

## PROJECTS



D-TOWN FARM

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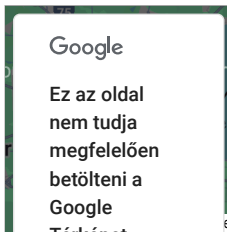
## People



Malik Yakini

### D-Town Farm

3800 Puritan  
Detroit, MI 48238



# D-TOWN FARM

[detroitblackfoodsecurity.org](http://detroitblackfoodsecurity.org)



by Tunde Wey  
August 3, 2012

On the city's far west side lies [River Rouge Park](#), Detroit's largest. Serenely verdant, it is an impressive stretch of foliage and canopy with 1,800 acres of wooded area, prairie and wetlands surrounded by more modern recreational amenities like golf courses, swimming pools, baseball diamonds and tennis courts. The Rouge River snakes lengthwise, cutting the park in an uneven half.

Within the Park is a special seven acres. A little west of the river and about a mile south of the train tracks sits [D-Town Farm](#). Lined by a see-through deer fence, the Farm's large hoop houses and open beds of tomatoes, garlic, beans and other vegetables peer out into the lovely park. Breaking with the popular notion of urban farms on gridded city plots, this farm is tucked in the thick of nature, just like the agrarian cultures of old.

D-Town Farm is the urban agriculture initiative of the [Detroit Black Community Food Security Network](#) (DBCFSN), a group of individuals and organizations dedicated to building food security and advocating for food justice for Detroit's majority African-American community.

DBCFSN began its urban agriculture efforts modestly in 2006 on a quarter-acre plot of land on Detroit's eastside. Relocating in 2008 to River Rouge Park, D-Town grew to its current seven acres after securing a 10-year lease agreement, for \$1 per year, from the City of Detroit.

The process of securing the farm property from the city took two years of tedious negotiations – a testament to Detroit's inarticulate policy on farming in the city.

Between 2006 and 2010, D-Town was run entirely by volunteer labor and self-funded by members. They spent this time improving their technical proficiency around urban agricultural practices, later leveraging in-kind donations and grants to raise over \$67,000 for improvements. Now staffed by a small team, D-Town boasts commercial equipment and an impressive irrigation system featuring hydrants and underground waterlines.

Even still, D-Town continues to engage considerable volunteer help, seeking creative and financially efficient solutions to technical challenges such as temperamental soil types, crop damage by animals and a sloping terrain that causes crop bed flooding. They also plan crop plantings by committee, which allows for innovative suggestions and democratic participation in the process. Ideas such as investigating the feasibility of rice paddy fields in the flooded parts of the farm are a benefit of their deliberative process.

More broadly, DBCFSN works to increase access to fresh, healthy food options and eliminate what are popularly known as "food deserts." (According to the [USDA](#), a food

desert is a low-income census tract where a third of the resident population lives more than one mile from a grocery store or supermarket. By this measure, there are [13 food deserts](#) between the tri-city area of Detroit, Highland Park and Hamtramck.)

DBCFSN, however, is dubious of this designation, as it defines food access entirely by proximity without considering other factors like quality and pricing of food options, availability of transportation, and the tastes of resident populations. (A recent [NY Times column](#) by David Borstein goes into greater detail about the limitations of the “food desert” characterization).

Consequently, DBCFSN strives to take a more enlightened approach to the issue of food access – moving beyond mere access to empowerment. In addition to bringing crops to local farmers markets, they educate youth about healthy eating and exercise through their Food Warriors Development Program, and run a food co-op buying club that offers its members discounted prices for quality food items. They also participate in the [Detroit Food Policy Council](#), a group committed to establishing and maintaining a localized food system and ensuring food security in the city.

These programs are all key to their strategy to break the cycle of unhealthy food habits in a community that experiences disproportionately high rates of diabetes and obesity.

Executive Director and founding member Malik Yakini describes their mission as “creating a model of community cooperation and self-determination.” Food, he continues, “is the lens we use to present this model for Black people in Detroit.”

Thanks to Yakini and others, this model has potential to extend even beyond the city. DBCFSN’s work is now being discussed in other urban centers like New Orleans, putting Detroit on the map as a pioneer.

By challenging popular misconceptions, questioning definitions, and creating opportunities for re-education, D-Town and DBCFSN are pushing the envelope to improve food access, equity and justice for all. What began on a quarter acre is not just a farm, but a movement -- one that by all indications will continue to grow.

*Photographs by [Marvin Shaouni Photography](#).*

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**Kate Leigh**

Remember when Malik Yakini insinuated that John Hantz was a racist for wanting to open urban farms in Detroit? Yeah...that was helpful...

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**Cheryl A. Simon**

Katherine- Speaking of comments that are not helpful!

Like · Reply · 12y



**Lance Yatooma**

I remember when Malik Yakini went on a rant insulting every suburbanite who was not black at the Detroit Environmental Summit. He likes to listen to himself talk.

Like · Reply · 12y



**Mike J. Reid**

well for one I am glad that someone cares enough to take a stand for his community and his people way too many of our generation are fixed on me rfirst and you well whenever I have gone over and been treated like a person and as for hantz good luck now how about some news about urban gardens outside of detroit.

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