

Urban farm network cultivates new food producers



THE ISSUE

Indianapolis suffers from widespread **food access challenges** driven by a combination of infrastructure-based and economic challenges. Many Indianapolis citizens seek to **improve their neighborhoods and local food systems through food gardens and small scale farming** efforts. Urban farmers, however, are a demographic of beginning food growers who often **lack access to a peer network or traditional agriculture resources**. Purdue Extension–Marion County sought to connect with new urban farmers, support their food production efforts and help them connect with each other.

THE PROGRAM: PURDUE URBAN FARM INCUBATOR NETWORK

With AgSEED Crossroads funding and strong community partnerships, Purdue Extension–Marion County developed the **Purdue Urban Farm Incubator Network** where new urban food growers can:

- Access professional development opportunities and establish a connection to existing support for small-scale, diversified farms
- Grow their peer network to expand their access to local resources and opportunities

THE IMPACT

In the first part of this program, 35 urban agriculture entrepreneurs attended a four-week **Urban Farm and Local Food Business Planning course**. As a result of these 14 hours of classroom instruction, participants made **new market connections and took actions like building a website for their farm**. From that cohort, five new urban farm enterprises joined the **Purdue Urban Farm Incubator Network** for the 2016 growing season in the program's first year.

As a result of their membership to the Purdue Urban Farm Incubator Network, participants reported **expanding their farmer-to-farmer connections, gaining chef connections and new landowner connections**. They also gained a **greater connection to organizations that support agriculture and benefited from new resources**. For example, member Tysha Ahmad (picture at right), was recruited to take part in a Sustainable Agriculture and Research Education (SARE) funded project at Butler University to support urban mushroom cultivation.

IMPACT SUMMARY

In their feedback about the first year, Purdue Urban Farm Incubator Network members said the **most valuable outcomes of their participation were building relationships with other food growers and connecting to technical assistance and educational resources**. Members also reported feeling **hope, energy and possibility as a result of the Purdue Urban Farm Incubator Network**.

