2024

Urban Farm Impact Report



Toronto Metropolitan University

Urban Farm

Year at a Glance

2024 was an exciting year for the Urban Farm! With a focus on building new collaborations, we expanded program offerings to the TMU community both on and off campus.

In partnership with the Indigenous Initiatives Rebirth teachings, we launched a new **Full Moon and fire teaching series** and hosted **7 Indigenous-focused events**.

The **Bankra Basket** allowed TMU's Black Faculty and Staff Network to share in the harvest of crops enjoyed across the African diaspora.

The **Ecological Market Garden** celebrated 10 years as rooftop farm and 20 years as a green roof.



Engagement Overview

The Urban Farm responded to over

200 requests

engaging with a total of

3791 people

2413 guests

visited the two rooftops through tours, workshops, experiential learning and events

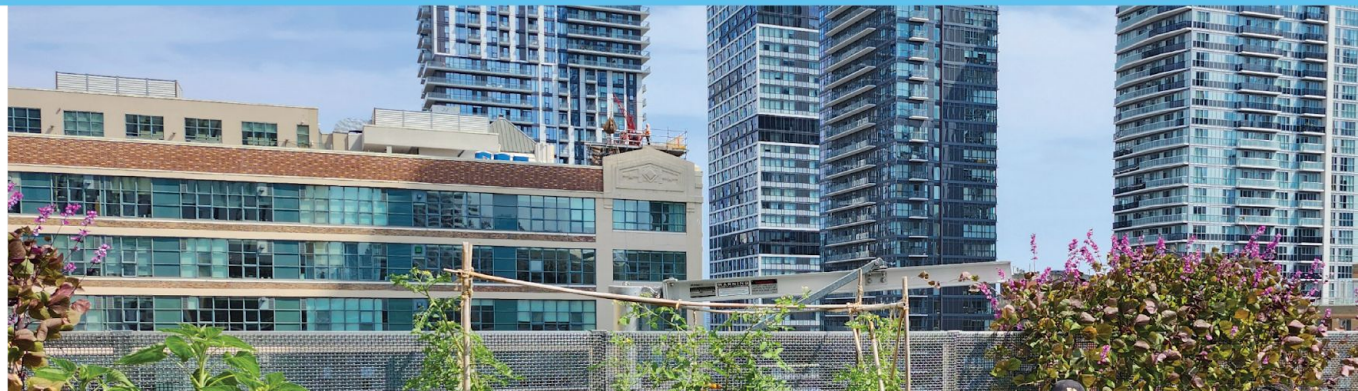
Off the rooftops, the Urban Farm engaged with

1378 attendees

on campus and beyond through presentations, consultations and event collaborations

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Engagement Highlights

More than **600 people** were led on a rooftop tour through **32 chartered tours, 10 student-led ticketed tours and 6 free community tours.**

Visitors included:

- Students, staff and faculty from across disciplines and departments at TMU.
- Growers across Greater Toronto through the Black Food Sovereignty Alliance and the Master Gardeners.
- Researchers from around the world including Brazil, England, France, Japan, Mexico and Portugal.

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Engagement Highlights



Hands-on field workshop programming expanded by **18%** with **32 hands-on workshops** and a total of **275 participants**. New workshops included **Seed Starting** and **Golden Hour Flower Pick.** Fan-favourites such as **Terrarium Building** and **Salve Making** returned with additional dates.

