

Ranson Old Town Community Gardens

Aspirations and Progress

Presentation by William P. "Bill" Gregg
High Tunnel Greenhouse Dedication
May 12, 2017

On behalf of the Ranson Old Town Community Gardens Association, and each of our dedicated board members and advisors, I'm so glad to welcome each of you to help us celebrate our new high tunnel greenhouse. This greenhouse is enabling us to promote gardening and to expand our service to the community in many ways as together we develop our gardening skills, and share experience and fellowship.

We see ourselves as a "can do" community. Here are some of our aspirations for our special community garden here in Ranson, and how far we have come.

First: That we could provide nutritious produce for neighbors facing food insecurity

Immediately after Mayor Hamill inspired the City to license a small alley to Jefferson County Community Ministries four years ago, our small garden team received a couple of small grants from philanthropic organizations, and support through JCCM from BB&T Bank. By summer, we were delivering fresh produce regularly to the food pantry. In addition, Harris Properties joined our initial garden team and allowed us to use a large vacant lot next to the alley, and the Baha'i Assembly allowed us to use their garden shed and facilities next door.

Volunteers began arriving from the first days, mostly through JCCM's network. Our community of volunteers and supporters grew after we became a 501(c)(3) organization in 2014. The City of Ranson licensed their newly purchased Edwards property to us (where we are standing), and the Secretary of Agriculture approved us to receive this high tunnel in 2015. Enter former board member Alex Personius and Dennis Magaha's capable crew from the WVU Fruit Tree Research Station who coordinated the construction of this beautiful greenhouse! Thanks, gentlemen! Enter more neighbors and friends, church youth, school groups, local businesses, master gardeners, educators, technical specialists, trades people, and Boy and Girl Scouts (including four Eagle Scout projects!) 4400 volunteer hours, and 113 deliveries to the food pantry last year! Today, more local organizations are receiving our produce (e.g., Meals on Wheels and the Senior Center) -- and getting involved (e.g., Boys & Girls Club, Jefferson Center).

Second: That we could grow a rainbow of fruits and vegetables in every season.

We'll be growing more than 80 varieties this year including some you may not be familiar with: like arugula, ground cherries, asparagus beans, purple tomatoes, goji berries, and hardy kiwi.

Third: That we could help people of all ages experience the wonder of the garden, and learn gardening skills and "garden values"

The gardens are open every day to walk-in visitors all the way from Early Head Start to the Senior Center. No one is too young or too old. Gardeners love to share experience, and there are often master

gardeners and potential master gardeners on hand to help anyone learn garden skills. If you volunteer for a while, "I don't have a green thumb" won't be an excuse to avoid gardening!

Fourth: That we could build a demonstration model of urban agriculture as part of a sustainable ecosystem.

- Our carbon footprint is small! Some of the "green" methods we use include use of solar energy, composting, and recycling. With the help of the City of Ranson, we capture rainwater from the Civic Center roof, and pump it with 12-volt solar-powered pumps for all our irrigation needs. (Roger Ethier, who designed our system, is on hand to demonstrate his patented solar-powered pump, which is adaptable for backyard gardening and all sorts other applications.
- We are reducing runoff to Evitts Run and the Chesapeake Bay by channeling water through our rain garden, mulched garden beds and public spaces, and gravel surfaces.
- We use only materials certified for use in organic farming and healthful garden methods that eliminate possibility of soil contamination -- as demonstrated by our raised beds made of untreated lumber, blocks, or straw bales.
- We are rehabilitating weedy habitat, to provide beauty, and attract birds, butterflies, and other pollinators. Already we have improved a woodland habitat at West 3rd Avenue, and are exploring the possibility of working on the CSX embankment and the tunnel area right behind us.

Fifth: That we could be financially self-sustaining.

Ask us about the Garden Circles for sale (on display around the high tunnel) -- a great technology for small scale urban agriculture. We are the sole distributor of this new product for our area, and make about 1/3 profit on every sale! We're also renting raised beds and circle beds in an expanding residents' garden next to the high tunnel. And today we're sharing our wealth of home-grown seedlings, for which we are happy to accept donations. Other donations and other fund-raising ideas are always welcome.

Closing Remarks

It has been inspiring to realize that, through working together on this ever-evolving project, we have become a virtual community! We are people of all ages, faiths, cultural & ethnic backgrounds, capabilities and skills, all having helped to make the vision and aspirations a reality. You are building this! "Watch Us Grow!"