The Produce Project started its 9th summer with many accomplishments to look back on with pride and much more to look forward to. The farm as it exists today owes much to the hundreds of students and thousands of volunteers who put in countless hours to transform a dozen abandoned city lots into a functioning urban farm. Now, with nearly two acres of crops, two high tunnels providing harvests throughout the winter and an orchard brimming with its first apples, peaches and pears, the Produce Project can also boast its first summer program that features three Student Leaders.

The Produce Project’s leadership track has evolved over time, building on the work of students and staff who came before to create higher expectations, make training more comprehensive, and develop a deeper pool of candidates capable of handling the challenge of being a Student Leader. After applying and being accepted, Leaders are paired with adult interns in June. Together they complete an intensive two week orientation that prepares them for the farming and management challenges they will face during the summer, as they lead their small groups in day-to-day chores and the entire group in team building and communication exercises. Interns and Leaders join staff at weekly team meetings to share advice and discuss program ideas and progress. Working side by side with adults in a position of shared responsibility gives Leaders a new understanding of their abilities and is very inspiring to both them and the students they are managing. This makes Leaders especially effective at motivating and inspiring other youth in the program, setting the stage for continued program improvements and the next crop of leaders. (Continued on Page 3)
We grow, educate and provide.

From the opening of its first gardens in 1975, to the dynamic and multifaceted organization of today, Capital Roots has worked to reduce the impact of poor nutrition on public health in the Capital Region. We organize community gardens, improve access to healthy food, offer nutrition and horticulture education for all ages and coordinate urban greening programs in Albany, Rensselaer, Schenectady and southern Saratoga counties.

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There’s a joke around the office and it centers on a word that I often use to describe what our organization was built on - GRIT. I don’t mean the dirt under our fingernails or on our floors, but the tenacity that we have always had to get the job done. It’s a joke because when what seems like an impossible or maybe even imprudent task is put before us, I roll out that GRIT. “That’s how we did it in the old days when we didn’t have any other choice but to just dive in and get it done, so we just need to put our shoulder to it… blah, blah, blah” There are definitely times when I need to be reminded that we do have options now. But, there’s nothing like that old fashioned grit and the teamwork that Capital Roots is famous for to achieve what sometimes seems like the impossible.

This season, our staff and volunteers had numerous occasions to demonstrate the true grit of Capital Roots.

For example, what do you do when you have to move 270 cubic yards of soil to build a new community garden? You grab a bunch of shovels and wheelbarrows, wrangle as many staff and volunteers as you can and you get to it! Do you let 90 degree heat, high humidity and scorching sun stop you? Of course not! That wouldn’t be grit!

What about when the Veggie Mobile® roof is torn off by a large tree branch and rain is pouring inside the truck and it can’t be repaired for months? Do you stop providing essential services? No way! You rig up some tarps so that the truck can keep operating even during heavy rain events, so families can access the best fruits and vegetables our region’s farms have to offer!

When trucks are stuck in the mud. When equipment breaks down. When you are woefully short staffed. What do you do? Dig deep and get the job done with the resources you have. That’s the Capital Roots way.

I’m so proud of the work that this organization is able to accomplish. How we maximize each dollar and invest it wisely in our programs and community. We provide our services with compassion, creativity and intent. And, yes, with lots and lots of grit.
The long hot days of the summer session begin early. Leaders and interns arrive before 8am Monday - Friday to review their group's tasks for the day with the Farmer and Educator. Students start arriving shortly after, many coming before their shift starts to take advantage of the fresh foods provided. Youth circle up at 8:30am sharp, and warm-up exercises and a check-in are managed by one of the Leaders. Groups then disperse around the farm, getting right to work harvesting or tending crops. Field work goes until midday when the groups come back together to share a communal lunch. On Thursdays, the lunch is prepared by a team of students with help from a guest chef, using crops from the farm. After every lunch, teams are responsible for cleaning up after the meal, then preparing for afternoon programming and more farm work. Students’ take turns running the Tuesday Farm Stand and making sales at the Saturday Farmers Market in Delmar, as well as working shifts on Capital Roots’ Veggie Mobile® and serving community meals with our friends at Unity House.

