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Nuestras Raices: RootsUp Green Jobs Training Program - Holyoke, MA

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Nuestras Raices

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Fostering economic, human and community development in Holyoke, Massachusetts through projects relating to food, agriculture, and the environment.
HOLYOKE, MA

Called the “Paper City” because it was a center of the world’s paper industry, still proud but dealing with changing economy and poverty:

High rates of over-weight & obesity (40% in Holyoke schools), amongst highest rates of diabetes, poverty in the state, unemployment (31%) in downtown neighborhoods.

Highest percentage of Puerto Ricans of any city in US outside of PR.
Now there are 100’s of vacant lots in downtown Holyoke. These lots:

- Create health problems (some are contaminated)
- Negatively impact community pride
- Are expensive to keep clean
- Create sites for criminal activity
- Preclude investment

Years of neglect and disinvestment have led to demolitions and arson.
HERITAGE AND KNOWLEDGE

Many of the residents of downtown Holyoke have come from rural Puerto Rico. Many grew up on farms and many first came to the Northeast as migrant farm workers.

The members of Nuestras Raíces have lifetimes of experience in farming. They are proud to use their knowledge to improve their neighborhoods and pass on their heritage to a younger generation.
Nuestras Raíces was formed by the members of La Finquita community garden in 1991-1992 with allies from community agencies.
Gardens throughout Holyoke
COMMUNITY GARDENS

Celebrating heritage while putting down roots in a new home.
Community gardens:

• Improve environment
• Make neighborhoods safer
• Increase greenspace
• Positive activities for youth and elders
• Reduce pests
• Improve pride
• Increase property values
• Lots of fresh, nutritious food
• People save money (over $1,000 per year)
• People can make money (micro-enterprises)
• Build community

Nuestras Raíces has 10 community gardens with over 100 families and 90 youth that participate, more gardens are planned.
Community gardens are the heart and soul of Nuestras Raíces but many important projects grow out of gardens.
Youth Leaders
Protectores de la Tierra
(Protectors of the Earth)
Environmental Justice

The environment affects health and pride of city residents.

Nuestras Raíces youth and adult members research, educate and organize the community to address the environmental issues of our community.
Economic Development

An abandoned building and vacant lot transformed into a vibrant center for micro-enterprise development.
Sustainable Businesses we have helped community members to start

• Mi Plaza Restaurant – Renting space in the Centro Agrícola with incentives in their lease to buy locally-grown produce

• El Jardín Bakery – Organic artisan bread baked in a woodfired brick oven

• Sofrito el Cielo – Renting space in NR’s commercial kitchen to make sofrito

• Borinquella Catering – Renting space in NR’s commercial kitchen for events and weddings
• Located on Connecticut River
• Home to 11 at-risk or endangered species
• World-class farmland
A mile from intersection of Rt. 90 and Rt. 91
• A mile from largest mall in New England

A unique resource
Nuestras Raices Farm
Nuestras Raíces Farm
Holyoke, Massachusetts
Master Plan

Sebastian Gutwein &
Keith Zaltzberg
Dept. of Landscape Architecture &
Regional Planning
University of Massachusetts
Spring 2006
Farmers raise specialty crops like ají dulce and calabaza, plus tomatoes, eggplants, sweet corn and more.
Nuestras Raíces Farms
Small Businesses

• 18 small farms
• A Farm Store selling herbs, vegetables, meats, flowers, arts & crafts, tropical sodas and ice creams
• Latino-themed Petting Zoo
• Paso Fino Horse stable with demonstrations, trail rides, sales & training, and Pony Rides
• Concerts and cultural activities
Una Lechonera estilo Guaváte Puerto Rico – Puerto Rican traditional barbeque featuring farm-fresh ingredients!
Over $1,000 of fresh, nutritious produce is grown by each family each season. Most of this is consumed by the family and their friends and neighbors. **Some is sold at the Holyoke Farmers’ Market.**

Teenagers from Nuestras Raíces’ youth program manage the stand. They learn about business, agriculture, and job skills. Urban agriculture is economic development.
Cultural Activities
Forming Coalitions to Broaden Impact and Address Policy

Nuestras Raíces has had a central role in founding and sustaining the –

• Holyoke Youth Task Force
• Holyoke Food & Fitness Policy Council
• Holyoke Environmental Health Coalition

Each coalition includes agencies and community leaders.
Commitment to Community Leadership
Holyoke Food & Fitness Policy Council

Steering Committee

Agency Alliance

Community Leadership Council

Youth Commission

Sub-Committees

Open Space/Infrastructure

Family Health/Fitness

Agriculture/Food Enterprises

Education, Schools

Hunger/Food Security
Nuestras Raíces Principles
Grows from the heritage of the community
Is community led and driven
(3) Intergenerational, diverse
4) Environmentally positive, connected with the land
Ají dulce seeds planted in greenhouse, 2 pt jobs

Waste food composted, planting medium for more seeds, plants

Restaurant sells to public = 1 bus, opp. 2 FT, 3 pt jobs

Ají dulce plants sold at market, to farmers = 2 youth jobs

Ají Dulce Pepper Plant

Sofrito maker sells to public, to restaurant = 1 family business, 2 jobs

8-12 Farmers grow ajíes, sell at market and to sofrito maker.

www.nuestras-raices.org
RootsUp Green Jobs Training
15 young people preparing for lucrative careers in:

- Solar hot water systems installation
- Energy audits and weatherization
- Sustainable agriculture and landscaping
Partners:

- Department of Youth Services
- New England Farm Workers Council
- Co-op Power
- City of Holyoke Mayor’s Office
- Commonwealth Corporation
Dedicado a todas aquellas personas que se dedican en hacer una diferencia en su comunidad.