

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: 03/14/08

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### **Tour a Kansas City garden that creates opportunities for youth to get their hands dirty**

Youth gardeners have the opportunity to explore urban agriculture in Kansas City, MO. The Troostwood Garden is located on a corner lot donated for use by Rockhurst University in an urban neighborhood in Kansas City.

There, a master gardener, and ten youth work with Ericka Wright's "Urban Agriculture Youth Program," building their urban agriculture skills. They grow produce to sell at the Troostwood Youth Garden Market.

Through the help of a 2005 grant from the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program (SARE), the Urban Agriculture Youth Program at Troostwood Garden's hopes to influence a change in youths' lifestyle and at the same time improve their nutrition, environment, social and economic practices.

Ericka Wright's family started Troostwood Gardens on their property in 2000 as an activity for neighborhood youths.

"In the community I live in, we were the only house in the neighborhood with a swing set, so we had always kids in the yard. Many of the kids had low scores in reading and math," explained Wright.

"Most people enjoy eating, whatever level they're at, and we figured we could read a little, eat a little, do a little math, and learn together in the garden with the kids," said Wright.

At 41 years-old, Wright is disabled from muscular dystrophy, and values a healthful diet. Wright wanted to show children healthful nutrition as part of a healthy lifestyle.

"In terms of sustainable agriculture, our project falls in line with community. It brings people together in an outdoor classroom, and makes people aware of sustainable gardening practices in the inner city, saving seeds, and eating healthfully," said Wright.

Youths begin gardening each March and continue working in the garden and at the Troostwood Youth Garden Market until the last vegetables are harvested, typically in late October.

"We've found that the youth developed better self esteem. They saw the fruits of their labor and how their hard work had paid off... They now have knowledge of a garden, what it takes to have and build one, and team work."

The Troostwood Garden will be featured as part of the tour program at SARE's 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary New American Farm conference, to be held March 25-27, 2008 in Kansas City, MO

Since 1988, the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program has helped advance farming systems that are profitable, environmentally sound and good for communities through a nationwide research and education grants program. The program, part of USDA's Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, funds projects and conducts outreach designed to improve agricultural systems.

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Ericka Wright in the garden. – photo by Ennis Walker



The Troostwood Youth Garden Market – photo by Ennis Walker