One morning we had the pleasure of checking in with Isaiah, one of this year’s Produce Project Student Leaders. At around 10:30am the students took a break from harvesting to chat, check their phones and grab a snack. Isaiah sat alongside a garlic patch, whittling a piece of celery as we talked about his time with the program. As his fourth and final semester came to close, we asked what his favorite part about the Produce Project was:

“It’s a weird answer, but I would say my favorite part... wasn’t really working on the farm,” Isaiah admitted, "it was when they gave me an interview for the first time. Obviously, when they hired me they saw something in me and I kind of appreciated that.”

Across 10 summers of the Produce Project, much has changed. Every year adds a new wrinkle to the layout of the farm and the design of the program, but the core of our mission — to grow food, empower youth, and build community — remains unchanged.

We strive to create an environment where healthy work and healthy food support honest conversation and a space where youth feel safe enough to take the emotional risks they need to grow and take responsibility for their own lives. We know it is difficult to create a future that you can’t imagine first. With each new class of Student Leaders, youth get an expanded view of their potential and the role the Produce Project can play in helping them reach their goals.

Join Us in Supporting Our Youth

SPONSOR-A-STUDENT

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THE FACES OF 2018 SUMMER SESSION

Student Leaders

Isaiah

Alexis

Tyiste
You might recall from our Winter 2018 Newsletter that we were in the early development stages of two new community gardens: one on Cayuga Street in downtown Cohoes and the other at Ida Yarbrough Apartments in Albany. We are happy to report that the Ida Yarbrough Community Garden is now open and full of gardeners growing delicious fresh fruits and vegetables, and Cayuga Street is well on its way!

It Takes a Community
A community garden truly takes a “community” to build and when it came to Ida Yarbrough, that couldn’t have been more true. Thanks to Ted Koch and Steve Longo at the Albany Housing Authority, Bill Keefer, General Superintendent of AOW Associates, and Kelsey Carr, Project Manager and Engineer at the Chazen Companies, for helping us bring this amazing space to life.

Situated in the heart of Ida Yarbrough’s brand new apartment complex, the community garden provides enough raised beds to support 20 families. As we transformed this new space, we’ve gotten to know some of the people from the neighborhood, many of whom would eventually join us as gardeners.

Omar was one of the first neighbors to sign up for a plot and was more than excited to get started. He asked our Community Gardens Program Manager, Tara, about different types of herbs from basil to sage. There was a genuine curiosity in his eyes as he dove into the possibilities this garden could have for him and his family. He even helped us prep the beds for the ribbon-cutting as his children ran around to each raised bed, wondering if any of the vegetables were ripe enough to pick yet (they weren’t - but that didn’t stop them).

Just like Omar, garden neighbor Shawnae was eager and enthusiastic about joining the program.

“This is my first time gardening, and it has just been a beautiful experience,” she told us, adding that she is growing upwards of nine different plant varieties this season. “It’s so cool to learn more about agriculture instead of just going to the store, it’s safer to know you’re actually growing the food you eat. It’s something that benefits you and teaches you at the same time.”

We couldn’t agree more. Ida Yarbrough has been particularly special, as it has brought the entire community together in the most amazing way. We were excited to celebrate its opening with many others from the community.

It Takes Grit
At Cayuga Street in Cohoes, what others saw as a vacant lot overgrown with weeds and a decaying building peeking through the brush, Capital Roots and the City saw as an opportunity and a prospective space for our 54th community garden. Capital Roots took ownership of the Cayuga Street property (thanks to the Albany County Land Bank) in late 2017 ensuring that the garden will forever remain a protected greenspace.

Knowing that we could count on the City of Cohoes to support our combined vision for the space, we tested the soil and the rest is history.
So what does it take to build a community garden? Well, it’s no easy task, we can tell you that! Just take a look at Tara’s to do list for Cayuga. Unlike the work of Ida, Cayuga’s creation required us to muster a bunch of that Capital Roots "grit" that we often mention.

For weeks, we packed up our trucks with shovels, wheel barrels and helping hands to spread 270 cubic yards of soil evenly across the quarter acre site (a portion of which was donated by our friends at Troy Sand and Gravel). Staff from across the organization put in days of work while volunteers, interns and community partners put in even more. The heat was no match for our spirits as we returned each week to chip away at the piles of soil, while others tackled the growing areas of knotweed by hand. We even had gardeners from other sites join the action by grabbing a shovel and getting down in the dirt.

