

Jeffrey: Hello and welcome to this edition of community and university. Today I am joined by the cofounder of the Lansing urban farm project, Laura DeLind. She's here to talk to us about this weekend's harvest gala at Urbandale farm. Hi Laura. How are you? I'm good. How are you?

Laura: I'm fantastic.

Jeffrey: Do you wanna tell us a little bit about yourself and what you do?

Laura: Sure. At this point I'm retired, but before I was, I was a cultural anthropologist at MSU and spent years and years studying alternative agriculture, sustainability, local food, and farming. And my work in the community on the east side is an extension of that interest.

Jeffrey: So what's the purpose of the Lansing urban farm project that you co founded?

Laura: Well, we have a mission statement, which I'll let you know and then I'll explain it further. The Lansing Urban Farm Project's mission is to support small urban farms in the Lansing region and to integrate food and farming into larger community building efforts. So basically what we're thinking of is that there is room and there's need for communities to recognize that, especially urban communities, to recognize the value of locally produced food and their space in urban settings for that to happen at is not generally recognized as being an asset and urban asset, but it is. And so part of what our mission is to change the climate both for producers and for eaters to recognize the value of locally produced food and to support those who do that, who farm.

Jeffrey: How did you find yourself involved with urban farms?

Laura: Well, urban farms is fairly recent, maybe 10, 12 years ago. But as I said, I'd been studying agriculture in alternative agriculture for very many years. And, um, this was just a, an outgrowth, I had been doing it in rural areas. I'd worked with CSAs. Um, and then I started working with the Allen neighborhood center on the Allen Street farmers market and recognize that there was a need in the city for production units, food production units. And that's when a colleague and I cofounded the Lansing urban farm project to see if we couldn't provide a model for a more intensive food and flower and herb production right there, right in the city.

Jeffrey: So can people in Lansing get involved with the urban farm project and how so?

Laura: Yeah, of course they can. Yes. At this, and they have, over the years we've been farming for 10 years. We started in 2009 but we didn't find that first year. And we've had volunteers, we've had interns and we've even had an apprenticeship program where we trained other urban farmers. At this point. This year we've tried something new. We are working with Lansing grown farmers and we offer, which is something I'll explain in a bit. We've offered the land that we use, which we lease from the Land Bank and we've offered it to some of the Lansing grown farmers. And so on our home field on what we call Urbandale farm and in our hope house, we have two very, very skilled, urban

farmers working the land and the hoophouse for us at this point. The two are Nate Kermit and Eliza Ghafari.

Jeffrey: So you mentioned Urbandale Farm has their harvest gala. Um, so do you want to talk a little bit about that and also are there other farms that are under the umbrella of the urban farm project? That have things coming up.

Laura: Let me talk about Lansing Grown first because it is a project of the Lansing urban farm project. What we recognized over the years we'd been training urban agriculturalists, urban farmers and doing a fine job of that. And they were doing a fine job of farming in the area, many of them in on the east side and many of them in Urbandale neighborhood proper, but none of them were being able to make a really robust living at farming. And so we realized that perhaps it was time to stop training new farmers and working on re-educating the general public and providing support for small farmers so that they would have increased markets and increased visibility. And that's what began, why we began the Lansing grown project. We now have a logo, which you'll see on some farms. You'll see it, some markets. And this is our focus right now. Right now we have about eight or nine farms that are part of the Lansing grown campaign and we're gonna work to sort of shop them around to food trucks and restaurants and chefs and nursing homes and grocery stores so that they're more and more visible as legitimate and robust producers of food have some time, eggs, honey food.

Jeffrey: So do you want to talk a little bit about the gala that's coming up this weekend?

Laura: Yes. Thank you. The gala, this is the fourth year we've had the gala. It is one of the... well it is our only major fundraiser once a year and it's both a fundraiser and a celebration. It's toward the end of the season, the end of the growing season. And we are using produce from the farms. We have as member of our board, the Lansing Urban farm project board. We have a chef, James Sumpter, and he was the executive chef at Dusty's. He's now in Ann Arbor working with a restaurant called virology, but he's come back to create the meal that we're going to have at the harvest gala and the harvest. The gala is a time for people who have supported us or who are curious about us or who just want to have a good time to come and see the farm, to wander through the plots, to take a look at the hoophouse, to enjoy wonderful food and all locally produced and to celebrate urban food and farming. Right.

Jeffrey: Where can they find more information about the gala?

Laura: The gala is also on our website. And there are, you don't have to have a ticket in advance. You can come at the door or at the gate at the farm gate and because it's a fundraiser, Individuals are \$30. Couples are \$50, and if you want to support us at a higher level, you can become a host or a sponsor or benefactor. And we would love to have as many people as possible join our celebration.

Jeffrey: So the last thing I'll ask is why are, why is this such an important initiative for you? Like, why are urban farms so important to our local communities?

Laura: Well, urban farms do many different things. Obviously the most apparent is that they raise food food in an urban setting for people frequently who don't have easy access to full capacity grocery. They are people who perhaps don't have cars or have to rely on the bus system and have to haul back anything. They can, whatever they call back they must carry. This is fresh food and, and when it's done properly, the very best food, but urban farms also use real estate that has been either abandoned or neglected or just needs better utilized. And so it, it takes these empty spaces in neighborhoods and makes them green and again, when done right, quite beautiful. So it has an aesthetic appeal as well. It works and improves the soil. It becomes a site for, for pollinators. It becomes a site for people to come and investigate. So it has, it has Ultimately it has community building qualities as well because people see what's going on. They see somebody as making an effort in their neighborhood to both utilize this vacant space but also to beautify the sake and space. And it means that people are going to be investing a little more heavily in their own backyards, taking themselves a little more seriously. I'm hoping and working to make this a community of interest and something that can, you can share information. You can share skills. So it's a community building effort. It's, it's a nutritional effort. It's an ecological effort and it's a neighborhood enriching effort.

Jeffrey: Well, thank you so much for joining us for this episode of Community University, Laura. Um, I can vouch for how beautiful that farm is, Urbandale farm. I was there on Saturday and it was really, really cool place to be. So I appreciate you coming on to talk about the gala and urban farming in general. Thank you so much.

Laura: Well, thank you. I appreciate all your time.

Jeffrey: Yeah. So that'll wrap up this episode of community university. I'm your host, Jeff Franklin, and, uh, we hope to see you at the harvest gala this Saturday, September 21st. See you there.