

Stewardship Leaders in Agriculture

Green Food Justice

Tezozomoc

A former linguistics graduate student, Tezozomoc (Tezo) named himself after a Mesoamerican Tepanec leader. Tezo's grandfather, a subsistence farmer in Mexico, instilled in Tezo not only the techniques of subsistence farming, but also a deep appreciation for the land and a respect for the long tradition of growing your own food. Tezo's family came to Los Angeles during the Green Revolution of the 1970s and Tezo and his father quickly became local leaders in South Central L.A. battling inequality through the formation of a 14-acre community garden located on a contested plot of land on 41st and Alameda. The South Central Farm, as it was known, became a cultural center and offered community members far more than just fresh produce. In 2003, after a hard fought political battle, the community farm lost its land to a developer. Tezo was undeterred and in 2007 he helped to form a new 80-acre co-op, the South Central Farmers Health and Education Fund (SCFHEF) in Buttonwillow, CA, about a two hour drive north of Los Angeles. Tezo is dedicated not only to organic farming, but to social justice and to the support of minority communities and low-income populations.



Photo courtesy of Chad Sawyer and the SAWYER Agency

"In the politics of impossibility, you win by losing. We won by losing. And we continue to win, planting hope all along the way." –Tezozomoc

ACHIEVEMENTS

- Recipient of the 2013 Natural Resources Defense Council's Growing Green Food Justice Award
- Instrumental in the founding of the South Central Farmers Health and Education Fund
- Instrumental in the fight to save the South Central Farm
- *The Garden*, a documentary of the fight to save the South Central Farm, was nominated for an Academy Award in 2009

South Central Farmers Health and Education Fund

The South Central Farmers Health and Education Fund (SCFHEF) was founded by Tezo and fellow South Central farmers in 2006. As an organic sharecropping organization, SCFHEF helps new farmers establish farms, facilitates culturally sensitive farmers' markets, and provides community-supported agriculture (CSAs) in low-income Los Angeles communities, along with a number of other community and food-centric projects. The SCFHEF, with a loan from the Northern CA SLOW money, has started a commercial kitchen that will be capable of adding post-harvest processing for small farmers in the Central Valley. The 100% certified organic co-op unites people around healthy eating while also supporting communities and populations suffering from inequitable treatment and forms partnerships with other organization to encourage community level economic development.



Photo courtesy of Jennifer Cockrall-King



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"By creating new economic opportunities right in our own backyard, we hope to strengthen communities' ability to grow and eat healthy food as well as reconnect to the priceless cultural heritage behind it. Community-based agriculture can prosper if equity is the guiding principle. That equity means having access to healthy food, good jobs and working conditions, and land ownership and resources."

—Tezozomoc

PROJECT PARTNERS

- Accurate Trenching Inc.
- Bakersfield Well and Pump
- California Certified Organic Farmers
- Center for Race Poverty and the Environment
- Central Valley Tank
- Diamond Plastics
- Farm Pump and Irrigation
- GM Engineering
- Goulds Pumps
- JM Eagle
- Lonnie A Cross Land Leveling
- Madland Toyota
- Natural Resources Defense Council
- Northern California Slow Money Chapter
- U.S. Irrigation
- USDA Organic
- Wesco



South Central Community Garden

From 1992 until 2006, the Los Angeles' South Central Community Garden grew to 14-acres becoming one of the largest community garden in the country. Three hundred and fifty families grew food on the land that was city owned but operated by the Los Angeles Regional Food Bank. The families farming all fell under the poverty level as determined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the garden become not only a source of fresh vegetables, but a community center and respite from the turmoil of the city. In 2001, legal battles concerning the ownership of the land began and resulted in the loss of the land to a developer in 2004 which was followed by forcible eviction of the farmers in 2006. The politically fraught battle to defend the South Central Community Garden was recorded by filmmaker, Scott Kennedy, in the Academy Award nominated documentary *The Garden*.

PROJECT DETAILS

South Central Farmers Health and Education Fund

The South Central Farmers Health and Education Fund (SCFHEF) has been the recipient of countless large donations that reflect the value of the organizations effort to provide organic, pesticide-free produce to communities with limited access to healthy foods. The 80-acres of land in Buttonwillow, CA was donated by an undisclosed nonprofit organization, a new water pump was donated by Goulds Pumps, a refurbished forklift was donated by Madland Toyota, a water tank was provided by Central Valley Tank of California, and an irrigation system was provided by U.S. Irrigation.

New Latino and minority farmers face many hurdles; threat of entry retaliations, pressure from land developers, language barriers, little access to credit, a lack of marketing skills, production management problems, government regulations, and a lack of organization among farmers. In order to help new farmers overcome these challenges, SCFHEF serves as a holding company, helping farms to get established, providing complete technical assistance, and gradually transitioning them over to self-sustaining operations. With the overarching goal of providing accessible food to marginalized communities, SCFHEF has implemented a number of programs.

Culturally-Sensitive Farmers' Markets

Existing farmers markets lack culturally sensitive Mesoamerican organic produce. SCFHEF works to identify local farmers producing these products and connects them with local farmers markets.

Community-Supported Agriculture

Produce from the SCFHEF is distributed through community-supported agriculture (CSA) packages to community centers, workplaces, and other convenient locations, where people can not only pick up fresh produce but also connect with others in their neighborhood around healthy eating options. The CSA boxes are offered on a sliding pay scale such that students or those below the poverty line are able to afford the produce while those better off help to support the program.

Conservation of Heirloom Crop Biodiversity

SCFHEF works to conserve diverse native North American Heirloom varieties with a special focus on Mesoamerican fruits, vegetables, and medicinal herbs.

Marketing and Distribution Channels as Services

A commercial kitchen purchased by SCFHEF with help from the Northern California Slow Money Impact Investors offers value-added co-processing, co-packaging, and distribution for existing and future Ag cooperatives.

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