

Urban Farming in West Oakland

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[Emily Anne Epstein](#) and [Alan Taylor](#)

This photo essay by photographer [Preston Gannaway](#) focuses on inner-city agriculture programs. Here's what's behind the essay, in her words:

Today, about a third of West Oakland residents live in poverty and with food insecurity. It's a place where most people get their food from McDonald's, the 99-cent store, or one of the many corner liquor stores. Due to a lack of nutritious food, low-income areas like this one face overwhelming rates of heart disease, obesity, diabetes. In an effort to fill this need, new groups have formed to help combat the neighborhood's food desert—a term to describe an area where most residents live below the poverty line and a mile or more away from a supermarket.

City Slicker Farms, which formed in 2001 and is one of the most established, recently built a 1.4-acre Farm Park complete with a sliding-scale farm stand and 28-plot community bed. Justin Vandebroek runs Fleet Farming Oakland, which constructs small farms in neighborhood yard spaces proclaiming, 'grow food, not lawns!' Working an economic angle as well as a dietary one, West Oakland Woods (WOW) Farms formed to help fill an employment need while taking advantage of the changing area's restaurant boom. WOW operates both a produce and a flower farm that supplies high-end restaurants while training and employing local high-school students with financial need.

But industrial urban areas like West Oakland must also contend with decades of pollutants. The farmers say the soil is too toxic and must be either hauled away or lined to accommodate organic soil beds built on top. Water, soil, and air are all problems in West Oakland, said Vandebroek.



Ketwan Raynor, 16, works at the WOW Produce Farm in West Oakland, California, on Wednesday, October 20, 2016. High-school students apply for a three-month internship and gain skills as well as a paycheck. #

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Azariah Waller, 3, helps her mother remove dead leaves from their community garden plot at City Slicker Farm Park in West Oakland, California, on Saturday, October 29, 2016. Gardening is spiritual, her mother Natacha Jeanty said: "Sometimes you gotta pull it out to make more grow." #

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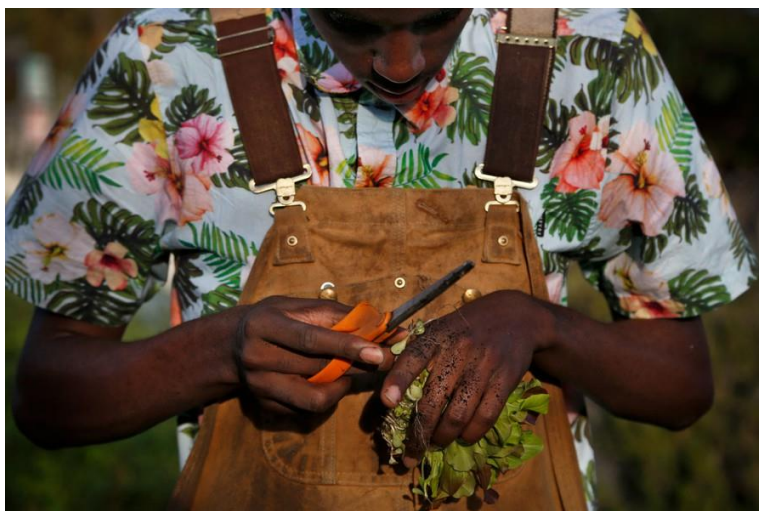
Jon Price (right), the WOW Produce Farm Manager, explains composting to the student workers including (from left) Erin Ahlich, 15, Andranee Lyons, 18, and Izabella Scaparro, 17, in Oakland, California, on Wednesday, October 5, 2016. #

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Interns and volunteers prep dirt for flower beds at WOW Farm in Oakland, California, on Tuesday, October 4, 2016. #

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Mekhi Brown, 15, trims the roots off greens at WOW produce farm in West Oakland, California, on Wednesday, October 20, 2016. #

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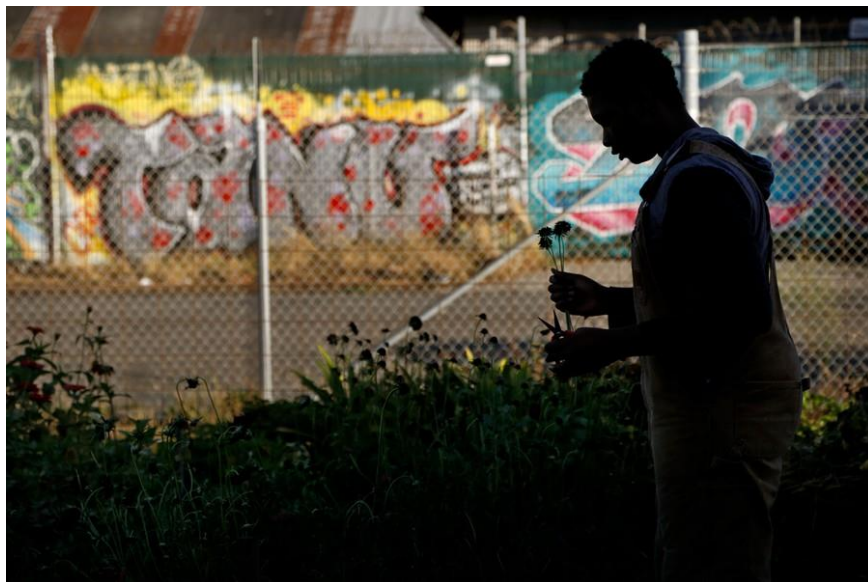
A farm truck at City Slicker Farm Park in West Oakland, California, on Saturday, October 29, 2016. City Slicker started in 2001, and its main mission is to educate people as to what's healthy while helping them grow their own food. #

