



ROOT CAUSE FARM

Stewardship Profiles in California Agriculture
Environmental Leadership with Soil Health and Pest Management

Root Cause Farm was established by the Center for Land-based Learning and the West Sacramento Urban Farm in 2014. Consisting of three-quarters of an acre of land in the Broderick neighborhood in West Sacramento, the farm has a seasonal farm stand and sells produce to the community. The farm is operated by farmer Aimee Sisson, who is a graduate of the Center for Land-Based Learning's Farm Academy, which also serves as a farm business incubator. After training at Soil Born Farms, co-managing an urban farm in the Arden Arcade neighborhood of Sacramento, and working at 5th and C Street farm with the West Sacramento Urban Farm, Aimee took on Root Cause Farm as an independent business. Eight months of the year, Aimee grows a wide variety of crops including as carrots, beets, arugula, Swiss chard, kale, tomatoes, peppers, melons, and more. She farms using organic practices like incorporating compost, avoiding the use of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides. She says the crops that are most popular with the neighborhood and children are snap peas and watermelons. Aimee also established an after school farming program, Farmers in Training, and her farm has become a prominent source of healthy food within this low-income community.

PROBLEM

Bermuda grass has been one of the biggest problems for the farm. Prior to being a farm site, Root Cause Farm was a Bermuda grass lawn, which Aimee has had to battle continuously. Removing the plant manually has posed a problem with some crops that have well-established root systems, because the roots of crops like tomatoes systems are often intertwined with the roots of the grass.

Another unexpected challenge associated with farming in an urban setting has been vandalism.

SOLUTION IMPLEMENTATION AND MANAGEMENT

Aimee is dedicated to avoiding insecticides, fungicides, or herbicides, so though she could easily remove the Bermuda grass with sprays, she and her crew choose to remove the Bermuda grass by hand. Due to the roots of the grass intertwining with the roots of the crops, Aimee has had to decide whether it is worth removing the whole plant along with the Bermuda grass.

ACHIEVEMENTS

- Increased community access to healthy and fresh food
- Minimal overhead costs



“The farm is more a labor of love, than a profitable entity. This feeds the soul.”

-Aimee Sisson

Aimee says that “although vandalism may seem unrelated to sustainable practices, it produced a sustainable solution.” She couldn’t afford a fence to prevent trespassing and vandalism, so Aimee got creative. She planted a fence, using sunflowers on the border of the farm to create a natural barrier. The sunflowers are beautiful and attract bees to the farm.

CHALLENGES/OBSTACLES OVERCOME

When plants are diseased or infested by insects, Aimee removes the plant completely. She says, “if a crop is so damaged that it needs to be removed, it is just mother nature’s way of saying it is time to rotate your crops.”

The soil is sandy loam, and Aimee is dedicated to maintaining soil health through practices like cover cropping and incorporating compost. During the winter, Root Cause Farm is planted with a cover crop mix of peas, beans, vetch, and oats that were donated by Capay Organics. This mix aids in fixing nitrogen and “allows for the land to rest between seasons.” She tills the cover crops into the soil before planting crops. Aimee also incorporates a vegetative compost consisting of yard clippings into the soil at the beginning of the growing season. She notes that using a broadfork has helped her loosen soil for incorporating compost as well occasional applications of Boron and gypsum. The compost and crop residue piles double as a windrow at the border of the farm.

MEASURING SUCCESS

Aimee takes pride in her cover cropping and crop rotation. As she looks into the next growing season, she hopes to create her own composting system and vermicomposting and grow more herbs and flowers.

She says her biggest accomplishments are having built a community around the farm, and increasing resident’s access to healthy and fresh food. The farm stand has allowed her to sell produce and interact with the community without the overhead costs of a farmer’s market. She believes that her acceptance into the neighborhood was a huge milestone; initial hesitance turned into friendships. In the future, Aimee hopes to increase her connection with the community by getting the neighborhood adults involved with the farm.

For more information about the stewardship practices discussed in this profile, please contact the farmer directly. You can reach Aimee Sisson by email to aimeesisson@gmail.com or by phone at (916) 508-5737.

STEWARDSHIP PRACTICES



Soil Health



Pest Management



PROJECT PARTNERS

- California Department of Food & Agriculture, Specialty Crop Block Grant Program
- Center for Land Based Learning
- Food Literacy Center
- Soil Born Farms
- West Sac Urban Farm
- West Sacramento Family Resource Center

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**American Farmland Trust
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2001 N Street, Suite 110, Sacramento, CA 95811 • (916) 448-1064 • www.farmland.org