MOTHER EARTH NEWS

LOCAL SELF-RELIANCE

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For the past several years, the good folks at the Institute for Local Self. Reliance in Washington, D.C. have worked to help urban residents gain greater control over their lives through the use of low-technology, decentralist tools and concepts. We strongly believe that more people (city dwellers and country folk alike) should be exposed to the Institute's efforts ... which is why we're now making this "what's happening where" report by ILSR staffers one of MOTHER's regular features.

There's no question that the new focus on energy and food self-reliance has sparked a good deal of interest in low-cost "solar" greenhouses lately Oust look through the last year's worth of MOTHER, and you'll see what we mean). All across the country, people are experimenting with new methods of greenhouse design and management, In some cases, this experimentation is helping to provide highquality food for those who can least afford to buy it.

Of course, as many groups have learned the hard way, the greenhouse business can be a tricky one. In Frobisher Bay in the Northwest Territories, Canada, an experiment with greenhouses for the local Eskimo population ran into serious planning problems, the biggest of which involved crop selection. For example, instead of choosing vitamin- and mineral-rich indigenous sorrel for cultivation, the greenhouse managers chose to produce lettuce. Lettuce commanded a higher price, but the Eskimos didn't want to eat it ... so the project had to be redesigned.

Here in the States, however, several organic greenhouse projects designed to benefit low-income people have proven to be quite successful. For example, in the past year or so Bill Yanda and his staff at the Solar Sustenance Project in New Mexico have conducted 19 different weekend greenhouse workshops ... each of which involved the actual construction of a 10' X 16' or 10' X 20' greenhouse. (Of those 19 greenhouses, only two are having any trouble with organization or cultivation.) The Project also recently completed a 1,600-square-foot greenhouse on the Navajo Nation for a Catholic mission for retarded youth. In each case, the folks who build the greenhouse also manage it.

So far, almost 1,100 people have attended the Solar Sustenance Project's workshops in New Mexico. To get an idea of how useful these study programs have actually been, Bill Yanda chose 100 of the 1,100 people at random and sent them short questionnaire cards to see if they planned on using their newly acquired greenhouse expertise. Of the 40 persons who answered the solicitation, 13 replied that they had already built a greenhouse and 28 more wrote that they did plan to build one. Which means that it the sample of 100 was a

representative one, there are already 130 greenhouses in New Mexico built by people who attended Solar Sustenance workshops.

The Domestic Technology Institute in Evergreen, Colorado is another example of an organization that has been successful in providing technical assistance to groups interested in constructing solar reliant greenhouses. Already, more than 500 people have gone through DTI's one-week training sessions. One of DTI's most exciting projects was carried out in the summer of 1976 in conjunction with Cheyenne, Wyoming's Community Action Agency. In this undertaking, 20 teenagers (all but one of whom were on probation) were hired as part of CAA's Summer Youth Employment program to build three small (12' X 16') greenhouses. After a one-week training session in tool use, building methods, and public presentation, the crews began work. By the end of the summer, completed greenhouses were in operation at a local Head Start center, a community food and nutrition center, and a local food co-op. All three greenhouses make use of organic planting methods and are managed primarily by people already working at the three sites.

This experience has led Domestic Technology and the Cheyenne CAA to plan a large-scale community greenhouse. The building will-when it's finished-offer 5,000 square feet of growing space in three separate but interconnected buildings. (This arrangement permits the existence of different micro-environments within the structure. Equally important, the greenhouse is designed in such a way that unskilled builders can do the construction work.) A site has already been donated by a member of the community. The finished greenhouse will be maintained by the participants in a "meals for the low-income elderly" program, and the food produced in the building will be used in that program.

Large-scale greenhouses are also being planned in Washington, D.C. and in New Hampshire. "I can't even begin to tell you how many solar greenhouses have been or are now being built," explains Andrea Dunn of DTI. "But I can tell you that it is happening all over!" If you want to know what your community can do in this field, write to Andrea at Domestic Technology Institute, P.O. Box 2043, Evergreen Colo. 80439 ... Bill Yanda, Solar Sustenance Project, Rt. 1, Box 107AA, Santa Fe, N.M. 87501 ... or Miranda Smith, Institute for Local Self-Reliance, 1717 18th St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009.

To get on the mailing list for ILSR's bimonthly magazine, Self-Reliance, send $6.00 to ILSR, 1717 18th St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009, Better yet, why not become an associate member of the Institute (and-in addition to receiving their magazine-obtain a 20% discount on all ILSR publications) by sending $25 ($19 of which is tax-deductible) to the above address?- MOTHER.