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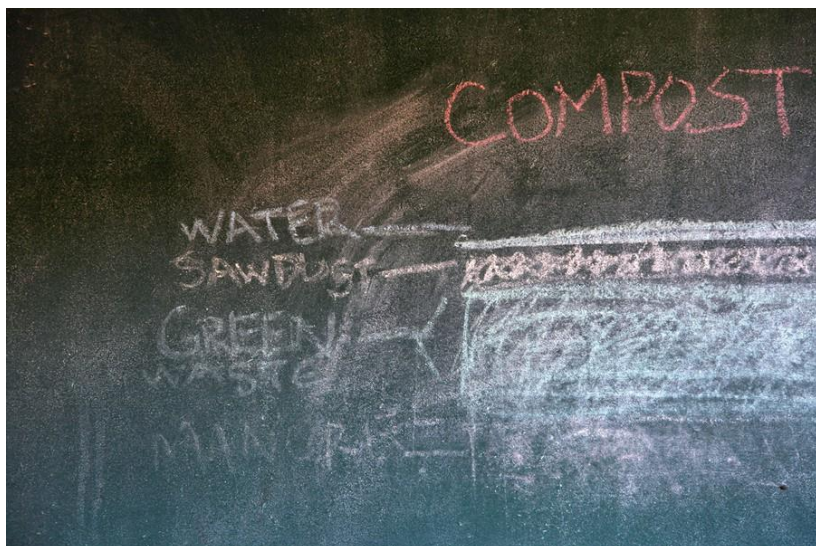
Interns work on a compost pile at WOW Farm in Oakland, California, on Wednesday, October 5, 2016. #

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Malik Hopkins, 14, picks flowers for bouquets at WOW in West Oakland, California, on Tuesday, October 18, 2016. The flower farm has been operating for three years. #

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An educational diagram of a compost pile at WOW Farm in Oakland, California, on Saturday, October 1, 2016. #

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Ketwan Raynor, 16, works at the WOW Produce Farm in West Oakland, California, on Wednesday, October 20, 2016. #

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Jon Price and the interns busy harvesting at WOW Produce Farm during the last night of the fall internship in West Oakland, California, on Wednesday, November 16, 2016 #

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An advertisement on the side of a corner market in West Oakland, California, on Wednesday, October 5, 2016. Much of Oakland is considered a food desert: a low-income area where many residents live a mile or more away from a supermarket. Many residents without access to transportation are forced to buy their food from nearby liquor stores and convenience stores. #

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People line up for free food in West Oakland, California, on Tuesday, November 22, 2016. The food is provided by the Oakland Food Pantry and Oakland and the World Enterprises, a development venture started by a former member of the Black Panther Party. #

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Teenage interns work at the WOW Produce Farm in Oakland, California, on Saturday, October 1, 2016. #

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Jakari Hill, a 17-year-old WOW intern, arranges a bouquet at the farm in Oakland, California, on Saturday, October 1, 2016. The bouquets are sold to restaurants and individuals. #

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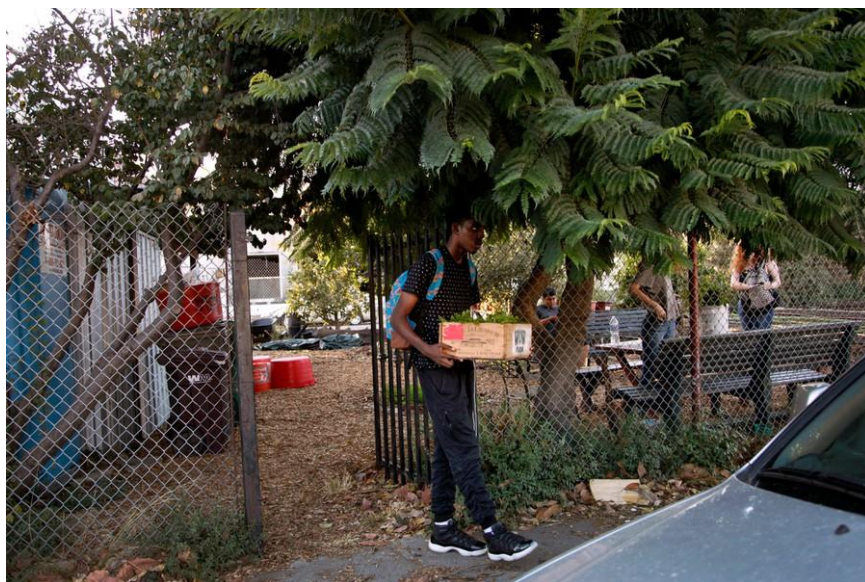
Izabella Scaparro, 17, works at the WOW farm in West Oakland, California, on Wednesday, November 16, 2016. #

