

TRIBUTE

Special issue:
Food as a Tool for Social Change

A tribute to Evan Weissman from Syracuse Grows

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University

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When we reflect on the tremendous impact that Evan Weissman made on Syracuse Grows, our most enduring memories come from the annual “Resource Drive.” Syracuse Grows, an all-volunteer nonprofit organization dedicated to food justice in Syracuse, New York, hosts an annual one-day event when we mobilize the resources of our entire Syracuse community to support the city’s community gardens and urban farms. The event is held each year in April when, as anyone familiar with Syracuse weather will tell you, it could be raining, sleeting, hailing, snowing, or all of the above! Regardless of the weather, it’s the perfect time to ready our city’s community gardens and farms for spring planting. On this day, borrowed and rented pickup trucks haul compost, mulch, and manure across the city in ragtag caravans, serving what has blossomed into a network of more than 25 gardens and 3 urban farms. Gardeners stand at the ready to receive the black gold that is critical to growing healthy foods in a city where food insecurity is ubiquitous. Volunteers—young, old, Black, white, Syracuse-born, and New Americans—work side-by-side to transform previously vacant lots into spaces that provide nourishment

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Photo 1. Evan Weissman Working with Neighbors and Students to Build Raised Garden Beds at the Syracuse Northeast Community Center in 2015



Photo courtesy of Syracuse Grows.

Photo 2. Evan Weissman Grilling at the 2012 Syracuse Grows Harvest Dinner



Photo courtesy of Syracuse Grows.

was facilitating a neighborhood meeting, registering Syracuse Grows with the IRS, or manning the barbecue at a community harvest dinner, Evan was willing to do the real work behind food activism. As a research professor at a private institution, he readily acknowledged his privilege—and then set about leveraging that privilege on behalf of the wider community. He finagled food preservation workshops in the university teaching kitchens and encouraged scores of students to connect food justice theory to practice. For Evan, food was the medium by which he brought people together to tackle injustice;

and camaraderie. When it's time to break for lunch, volunteers with dirt-stained hands share in a meal, donated by local restaurants, and assess the day's progress. It's community building at its most authentic, and an event of which we are proud.

Evan relished the Syracuse Grows annual Resource Drive. Grinning widely, he dutifully reported to the volunteer assignment table each year, joyful to take on whichever task needed doing. During our organization's first Resource Drive, in 2008, Evan designed and led construction for the Westcott Community Garden, where he and his family now have gardened with friends and neighbors for over a decade. Some years he would tirelessly shovel compost into trucks at the Southwest Community Farm. In 2015, he enlisted his Food Studies students to help the Northeast Community Center build a new garden. He certainly was at home with a pitchfork or a hammer in hand. On many occasions, his three children were in tow. His kids are no strangers to Syracuse Grows harvest dinners, workshops, and fundraisers, each having participated nearly since their birth.

Although he reveled in the Resource Drive, as a founder and board member Evan understood that much of the work that goes into building a grassroots movement is thankless but essential. Whether he

develop reciprocal relationships and mutual respect between community and university; and live out his own moral obligation to engage critically and deferentially in the intractable challenges of his community.

Syracuse is a more just and verdant city because of Evan. We will miss him each spring as we prepare for the growing season ahead. On behalf of our member gardeners and farmers, partners, supporters, and the board of directors, we wish to express our deep gratitude to Evan—for growing community with us, one Resource Drive at a time.

Photo 3. Evan Weissman Facilitating the Syracuse Grows Annual Meeting in 2010



Photo courtesy of Syracuse Grows.