The logo is a stylized graphic. At the top, a small green plant with two leaves grows from a brown building-like base. Below this, the words "URBAN FARM" are written in a large, bold, brown, sans-serif font. Underneath that, "ROAD TRIP" is written in a white, bold, sans-serif font with a black outline. At the bottom, "LOS ANGELES" is written in a bold, black, sans-serif font on a yellow banner with a black border. The background of the logo features a yellow sun with rays and a dark, silhouetted mountain range.

URBAN FARM ROAD TRIP LOS ANGELES

In the City of Angels, the sustainability initiatives under development are as diverse as the population itself.

BY ERIK KNUTZEN

It's hard to escape the stereotypes projected by the mass media of Los Angeles as a vast grid of sun-baked freeways and smog, a ruined paradise, a dream overrun by too many dreamers. Dave Alvin's song "Dry River" sums up the city's reputation as a lost Eden: "I played in the orange groves, 'til they bulldozed all the trees."

And yet, Los Angeles' dystopian narrative may be overplayed. While the loamy soil that once supported those orange groves is now covered in asphalt and mini-malls, a new generation of dedicated activists are working to bring Eden back.

Los Angeles County, the second-largest metropolitan region in the nation, has a remarkably diverse population, hosting cultures from all over the world. The region's large immigrant population brings rich traditions of urban food gardening and sophisticated cuisines. Stroll through the residential streets of Chinatown, and you'll see bok choy, squash and bitter melons growing up the stairways of apartment buildings. East of the Los Angeles River, you'll find flocks of chickens, goats and even the occasional cow. Citrus and avocado trees grace backyards both modest and stately—a legacy of the region's agricultural past. Los Angeles has some of the richest alluvial soil in the nation, along with a mild climate and lots of sun. You can grow almost anything here. But more importantly, you can grow

hope. If Los Angeles, the poster child for post-war sprawl, can transform itself, any city can. As the Dave Alvin song concludes, "Someday all those dead trees, they won't be dead anymore."

What follows is a whirlwind introduction to just a few Angelinos who are working hard to bring back the dream.

Common Ground Garden Program

Every county in the United States has a cooperative extension office to dispense agricultural, horticultural and nutritional advice. Administered by the University of California, the Los Angeles County Cooperative Extension has a unique set of initiatives tailored to its presence in an intensely urbanized county. Its Common Ground Garden Program trains Master Gardeners to teach low-income individuals and families how to grow their own food.

Volunteer numbers have exploded in the Common Ground Master Gardener training program in recent years. In 2009, according to the program's website, "192 Master Gardeners volunteered 9,955 hours, serving 63,624 low-income gardeners in Los Angeles County at 41 community gardens, 71 school gardens, 14 homeless and

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See why Yvonne Savio was named 2010 Horticulturalist of the Year by the Southern California Horticultural Society at www.urbanfarmonline.com/yvonnnesavio.

battered women's shelter gardens, six senior gardens, and 14 fairs and farmers' markets." Common Ground program manager and Master Gardener coordinator Yvonne Savio says, "We give people the tools to change their lives—beautification, culture, emotional, physical and psychological health—all the good stuff comes through gardening."

Since 1978, the Common Ground program has improved access to fresh fruits and vegetables in neighborhoods where the only place to buy food—probably not including fresh produce—might be the corner liquor store. In addition to teaching in the field, L.A. Master Gardeners staff email and telephone help lines available to the general public.

L.A.'s Master Gardener trainees must already commit themselves to volunteer service before being accepted into the program. "For me, to be a Master Gardener is an honor," says program graduate Milli Macen-Moore, who teaches classes at the Milagro Allegro Community Garden in Los Angeles' Highland Park neighborhood. "It's life changing."

Recessionary times get people more interested in planting food gardens, so in addition to the Common Ground program, the L.A. Cooperative Extension has launched a new program for the gen-



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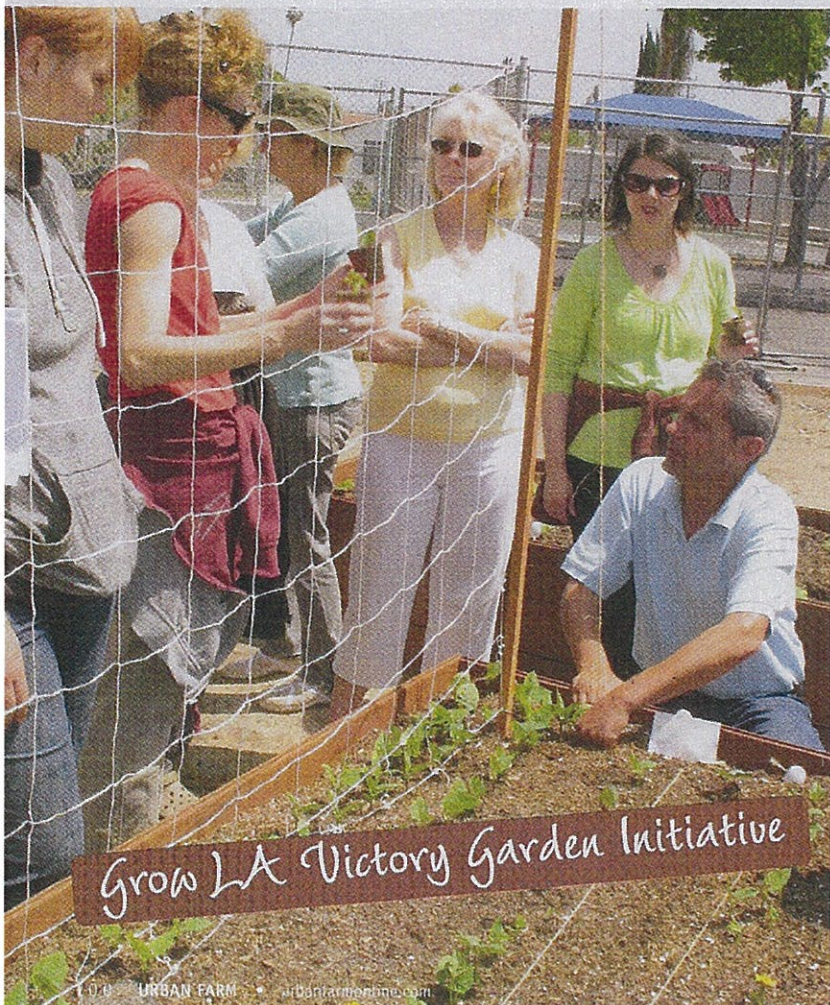
Yvonne Savio & Common Ground Garden Program

eral public, the Grow LA Victory Garden Initiative, a low-cost, hands-on food-gardening class for beginners. And Savio maintains two email lists with event listings and tips: one focusing on community gardening and food security and another on school gardening.

323-260-3407; http://celosangeles.ucdavis.edu/common_ground_garden_program

Urban Farming Advocates

Surprisingly, until July 2010, Los Angeles' City Municipal Code forbade growing and selling nuts, flowers and fruit within city boundaries. The Urban Farming Advocates, a loose-knit group of activists primarily from L.A.'s Silver Lake neighborhood, banded together to change the code after urban farmer Tara Kolla ran afoul of the law by growing flowers in her backyard and selling them at farmers' markets. The UFA dubbed the code change effort the "Food and Flowers Freedom Act" and shepherded it through L.A.'s planning commission and city council. The act won an easy victory on a wave of enthusiasm over local farming. The Food and Flowers Freedom Act was signed into law by the mayor after just one year of UFA's lobbying efforts.



Grow LA Victory Garden Initiative

COURTESY YVONNE SAVIO