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Malik Hopkins, 14, harvests at WOW Flower Farm in Oakland, California, on Tuesday, October 18, 2016. Malik uses his paycheck to take his mother grocery shopping and his sister to eat at Panda Express. #

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Mekhi Brown, 15, carries crops to be delivered to a local restaurant in Oakland, California, on Wednesday, October 5, 2016. WOW Farm's produce is sold and served in various restaurants in the area. #

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Mekhi Brown, 15, holds flowers to be delivered to a local restaurant in Oakland, California, on Wednesday, October 5, 2016. #

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Jon Price, the WOW farm manager, and Mekhi Brown, 15, deliver flowers to a local restaurant called The Cook and Her Farmer in Oakland, California, on Wednesday, October 5, 2016. The proceeds help fund the internship and run the farm. #

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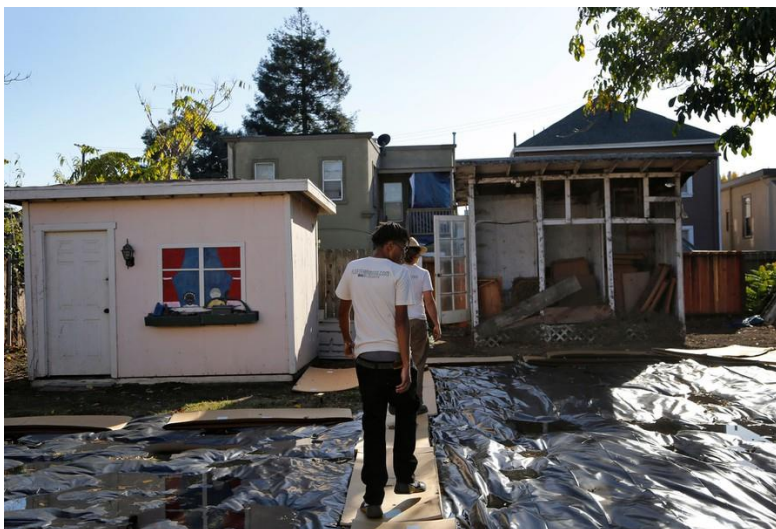
Justin Vandebroek, the co-founder of Fleet Farming Oakland, rides his bike to a farmlette in West Oakland, California, on Tuesday, October 18, 2016. #

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Justin Vandebroek, the co-founder of Fleet Farming Oakland, harvests at a farmlette in West Oakland, California, on Tuesday, October 18, 2016. #

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Justin Vandebroek and Fred Lake work at a new location about to be cultivated in West Oakland, California, on Tuesday, October 18, 2016. Fleet Farming Oakland is working on 7,000 square feet of farm space and about to bring in enough revenue to employ two residents part time. #

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Justin Vandebroek, the co-founder of Fleet Farming Oakland, harvests a farmlette in West Oakland, California, on Tuesday, October 18, 2016. About 5 to 10 percent of the produce he grows is shared with the residents or homeowner, and the rest he sells directly to restaurants. #

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Justin Vandebroek, the co-founder of Fleet Farming Oakland, washes off some carrots before making dinner at home in West Oakland, California, on Sunday, November 20, 2016. #

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Justin Vandebroek and Fred Lake check out a new backyard about to be cultivated in West Oakland, California, on Tuesday, October 18, 2016. #

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Justin Vandebroek, the co-founder of Fleet Farming Oakland, harvests at a farmlette in West Oakland, California, on Tuesday, October 18, 2016. "There was a lot of food grown in this neighborhood at one point," he said. "I think it skipped a generation." #

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Justin Vandebroek, the co-founder of Fleet Farming Oakland, and his girlfriend Kelly Clark make dinner at home in West Oakland, California, on Sunday, November 20, 2016. #

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Justin Vandebroek, the co-founder of Fleet Farming Oakland, and his girlfriend Kelly Clark have dinner at home in West Oakland, California, on Sunday, November 20, 2016. They have a mostly vegetarian diet and often use produce from the farmlettes that Justin works. #

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