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Engagement Highlights



Presentations, panels and tabling brought the Urban Farm to **12 classrooms** and **6 campus events**, engaging with more than **900 students.**

Participants included:

- EUSSA
- First year Engineering Office
- Indigenous Student Services
- International College
- Medicine
- Midwifery
- Shad at TMU
- Social Work
- Sociology
- TMU Global
- TMU Pow Wow
- TRSM
- Urban and Regional Planning

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Engagement Highlights

29 requests from TMU faculty, visiting researchers, campus groups, and community partners

23 external consultations on rooftop farming

13 media requests

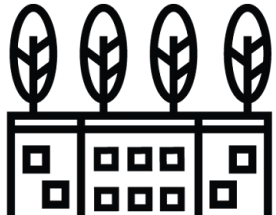
7 student class projects for course credit through experiential learning

25 collaborative rooftop events co-hosted in partnership

16 weekly Summer Open Farms, culminating in a Fall Harvest Party

8 campus groups booked Event & Space Reservations on the Daphne Cockwell Complex (DCC) rooftop

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Indigenous Foodways Program

In collaboration with partners across campus, the Indigenous Foodways Program introduced seven new programs this year. Partnerships with the Office of Indigenous Initiatives, Rebirthed Teachings, and Indigenous Student Services enabled the DCC roof to host:

- Monthly Full Moon Teachings with Amy Desjarlais
- Medicine Walk and Tea Making workshop
- Firekeeper teachings with an elder
- Medicine and community harvesting sweetgrass braiding and teaching
- Smudge bundle making workshops
- Bi-weekly Indigenous Student Volunteer meetups

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Indigenous Foodways Program

Medicine donations were distributed across campus and to surrounding community organizations to support Indigenous programs including:

- Aboriginal Legal Services Toronto
- Career Mentorship program
- Indigenous Student Services
- Miziwe Biik
- Native Child and Family Services of Toronto including early childhood education Head Start Program
- Native Women's Resource centre
- Spring/summer convocation
- Student convocation
- TMU Pow Wow

Rooftop medicines were packaged for sale as a pilot to identify market research potential. Yarrow, elderberry tea and mullein were offered for the first time at the Reconciliation in Business Conference
and sold out.

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Indigenous Foodways Program

Highlights

Increased program participation for the Indigenous Student Foodways Meetup group from **7 to 29**

Over **5.8 pounds of sage** were donated
More than **150 tobacco ties** were donated across campus

Medicine Donations distributed through **7 internal partnerships and 4 external partnerships**

Introduced **3 new** medicines for distribution/sale

7 new programs introduced

Piloted Tea n' Talks on the DCC roof with Indigenous Student Services

Hosted the **2nd Medicine in the Garden event** with School of Medicine and the Office of Indigenous Initiatives

3rd year hosting **Miziwe Biik Earth Tending Green Infrastructure Training program** participants with SpruceLab

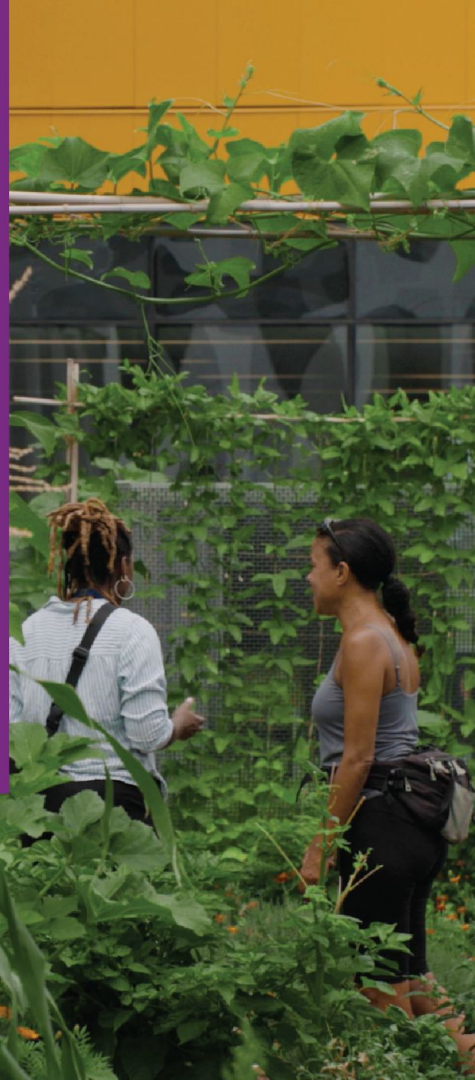
Black Food Sovereignty Harvest Collective and Learning Circle

The Black Food Sovereignty initiative keeps moving from strength to strength and continues to welcome more visitors each year to participate in the Harvest Collective and Learning Circle programs.

