about whole-grain bread and organic milk," says LaDonna Redmond. For this community organizer, grassroots activism took on new meaning after her son, Wade, was diagnosed with severe food allergies six years ago. In researching what to feed him, the new mother found herself increasingly concerned about the larger issue of food distribution and the options facing other families in Austin, her mixed-income, predominantly African-American neighborhood on Chicago's West Side. While fast-food chains and corner shops abound, a single supermarket services the area's 117,000 residents. Redmond founded the nonprofit **Institute for Community Resource Development** to bring the food she wanted closer to home. First, she turned six abandoned lots into an urban farming center. "People thought we were crazy at first," she recalls. "But then they started crossing the street to give us planting tips. This incredible knowledge was buried just under the surface." Next, with the help of a grant from the W. K. Kellogg

At the Food Project's North Shore farm lot (one of four Boston-area growing locations), it's harvest time for greens and other vegetables.

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Foundation, Redmond resuscitated the defunct local farmers market, and, with a team of specialists from nearby universities, launched the pilot phase of the School-Based Nutrition Program for children in elementary school. On deck? A community-owned grocery store that will, she hopes, serve as a model for other urban neighborhoods. "Austin spends \$130 million a year on food, and eighty percent of that money leaves the community," Redmond says. "We want to return that value." These grassroots are bearing fruit—and vegetables. (630-552-1806) —*Marisa Robertson-Textor*

**C**OMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE programs, or CSAs (which originated in Europe and Japan in the 1960s), entail a farmer and consumers establishing a partnership and sharing the risk that is usually borne by the farmer alone; consumers pay in advance for a share of the season's bounty, and any surplus produce often goes to farmers markets or is donated to local food banks. Today, there are about 1,500 CSAs in the U.S. What distinguishes relative newcomer **Organic Farm Project**, based on the campus of Washington State University in Pullman, is that it has led to what will be the first Organic Agriculture major at an American university. "I want students to have the skills to grow their own food, whether on a farm or in their backyard," says the CSA's manager, Brad Jaeckel. "That's the sort of thing that ensures our food security." ([csanr.wsu.edu/educationopps](http://csanr.wsu.edu/educationopps)) —*Jane Daniels Lear*

**A**S A NEWLY SINGLE WORKING MOTHER of two, Lynn Fredericks began to feel a disconnect between herself and her children, Stephan, then 19 months old, and Alex, then eight. She saw dinnertime as an opportunity to change that. "I'm giving you a job," said Fredericks to her youngest. "Hold this cup of orzo, and when that pot bubbles, you let me know." And there he sat, eyes fixed on the pot of water, waiting for the slightest hint of a boil. Engaging the child in the meal they were about to eat, Fredericks realized, made them a team. Soon, her older son was helping her select produce at the grocery store—food they both wanted to eat. Fredericks's breakthrough evolved into **FamilyCook Productions (FCP)**, a program for kindergartners to teenagers and their parents that fosters family togetherness and nutrition education through a 15-week series of after-school cooking classes. Now in its third year in Rochester, New York, and its second year in New York City, FCP (partnered with the After-School Corporation, the YMCA, and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene) reaches more (Continued on page 72)

## SOWING THE SEEDS

Annual revenue to farmers from families using coupons at farmers markets from the USDA's Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children: **\$26.9 million**

Productivity of bees raised in urban hives compared with those in rural hives: **four times greater**

Percentage of U.S. agricultural production that originates in metropolitan areas: **40**

Percentage of energy saved by farming corn organically versus conventionally: **30**

Percentage of U.S. cooks and food preparation workers who were 16 to 19 years old in 2004: **19**

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than 1,500 families annually at 50-plus sites. Cultural-themed evenings find families cooking up miso soup, risotto, or tabbouleh using seasonal ingredients. "One mother of a nine-year-old told me that she doesn't have the energy to fight with her child in the supermarket. So she was thrilled when after only three weeks her comments about not eating sugary snacks no longer fell on deaf ears," says Fredericks. "That's our goal—to stop the food fight and help the family make better choices." (212-867-3929; [familycookproductions.com](http://familycookproductions.com)) —Eric Hastie

LONNIE VEASEY KNEW he'd come a long way when he found himself making turnovers for the president of Ireland. Six months before, he had been drug-addicted and homeless, but a cautious step into the offices of FareStart—and a lot of hard work—made all the difference. The brainchild of local chef David Lee, the Seattle-based FareStart (206-443-1233; [farestart.org](http://farestart.org)) provides 16 weeks of intensive food-service training to homeless and disadvantaged men and women, and also makes sure its students receive housing, clothing, transportation, and counseling services. Training includes running the FareStart Restaurant, the FareStart Café, and catering operations. There is also barista training for runaways aged 14 to 21. On Thursdays, the restaurant hosts the wildly popular "guest chef night," where a chef from FareStart's impressive roster (35th Street Bistro, Barking Frog, Flying Fish, Lark, Nell's) designs a meal and teaches students how to prepare it. Dinner is then served to the public for \$19.95. Eighty percent of students have a job by the time they graduate. As frequent guest chef Dan Thiessen explains, "Transforming lives through food not only benefits those who learn to cook, it also puts culinary professionals into the community. Everybody wins." Recently, FareStart launched **Kitchens with Mission**, which helps similar organizations across the country replicate Seattle's success. (206-427-9651; [kitchenswithmission.org](http://kitchenswithmission.org)) —Margo Leab

FENNEL MAY NOT BE the first thing that comes to mind when you think of the South Bronx. But last summer, at one of 13 Bronx community gardens Just Food has partnered with, the aromatic vegetable was being made into a salad by Just Food community food edu-

cator Elizabeth Johnson. "Local children came back for second and third helpings," says executive director Ruth Katz. "One girl told Elizabeth, 'McDonald's has got nothing on you.'" Katz laughs. "Nutrition education is great, but it operates in a vacuum unless people have access to fresh produce and know how to cook it. By linking our farm, garden, and education programs, we close the gap." For the 11-year-old Just Food organization, teaching urban gardeners means sharing the wealth. Master beekeeper Roger Repohl, for example, who keeps his hives in one of the Bronx community gardens, passed his knowledge on to Just Food's City Farms program manager, who then trained members of the community, who will train others. In time, honey will be produced in the middle of empty lots and on rooftops all around the city. And Just Food's CSA programs include one in East New York (one of Brooklyn's poorest neighborhoods), linking upstate New York farmer Cheryl Rogowski with a community in need of fresh, affordable produce. The CSA has helped Rogowski's family farm stay afloat and brought East New Yorkers tomatillos, eggplants, and greens. What goes around, comes around. (212-645-9880; [justfood.org](http://justfood.org)) —N.M.

IT'S EASY TO SAY "Keep farming" to a grower who is being offered big bucks by a developer for his land, but it's far more difficult to make it economically viable for that farmer to stay the course. The nonprofit Glynwood Center's Keep Farming program has been helping communities do the math, consult experts in land conservancy and markets, and connect the dots to get a realistic picture of where they are now, and of what they have to do to support their farmers. In the Hudson Valley, for instance, the 11-year-old organization is encouraging some low-profit dairy farmers to diversify their income by adding pastured beef. In other areas, it has helped farmers make connections with new markets, including restaurants. "We're a working farm ourselves," says Glynwood president Judith LaBelle. Sheep-shearing and beekeeping demonstrations are ongoing at the center, in Cold Spring, New York. Glynwood also presents annual awards to outstanding farmers and the organizations that support them. (845-265-3338; [glynwood.org](http://glynwood.org)) —N.M.