Robin F came to us on a hot July morning, ready to lend a hand. You’d think that Robin was a perspective Cayuga Street community gardener, yet she has been a part of the Normanskill Community Garden in Albany for quite some time. So why would a person who already has a community garden plot come all the way to Cohoes to help spread some dirt?

"I like to dream about the different veggies I want to grow, and the varieties that have come about, and what plants want to be with whom, and where. It’s like building a veggie village," Robin says, "Plus, I love playing in the soil, which really reminds me how connected we ALL are to everything and everyone."

Robin had even confessed to us that she hasn’t be able to spend a lot of time in her garden this year, but deeply cares about the importance of gardening and the feeling of accomplishment you get from that first harvest. It was certainly inspiring to know community of gardeners will go out of their way to lend a hand to give another person the chance to feel that same pride.

Together we moved mountains. Thanks to this serious team effort and the support of the Land Trust Alliance New York State Conservation Partnership Program and Cohoes Savings Foundation, we were able to transform this once abandoned lot into a productive green space — one shovel at a time. We are happy to say that the 2019 growing season will provide another 20 families the opportunity to grow their own fresh, organic fruits and vegetables, thanks to this space.

After last minute finishing touches, like a brand new water spigot, we officially opened up the Cayuga Street community garden with a traditional ribbon cutting. We are so excited to get growing with our gardeners!

It Starts with You

Between the opening of Ida Yarbrough and the development of Cayuga Street, our Community Gardens team has had quite the summer. But the work isn't over. We have our eyes on potential new spaces to create our 55th community garden.

There’s no better time to support this program than now. You can be that change and help us create more green spaces that nourish and strengthen our communities. Hop online to www.capitalroots.org/donate and make that change today.
This year is shaping up to be a bountiful one for Capital Roots’ Squash Hunger program. Our team is working closely with local farms and making improvements to our data collection system to ensure farmers and producers are provided the info they need to take advantage of the new Farm-to-Food Bank tax incentive.

Working alongside our partners at Comfort Food Community, Capital Roots’ staff, volunteers and interns have been harvesting fresh produce from dozens of farms. This top quality produce, gleaned from the fields of our partners, is delivered directly to food pantries, soup kitchens and shelters throughout the region, providing our neighbors in need with heathier food options. More than 23,220 pounds of fresh fruits and vegetables have been donated to Capital Roots’ Squash Hunger program already this year from 30 regional farms, and the peak harvest season is just beginning.

In our last newsletter we announced the launch of our Produce Drive Tool Kit which provides simple step-by-step guidelines for volunteer groups (colleges, churches, civic organizations and businesses) to host Squash Hunger produce drives. Interested groups work with Capital Roots’ staff to get the word out and collect fresh produce for donation to area feeding programs. It’s simple, worthwhile, and helps hungry neighbor’s access fresh fruits and vegetables. With a few drives already registered, we are anxious to see this new volunteer concept grow through the end of the year.

**ACCESS THE PRODUCE DRIVE TOOLKIT AT:**
www.capitalroots.org/squashhunger/toolkit

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**IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD**

Notice more of the Veggie Mobile® or Veggie Mobile® Sprout trucks in your neighborhood? That’s because the mobile markets are now visiting more locations in the Capital Region than ever before! Thanks to our friends at CDPHP, our generous program sponsor, we were able to add two new market stops to our weekly schedule. You can now find our mobile markets providing year-round access to healthy, affordable fruits and veggies at Monument Square Apartments in downtown Troy and Hillside Apartments in Schenectady. In partnership with The Community Builders, these two new stops will provide healthy food access for hundreds of our neighbors across the region.

As always, our mobile market stops are open to everyone. So come on out and meet your fellow neighbors and catch up with our friendly staff. We accept many types of payment including EBT/SNAP, Farmers Market Nutrition Program checks, Veggie Rx coupons, cash and check. If you’re looking for a stop, visit www.capitalroots.org or keep an eye out for these.