Groups of all ages, including youth, adults and elders, participated in various workshops and tours highlighting Black culture and foodways.

Collaborations took place with a number of TMU departments and faculties including:

- **Fun with Food Camp**, School of Nutrition
- **The Black Youth Farmers Collective**, School of Child and Youth Care
- **Sowing Seeds** for Black on Campus orientation, Black Student Success and Engagement
- **Let's Talk**, Black Faculty and Staff Community Network



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Black Food Sovereignty Harvest Collective and Learning Circle

Highlights

Launched the **Bankra Basket** pilot, offering weekly harvest bags for purchase in August and September, featuring produce that is culturally significant across the African diaspora.

Grew **5 new** culturally significant crops and medicines: Ethiopian mustard greens, purple hyacinth beans, brown speckled butter beans and buena mulata peppers.

Saved seed from okra, Ethiopian mustard greens, long beans, calendula and white velvet okra.

Gave presentations on and off campus with a **50% increase in internal and external presentations**.

Conducted **more than 12** Black Food Sovereignty focused tours on the DCC rooftop farm.

Distributed **260 seed packs** of Ethiopian mustard greens to students at the 2024 Black Excellence Graduation Celebration.

Hosted a photoshoot for **Saagajiwe's Wampum belt unveiling** under the chocho trellis in the Learning Circle.



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Black Food Sovereignty Harvest Collective and Learning Circle

Media Features

EyeOpener, Grace Henkel:
Sovereign soil: A new generation of Torontonians embracing urban gardens for food justice

CityNews, Afua Baah:
Culturally significant crops grown at Toronto university urban rooftop farm

Toronto Met Article, Surbhi Bir:
Urban Farm brings Black community together through food

Ecological Market Garden

The Ecological Market Garden includes a four-year crop rotation of annual vegetables along with dedicated plots for cut flowers, medicinal teas, natural dyes and pollinators.

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Ecological Market Garden

In 2024, the Andrew and Valerie Pringle Environmental Green Roof on the George Vari Engineering and Computing Centre **celebrated 20 years as a green roof and 10 years as a rooftop farm**.

