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AUGUST 22, 2012
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Gainesville's First Urban Garden Hopes to Donate 1 Ton of Produce to Homeless

Gainesville, Fla. – The currently vacant lot in the downtown Porters Neighborhood will soon be converted into a thriving urban farm by local nonprofit, Florida Certified Organic Growers and Consumers, Inc. (FOG). The farm's projected 1 ton harvest will be donated to St. Francis House to feed the approximately two hundred men, women, and children who rely on St. Francis daily.

After attempts by other groups to attract residents to use the lot for growing their own food, FOG is using a different approach. "I had been keeping an eye on the Porters garden for a while," said Travis Mitchell, a Community Food Project Coordinator for FOG. "The space has so much potential, and the need in the community is so great. I think now the time is definitely right for this project."

The main component of the Porters Community Farm will be ten fifty-five foot rows that will be intensively grown to supply fresh organic vegetables to St. Francis House. Additionally, the Farm will include a permaculture food forest and a community garden with plots available for members of the surrounding Porters neighborhood. While Gainesville's median household income is \$27,420, the families of the Porters community have a median income of just \$13,284. The community garden will serve as a remedy to some of the food needs of this poverty stricken community.

"We are excited to be creating something positive in the Porters neighborhood - an historically underserved community. The lot is right across the street from the community center and will transform blight into a bountiful, thriving green community space," Mitchell said. "Through our GIFT Gardens program, I've seen over and over again the positive and immediate change in people who discover the simple joy of digging in the dirt and growing your own food. It's empowering."

The GIFT Gardens program, administered by FOG, builds raised-bed vegetable gardens for low-income residents as well as the institutions that serve them. All gardens are free of charge and include the raised bed, soil, seedlings, fertilizer, educational resources, and support to help ensure bountiful harvests. FOG's GIFT Gardens program has been tremendously successful in Alachua County, with gardens having been built in 270 locations county-wide.

"We've been successful with the GIFT Gardens program, but now we want to do something bigger," said Mitchell. "The Porters Community Farm gives us the opportunity to feed many more people: those who don't have their own yard to install a garden in and those who don't always know where their next meal is coming from. The Porters farm will be capable of providing a ton of produce to feed our neighbors! That's a lot of food! We [FOG] serve the entire state with our various programs, but our home is here in Gainesville. We just wanted to help our neighbors."

In order to establish the Porters Community Farm and run it for one year, FOG needs to raise \$16,000. This budget includes a drip irrigation system, the cost of water, fertilizer, tools, seeds and seedlings, and the part-time salary for one staff member to manage the farm and organize volunteers. Using the online fundraising platform, IndieGoGo.com, FOG has already raised nearly \$1300 in just a few days.

"I think everybody needs fresh vegetables, always better than canned, and especially if its grown real locally it has no petroleum burned or nothing like that" said Bob Mckibben, St. Frances regular, "it's good for the environment and good for everyone's health."

"I feel [Porters Community Farm] is a very good thing because we always need vegetables and if y'all are going to help bring in some in, I think it's a very good thing y'all doing." Said Mamie Harb, "We always need collards, mustard greens, turnips greens, peas, something like something that will fill them up."

"Access to fresh fruits and vegetables is crucial to good health. Unfortunately, not everyone has that access. Food donated to food banks and soup kitchens is often processed and loaded with sodium, preservatives, and other fillers," said Mitchell.

"Our goal with the Porters Community Garden is to provide a sustainable source of nutritious, good quality fresh fruits and vegetables to St. Frances House. Everyone deserves to be able to bite into a fresh-from-the-farm tomato, lettuce, or carrot."

To donate to the Porters Community Farm project, visit indiegogo.com/porterscommunityfarm .

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