

Non-Profit Happenings

A new face for the Moab Community Gardens (MoCom) – and we're on a field trip to the East Bench

by Nancy Kurtz



Emily Roberson, the temporary program manager of the Moab Community Gardens, has a wish list. But then, the dynamic director of the Youth Garden Project (YGP), one of Moab's best-known nonprofits, is almost always thinking ahead to the next great thing.

We're in the YGP van driving out into Spanish Valley toward the oldest and most established of the Moab Community Gardens, aka MoCom. East Bend is the flagship of the trio of garden spots YGP acquired from the Resiliency Hub six months ago.

"This one has such a nice feel, it's so beautiful; that's why I wanted to bring you here," Emily says. She parks the van in a shady spot just a few steps away from the gardens.

YGP adopted the Resiliency Hub's 31 garden plots last January. Becky Mann, who founded the gardens in 2018, was leaving Moab and wanted to find the ideal entity to fold into the existing program. YGP asked for and received a detailed proposal and couldn't find a reason to say no.

Emily mentions, only half-jokingly, that the youth-oriented educational mission for which YGP is so well known is being vastly expanded by the addition of new gardens. More land, more responsibility, more gardeners of all ages, and more opportunities to expand. And it's still only the first year of transition –

"It's a really awesome program that people love. It supports food security... where we go from here will be based on community need. What do people want?"

Welcome to the East Bend Community Garden! - The breezy hand-colored sign still bears the Resiliency Hub signature. YGP hit the ground running in January, easing into the existing program, re-assigning plots, almost entirely to the same gardeners as last year. "It's year one," she says, "and our whole goal was to make it happen."



The land is donated by the land-owners and the volunteer-run gardens have site stewards who interface with YGP. Each garden has three rows, and gardeners tend to personalize their turf. Some have painstakingly placed rocky borders; others are more free-form to create what Roberson terms "a good kind of chaotic."

It's sunny and slightly gusty and blazing hot for June. A furious blush of marigolds and purple blooms fill my senses with splashes of color as Emily ticks off the tender crops, most still waiting to push through to the surface - wild arugula, "many onions" and, of course, tomatoes and peppers, those fulsome late summer treats bursting with flavor as waning summer light brings the juiciest of bounties en route to harvest time.

The acquisition of MoCom included two in-town gardens, one on Moab's West side and a smaller one near Wabi Sabi thrift store that will likely be temporary. Where the venture goes from here is open to the wiles of the universe.

But the future is wide open: Roberson looks forward to more funding so she can hire someone to run the program, educational opportunities, volunteer opportunities, possibly more sites, and conversations with other potential locations. She talks about doing a feasibility study to see if developers would be interested in donating land that would be open to the public in this unique and nurturing way. Arching over this extensive dreamscape is her desire to create food security that prioritizes low-income people.

And there's nothing, no nothing, like a tomato you grew yourself...

YGP, still growing kids, food, and community: To donate to this ever-morphing non-profit or to find out more about YGP's summer events and evolving missions, call 435-259-BEAN. (The Moab community Gardens can also be found on Facebook.) And don't forget to tell them you read about it here in the *Moab Happenings*.



Fruita Farmers & Makers Market offers locally grown produce, meats

By Sharon Sullivan

You can find western Colorado-grown, and raised fresh produce, beef and lamb every Saturday, through October 26, at the Fruita Farmers and Makers Market, at Reed Park, 250 S. Elm St. in Fruita, Colorado.

"We require that all of our farmers grow their produce locally, from the Grand Valley and surrounding area," said Giselle Genova, marketing and communications manager for the Fruita Chamber of Commerce, the market's sponsor. "The community likes that a lot, that the produce is grown locally."

One of the food vendors is Triple JD Specialty Meats. Owners Jess Snyder and his wife Judy have a small ranch in Loma where they raise Highland cattle.

"All of our meat is processed locally in Fruita where it's USDA inspected," Snyder said. "Our meat is not only locally raised, it is also locally processed. It's a very high-quality beef that is lean and more nutritious."

"It's one of my favorite markets to do, because of the people who come and the other vendors," Hays said.

The market goes from 8:30 a.m. to noon, and also includes food trucks and arts and crafts vendors selling gourd art, hand-crafted jewelry, woodwork, metal signs, watercolor paintings and more.



Family Fun Days at the market occurs the second Saturday of each month – when there are additional vendors and kids' activities, such as Farmer Fred's Scavenger Hunt, and a bump-n-jump. Family Fun Days also includes a visit from Moon Farm in Fruita bringing animals such as donkeys and bunnies from its petting zoo.



The Snyders also partner with a Meeker ranch to offer lamb for sale, as well.

"We have quite a few customers from Moab," said Snyder. "The Fruita market is wonderful; for us it's the best in the Valley."

The Witch Head Farm and Ranch, located at the mouth of De Beque Canyon – is one of the produce vendors (Mt. Garfield Fruits and Vegetables) that set up at the Fruita market. The farm has been in owner Kip Hays' family for 100 years, he said.

"We grow 90% of what we sell," Hays said. (the remaining 10% comes from other growers in the Grand Valley). Produce includes peaches, tomatoes, cucumbers, squash, and more.

A new playground at the park is expected to be completed by the end of June, said Chamber assistant director Allie Daniel.

You can pick up Moab Happenings in Grand Junction!

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