You may have also noticed some street art popping up along sidewalks in our cities’ neighborhoods. Look closely and you’ll see the days and times when our mobile markets will be rolling through. We’re excited to connect with more of you this fall and winter. So stop by your nearest Veggie Mobile® or Veggie Mobile® Sprout location to see what all the buzz is about.
For most, the first weekend of May is the beginning of Spring. Birds and bees are a buzz with activity. And Capital Roots is as busy as the bees during that first weekend of May! That’s because we like to celebrate spring by holding the largest community event of the season! On May 6th, we returned to the Empire State Plaza to host Capital Roots’ 31st Annual Spring Brunch.

Over the past 31 years, many aspects of this event has changed, but one thing that’s for certain, it keeps on growing! The best part about the Brunch is that moment when we finally open the doors to welcome our guests - almost 600. Our guests enjoyed a never ending buffet, exploring the region’s favorite dishes from more than 100 local restaurants. This year even included a delicious pancake station provided by our friends at Rivers Casino & Resort. No one ever goes home hungry, that’s for sure!

At the center of our sprawling Brunch space was our silent auction. More than 300 businesses and individuals donated items and services to the auction, making this year’s event a huge success. $91,000 was raised to support Capital Roots’ programming. None of this would be possible without the support of all of our generous donors, business partners, volunteers and gardeners. Thank YOU!

At its core, Spring Brunch is truly a community event. It takes the effort of our full staff, more than 50 volunteers, and relies on the generosity of hundreds of local restaurants and businesses. The sense of community is overwhelming, and we are so fortunate to be surrounded by such a passionate and engaged community. Save the date for our 32nd Annual Spring Brunch on May 5, 2019!
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WISH LIST

- Working vehicles
- Baskets
- Hoes (stirrup preferably or regular)
- Garden carts
- Water barrels
- Good working all-terrain mower
- Set of metal ramps for loading equipment
- Laptop computers
- Long handled and round point shovels
- Cake platters and pie servers
- High capacity stapler
- Bags of road salt and scoops
- Clean 5 gallon buckets
- 3-4ft tall pointed wooden stakes
- Broad fork
- Watering cans with nozzles
- Hard rakes
- Large whiteboards
- Light Coats and Sweatshirts
- Raincoats
- Large plastic storage totes with lids
- Push mower
- Gardening gloves for cold weather
- Composition notebooks
- Electric weedwacker
- Spray nozzles and watering wands
- Soaker hoses in good condition
- Pick axes
- Locker locks
- Pitch forks

To make a donation, call Jessica:
518-274-8685

Give Your Way

MAKE IT MONTHLY – Join Capital Roots’ Harvest Helpers and make a monthly gift to support our work. Whether it’s $5 or $100, your continued commitment throughout the year ensures our neighbors have the resources they need to thrive.

LEAVE A LEGACY – Planned giving is one of the simplest ways to make a lasting impact. Talk to your financial advisor about adding Capital Roots to your will and help ensure our programs are here for the long haul.

There’s no better time than now to take your giving to the next level or to kick-start your commitment to Capital Roots. Email Amy at amy@capitalroots.org or Rebecca at devmanager@capitalroots.org to get started.

SUPPORT CAPITAL ROOTS WITH A DONATION TODAY!

NAME: ___________________________ E-MAIL: ___________________________
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☐ In support of the 55th Community Garden,
I’d like to donate $ ___________

☐ $35 Friend
☐ $60 Sponsor
☐ $120 Supporter
☐ $300 Benefactor

☐ In honor of
☐ In memory of

☐ I’d LIKE TO GET INVOLVED
☐ Volunteer on our Veggie Mobile® to deliver fresh produce
☐ Spend a Thursday or Saturday at the Produce Project 8th Street Urban Farm
☐ Help deliver produce to area food pantries for Squash Hunger
Autumn Evening
in the garden

Wednesday, September 12, 2018
6:00PM-9:00PM
Cocktail Attire

The Hilton Garden Inn
235 Hoosick Street, Troy

Purchase tickets online at:
www.CapitalRoots.org

For questions, contact Rebecca at 518-274-8685.

JOIN CAPITAL ROOTS for an elegant evening of seasonally fresh foods and mingling amongst chefs, farmers and friends.