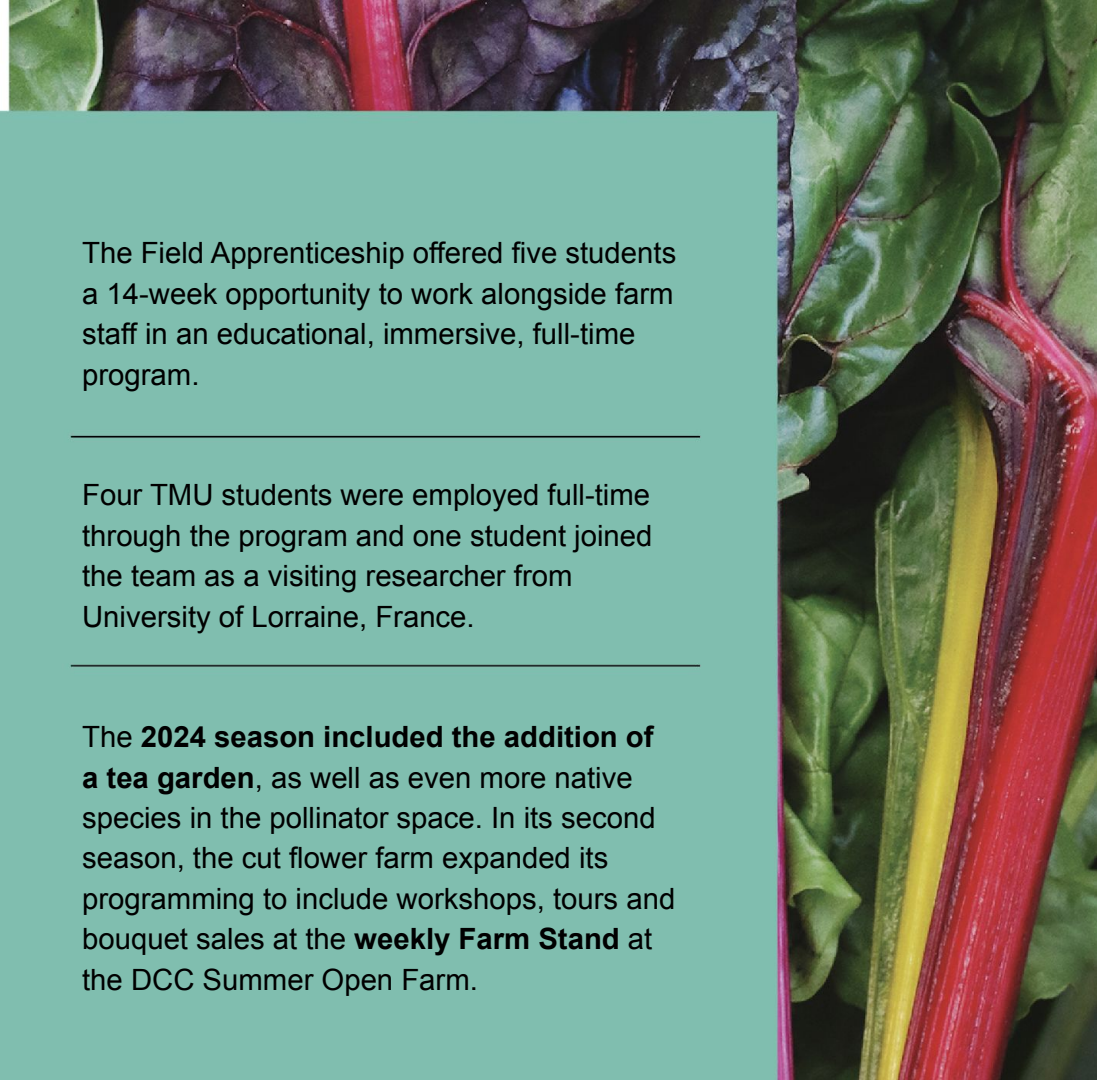
Using the original soil blend, this green roof continues to produce crops with remarkable yields and excellent quality.

Focusing on prioritizing student engagement and welcoming the broader campus community, the Ecological Market Garden welcomed over **1000 visitors** this year through tours, Workbee Wednesdays, hands-on field workshops and experiential learning programs.

The Field Apprenticeship offered five students a 14-week opportunity to work alongside farm staff in an educational, immersive, full-time program.

Four TMU students were employed full-time through the program and one student joined the team as a visiting researcher from University of Lorraine, France.

The **2024 season included the addition of a tea garden**, as well as even more native species in the pollinator space. In its second season, the cut flower farm expanded its programming to include workshops, tours and bouquet sales at the **weekly Farm Stand** at the DCC Summer Open Farm.



Ecological Market Garden

Highlights

The Ecological Market Garden yielded **2700 kg of produce — a 35% increase from 2023!**

43% was sold at market price and 10% at affordable student rates at the DCC Summer Open Farm, Gould Street Market, TMU Eats and Oakham House.

43% was donated to neighbouring community partner, **Building Roots, and to the Good Food Centre on campus**.

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Overall, **food sales increased by over 40% in 2024**. This was accomplished by building upon 2023's successful pilot community program, the DCC Summer Open Farm, with extended hours and dates.

A collaboration was launched with TMU Eats to serve Harvest Bowls featuring seasonal, rooftop produce, selling **126 bowls between June and September** at the DCC Summer Open Farm.

The medicinal tea garden was expanded to include various mints, lemon verbena and stevia to add to the natural iced tea blends. The **DCC Summer Open Farm was featured in CBC Radio Canada.**

Garden Grab Bags online sales were extended from two months to three months. Using data from customer feedback, monthly sign-up options were switched to weekly, **increasing client retention by 65% and new clients by 35%**.





