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(Michael Mangum | The Salt Lake Tribune) Diane Jones walks through the field at Wheadon Farms on Monday in Draper as a demolition crew works on an adjacent property. The crew had recently demolished an old farm house on the site, Jones said. This 5 acre site, right, will soon be cultivated by Jones as part of an urban farming initiative that has been launched by Salt Lake County.

Urban farms sprouting on government land

Nearly 50 acres will become farm fields, with another 29 acres set aside for gardens.

By Jeremiah Stettler
The Salt Lake Tribune

Updated Aug 10, 2010 06:54AM

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At A Glance

Tilling government ground

Salt Lake County wants to put its fallow government ground to good use as farmland. Here's a look at the first batch of farmers taking advantage of the program.

Bell Organic Gardens »

Leasing 17 acres of Draper's Wheadon Farm property for vegetables and fruit. From its beginnings as a restaurant supplier, Bell now distributes food to more than 300 families across the Wasatch Front.

Tagge's Famous Fruit »

Leasing four acres near the Holladay Lions Fitness and Recreation Center. The farm peddles its product at fruit stands and farmers markets.

Cottage Greens Farms »

Leasing five acres of Draper's Wheadon Farm property for vegetables. Cottage Greens has been growing its veggies in Roosevelt and selling them at the downtown farmers market in Salt Lake City.

Schmidt Family Farms »

Negotiating leases for 24 acres near Mountain View Golf Course and the Welby-BMX Track Park in the southwestern part of the valley. The Schmidt family has been farming for 90 years in West Jordan and distributes at roadside stands and farmers markets.

Source: Salt Lake County

Draper • Standing in an open field spared from suburban sprawl, Diane Jones can't help but wonder if she was born in the wrong century.

She is a farmer at heart — just take a peek in the back of her truck at the basket of purple carrots, scarlet-red turnips and a radish that looks more like an icicle than a vegetable — who sees potential in a grassy swath of unused government land along 13800 South near 300 East.

"I can see me here every single day, all day long," says Jones, who envisions passers-by perusing a future vegetable stand beneath a nearby grove of Russian elms. "My favorite thing in the world is to weed, besides harvest."

Jones is among the first farmers to take advantage of Salt Lake County's new urban-farming program, which leaders approved last year to put fallow public lands — set aside for future parks — to productive use until the county has money to develop them.

The county reported this month that it will turn about 50 government acres into farm fields — allowing growers such as Bell Organic Gardens, Tagge's Famous Fruit, Schmidt Family Farms and, of course, Jones' Cottage Greens Farms to till the soil and plant seeds. It also has identified 29 acres that can be used for community gardens.

In Salt Lake City, safflower already has sprouted from a once-empty plot that the capital has reserved for a future wastewater treatment plant. It now will produce hundreds of gallons of biofuel a year for the city's fleet.

"This has worked out very, very well," said Councilman Jim Bradley, who championed the urban-farming initiative. "There is a lot of potential there."

And it hasn't cost taxpayers any extra money.

Story continues below

Mayor of poor NJ city offers library rescue plan

Updated Aug 9, 2010
02:23:13PM 0 Comments

The county's open-space coordinator has carried out the program since fall 2009, parceling out lands without a dedicated funding stream from the County Council. Officials also have assembled a technical advisory committee that consists of farming advocates such as Wasatch Community Gardens, Slow Food Utah and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Planting will begin this fall for Jones, who wants to have lettuce, spinach and chard growing — well, yesterday — on her five-acre patch of the county's so-called "Wheadon Farm" property. Another operation, Bell Organic Gardens, on.

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Aug 10, 2010 03:12 pm:



naylorbros says:

+0 -0

There were many more parcels available for lease that were not taken. An RFP was put out by the county for all interested people. I looked at it and walked away. Some of the parcels have water rights or canal shares attached to them and others do not.

Aug 10, 2010 01:52 pm:



SLCynic says:

+0 -0

Makes you wonder why SL County acquired the land before they had the means to develop it. The land was probably being farmed. For the county to acquire farmland and then let somebody else farm it doesn't seem to make much sense.

Aug 10, 2010 10:40 am:



NotQuiteAsRetardedasYou says:

+2 -1

water included? What was the method for picking the growers in this thing? I like the idea of putting land to use, but many, many acres for such a small lease...I want to know about the process for what amounts to a heavily subsidized farm.

Aug 10, 2010 10:54 am:



speakoutorshutup says:

+2 -0

Heavily subsidized farm vs. fallow ground not doing anything? The article could have gone more into the selection process, but I'm not losing sleep over giving urban farmers a deal on this lease. They are filling a growing market of providing people with locally grown food and that alone is incentive for any discount. Otherwise the land is just sitting there not producing any lease payment or food.

Aug 10, 2010 10:16 am:**bensonkingsland says:**+3 -3

Enough about "weed gardens" and Russian Olive trees already. This is a cool article. The Wasatch Community Gardens has been a nonprofit for more than 25 years, I believe. They developed a "portable garden" that takes advantage of government-owned land by placing grow boxes and an irrigation system on the property until the property can be developed. Then they can pack up the garden and relocate it to another site. An example of the "portable garden" can be seen on 8th So. just east of 300 West. WCG's main garden is on the the corner of 8th So. and 600 E where they rent out plots to be cultivated and hold classes in gardening for enthusiasts and school kids and generally promote gardening in the city. Our family grows its own tomatoes and herbs in the city and we love it.

Aug 10, 2010 10:27 am:**Sub cool says:**+2 -1

More talk about weed, you have no control how people want to respond to the article, get off your high horse dufus.

Aug 10, 2010 03:01 pm:**pawsformoore says:**+0 -0

So are you saying you'd rather have a pot garden than a weed garden?

Aug 10, 2010 10:06 am:**naylorbros says:**+7 -0

What would everyone think if we added the Russian Olive tree to the counties noxious weed list.

Aug 10, 2010 02:58 pm:**pawsformoore says:**+0 -0

Count me in. I'm deathly allergic to the things. Not to mention they reek to high heaven in the spring.

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