



# A GROWING CONCERN

REFLECTING ON A  
SUMMER OF FARMING  
AND FRESH PRODUCE

See Deshaun Hughes talk about the  
Food Literacy Project and its Youth  
Community Agriculture Program at  
[www.courier-journal.com/features](http://www.courier-journal.com/features)

Summer farm  
project turns  
teens into  
ambassadors of  
**fresh produce**

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**L**ike many teenagers, Deshaun Hughes didn't have the greatest eating habits — most meals he ate came from restaurants that have a drive-up window or out of the freezer case. If his diet included vegetables, they were only of the frozen or canned variety.

"I'd never had squash, or kale, or beets," said Deshaun, 17. "The stuff I had, I'd never had

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Deshaun Hughes, 17, participated in the Food Literacy Project's Youth Community Agriculture Program at Oxmoor Farm over the summer. [www.courier-journal.com](http://www.courier-journal.com)

## GROW: Farm experience is eye-opening for youths

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fresh."

That is, until Deandrae came to the Food Literacy Project at Field Day Family Farm, part of Oxmoor Farm in St. Matthews. "I'd never even been inside of a garden," he recalled on a recent trip to the farm. "It was like, 'This is something.'"

The Food Literacy Project, situated behind Oxmoor Mall, provides agricultural education and experience for student and community groups. Its mission, according to its website, is to encourage "healthier children, healthier communities and increased respect for the land."

Deandrae took part in the Food Literacy Project's Youth Community Agriculture Program, which invites a handful of teenagers from underprivileged neighborhoods to spend a summer working on the farm. They work 30 hours per week, and get paid through Metro government's SummerWorks program.

The students also take field trips to important sites in the distribution and retail of fresh produce — like Grasshoppers Distribution and New Roots' Fresh Stops, which bring locally grown produce to different parts of the city, many of which don't have ready access to fresh options.

When it came time to harvest, the participants worked together to sell their produce to local retailers like Fresh Stops and the Root Cellar. The idea, said Food Literacy Project director Carol Gundersen, is to create young entrepreneurs interested in local agriculture.

"These young people can become a new generation of leaders in food justice," Gundersen said.

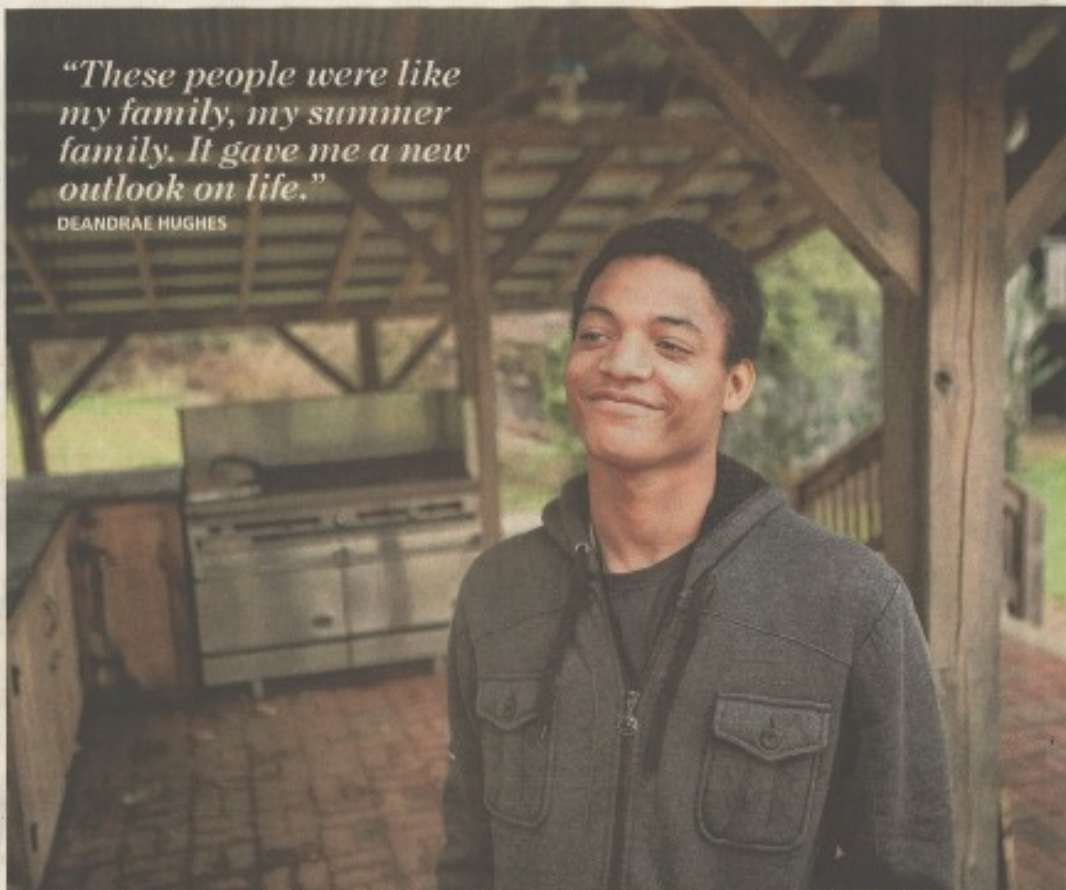
Deandrae has participated in the program over three summers. But until this summer, the program only ran eight to 10 hours per week, and involved only students from the Portland neighborhood.

"This summer, in partnership with SummerWorks, we were able to assemble a group from all over the county," Gundersen said. "It was a much deeper experience for the kids."

On a recent tour of the farm, Deandrae stood in the open-air kitchen where he and the five other participants in the program learned to prepare dishes with the produce they grew

*"These people were like my family, my summer family. It gave me a new outlook on life."*

DEANDRAE HUGHES



Deandrae Hughes, seen in the open-air kitchen at Oxmoor Farm, learned about healthy eating. JESSICA CEEHART/THE COURIER-JOURNAL

— dishes like pasta, beet salad, fried zucchini and, his favorite, squash quiche.

"That might be one of my favorite dishes of all time," Deandrae said. He plans to make it this Thanksgiving to share with his foster family.

A lanky teen who considers his sentences carefully and speaks in a gentle tone of voice, Deandrae said his favorite pastime is to "philosophize." One of the things his experience with the Food Literacy Project made him ponder is the interconnectedness of the food system.

"Everything affects everything else," he said. "I think, 'How can I fit in to make it better?'"

In Deandrae's neighborhood, in southeast Louisville, grocery stores

with good produce sections are few.

"Where I live, if you don't have a car, and the way that you're going is not on a TARC route, you have to be walking," he said. "There's not any stores that are really focused on health."

When he switched to his summer diet high in fresh fruits and vegetables, Deandrae's health improved.

"I slept more soundly at night," he said. His body also shrugged off "weird pains, little sicknesses, all that little stuff that just comes from unhealthy eating."

If not for the Youth Community Agriculture Program, Deandrae said, "I'd probably still be eating junk food and not realizing the damage done."

Although autumn has withered the stalks of pole beans and tomato plants

in the farm's gardens, Deandrae said that the lessons he learned from the program would stick with him. "These people were like my family, my summer family," he said. "It gave me a new outlook on life."

"People hand you canned food, frozen food, but you can grow it — and it's better than what people hand you."

In keeping with Gundersen's vision for the participants to act as ambassadors for fresh produce, Deandrae said he has already converted his foster family to using more fresh vegetables, and is working on his friends.

"If I learn something, I'm going to share it," he said.

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