



## Local Self-Reliance

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*By the Mother Earth News editors*

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, gain 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.

Most cities today face the problems of unemployment, hunger, housing shortages, and litter. Recently, however, we learned of four urban communities which have put their own resources to work and come up with "common sense" solutions to these very basic problems.

### **FOOD FOR THE PICKIN'**

Tons of good produce rots unpicked in the fields and gardens of Oregon's lush mid-Willamette Valley every year ... while, in the same area, many people (elderly folks in particular) don't get enough to eat. These hungry people and those surplus crops existed side by side for a good while . . . until the Salem Community Food Store, a food cooperative in the valley, started bringing the two together.

The store, you see, puts "pickers" in touch with local field, orchard, and garden owners who are willing to donate their "leftover" produce to anyone who'll gather it. The "farms" involved in the program range from large agricultural businesses-which often have several acres of surplus crops available to home gardeners who've grown a bit more food than they can use themselves. And most of the pickers voluntarily "adopt" a senior citizen or handicapped person someone who is unable to get out into the fields -and share their harvest with their adopted friends.

Last year some 60 pickers worked with 40 separate growers to bring in 16 tons of "waste" produce between mid-August and late fall. With increased participation and an earlier start, the cooperative hopes for even better results next season.

### **"TRUST" YOUR NEIGHBORS**

Housing shortages and soaring rents have made it nearly impossible for low income people to find decent homes in Washington, D.C. To help solve this problem, a group called the Columbia Heights Community Ownership Project took the good idea of land trusts one step further than it has usually been taken by setting up the first United States trust for urban housing.

The trust-which was formed in 1976-recently finished rehabilitating two buildings in Columbia Heights (a low-income neighborhood in the capital's northwest section). One of these structures will be a single family dwelling, while the other is earmarked to house six elderly people.

A non-profit board of directors-which includes neighborhood residents, the leaseholders themselves, and a limited number of concerned people from outside the community-runs the trust and the leaseholders are different from "traditional" tenants in many important ways. "They're given lifetime leases, which can be passed on to members of their families," says trust member Mary Ellen Holmes. "Also, no decisions about the property can be made without their consent." And, whenever possible, these lease-holding tenants contribute "sweat equity" in order to lower the costs of the rehabilitation.

## **NEW WINE IN OLD BOTTLES**

California produces and consumes more wine than any state in America, and many of those wine bottles are wasted or, worse yet, become a litter problem. That's why it's such good news that a new business in Alameda County is now recycling 150 tons of the containers a month.

The firm, called Encore!, was founded in 1975 with the help of a \$25,000 revenue-sharing grant from the county. Since that time the business has grown enough to hire a full-time staff of eight people and buy the equipment necessary for further expansion.

Encore! pays about 40¢ a case for the used bottles. Then, after the containers are washed, sterilized, and repackaged, they're sold back to wineries for \$1.75 a case. This arrangement helps Encore! earn money, provides "bargain" bottles for small winemakers (who often can't afford large new-bottle contracts), and helps keep the county's roads and streets free of unsightly trash.

## **A COMMUNITY CANNERY**

The Krebs Nutrition Center-outside McAlester, Oklahoma-is a community cannery that provides jobs for 25 formerly "hard-core" unemployed workers. The center also creates a market for small fruit-and-vegetable growers and sells low-cost, high-quality canned goods to local non-profit food programs (such as federally funded senior citizen and day-care centers).

The Krebs Center-which is a project of the KIBois Community Action Foundation of southeastern Oklahoma-uses a metal canning system, and puts up only "institutional sized", one-gallon cans. "We thought at first that we would do custom canning for poor families," says director Joy Roy, "but the economics are such that we have to stay with the larger containers." Future plans for the nutrition center include work with buyers' co-ops and some custom canning for a local Choctaw Indian tribe that's involved in a gardening self-sufficiency project.

To get on the mailing list for ILSR's bi-monthly magazine, Self-Reliance, send \$8.00 to ILSR 1717 18th St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20008. Better yet, become an associate member of the Institute (and-in addition to

receiving their magazine-obtain a 20% discount on ILSR publications) by sending \$25 (\$19 of which is tax-deductible) to the above address.—MOTHER