

Dharma's Garden Urban Farm Stewardship Plan

By Tyler Bortz, Claire Duncombe
Morgan Snow & Beth Swartwood

Advised by Dr. Damien Thompson



Where does your food come from? Why does it matter?

Food is central to the human experience. It's a physical source of nourishment and a tangible source of enjoyment. It can be a consistent means of connecting with others. But in the last 100 years, many people have become disconnected from the food they eat and the context in which the food is grown. In fact, much of modern-day, conventional agriculture is harmful to Earth and the people who tend to it.



Enter: Dharma's Garden

Dharma's Garden, a nonprofit urban farm in North Boulder, aims to recenter food and agriculture within people's lives. Under the stewardship of co-founders, Tim & Kerry Francis, the organization is striving to set an example of what conscious food production can look like. Their methods account not only for feeding people, but also nourishing the land and the surrounding ecosystem while doing so. Such action is important in a future where we need to be able to feed a growing population while also caring for and sustaining our natural world -- and our connection to it.



How are we helping?

Our team of Masters of the Environment students at the University of Colorado-Boulder, was hired to produce a long-term Stewardship Plan for future Dharma's Garden stewards. The plan includes an outline of the nonprofit's values, conscious land management techniques and an intention for community involvement. It lays out practical and actionable steps towards achieving short-, mid-and long-term goals.





What are our deliverables?

We will produce a more than 200-page Stewardship Plan document that explains overarching themes and methods, including specific appendix documents that outline monitoring techniques.

What's been our process?

Our research started with in-depth conversations with the farmers we are working with. We then referenced scholarly documents, research manuals and news articles. We've also conducted numerous interviews with experts in the field, such as nonprofit organizations engaged in regenerative work, scientists, horticulturalists, farmers and educators.

How did we approach holistic management?

We divided the Stewardship Plan into four sections: Soil & Agriculture, Plants & Trees, Water & Wetlands and Wildlife (see key elements below). Each section has a stand-alone portion within the plan. They also serve as lenses to better understand complex projects and management practices such as silvopasture, cultivated gardens and wildlife corridors.



WILDLIFE

- Wildlife corridor
- Biodiversity monitoring protocols for insects, wild birds, wild mammals, and herptiles.
- Pest management
- Community events such as the birding class.



PLANTS & TREES

- Grasses for silvopasture system & how to monitor
- Tree lists and recommendations for climate resilience
- Noxious weed removal & community events
- Updated plants lists



WATER & WETLANDS

- Wetland restoration and design project
- Slowing the small water cycle
- Well relocation and improvement
- Rainwater collection system
- Greywater advocacy



SOIL & AGRICULTURE

- Sheep silvopasture system
- Forest patches with mycelium-soil and tree health
- Biodynamic farming practices
- Cultivated perennials for pollinators, soil & market