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Living Lab Collaborations

Highlights:

Collaborated with Design Fabrication Zone to present the 2024 Creative in Residence program. Inspired by this year's theme of Wind Rose, Cookie Burnell's three month residency delved into the concept of growth as a dynamic force in nature and technology. This culminated in an exhibit in the DCC Greenhouse, ***Rare Access Point***, that incorporated plant residues from the Urban Farm into wind-themed sculptures and interactive installations.

Participated in a farmer-led research project with the Ecological Farmers' Association of Ontario, assessing plant-available nitrogen from cover crops, contributing data alongside a number of farms across Ontario.

Hosted a new study continuing on previous years' work, *Assessment of Water Quality and Soil Moisture of Productive Blue-Green Roofs*, to evaluate the quality of water stored in the retention layer of the blue-green roof following storm and irrigation events. Principal investigators: **Afsana Alam Akhie, Darko Joksimovic, Ava Alvand.**

Collaborated with the School of Fashion for the third year of the **Natural Dye & Fibre Experiential Garden**; facilitated two course sections for fashion students on the rooftop, supporting experiential learning at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

External Events

Continued to share learnings and expertise through presentations, panels and tabling events.

February 22

Presented on **“The Urban Farm at TMU: A Case Study for Crop Production on Green Roofs ”** at the Garden Club of Toronto’s *Monthly Meetings with Guest Speakers*

April 13

Delivered the keynote on **“Urban Agriculture, Community Engagement and Education Success Stories”** at Durham College’s Barrett Centre of Innovation in Sustainable Urban Agriculture’s *Urban Agriculture UnConference: Exploring the power of community and social innovation*

May 14

Presented on **“Food Sovereignty in Action: Intentional urban agriculture on a green roof”** at Green Roofs for Healthy Cities’ *Urban Agriculture & Rooftop Farming: Virtual Symposium*

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External Events

Continued to share learnings and expertise through presentations, panels and tabling events.

May 15

Presented on **“The Urban Farm at TMU: Supporting Ecology and Food Justice through Rooftop Farming”** at Science First and the University of Manitoba Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences’ *Rooftop Farming & Food Resilience*

September 26

Presented on **“Growing Garlic Gardens: Tips on growing garlic in an urban setting, from gardens, to rooftops and balconies”** at the Toronto Garlic Festivals’ *Garlic Week*

September 28

Tabled with Gdoo-maawnjidimi Mompii Indigenous Student Services at the Native Child and Family Services’ *27th Annual Community Pow Wow*

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External Events

Continued to share learnings and expertise through presentations, panels and tabling events.

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November 6 - 9

Presented at Green Roofs for Healthy Cities' and the City of Toronto's *CitiesAlive 20th Anniversary* on the following topics:

Crop Production for Green Roofs: How to Get the Most Out of Your Rooftop Farm

- **Strategies for Scaling Up Rooftop Agriculture Through Community Scale Green Infrastructure Development**
- **Rooftop Farming, Ecology and Food Justice: Utilizing Green Roofs for Food Sovereignty and Community Healing**
- **Rooftop Agriculture Advancements**

December 5

Presented on **"Lessons From Urban Ag: Micro-Scale Farming Efficiencies"** at the Ecological Farmers' Association of Ontario conference: *Interconnected*



Major Donors

The Urban Farm would like to acknowledge and thank the following donors who invested in our success in 2024. We appreciate the support and generosity of these individuals and organizations who helped fund many of the accomplishments the Urban Farm team achieved this year.



- **Chartwells, Compass Group Canada Ltd.**
- **Andrew and Valerie Pringle**
- **Nature Canada Work to Grow**
- **Jim and Vicki Wilson Family Fund**
- **TMU Faculty and Staff Donors**
- **Graywood Developments**
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- **Rodney Yip**

Annual donors

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