

## James Matias



James became interested in food through a St. Paul event called the “Victoria Meal”. During this event, thousands of people joined together on Victoria Street in St. Paul to eat a meal. He met interesting people and realized that eating a meal automatically breaks the ice between people. He had an eye-opening moment and realized that food was a tool that could be used to bring his neighborhood together. At the beginning of his work to improve his neighborhood, he worked with a neighborhood organization. He has been involved with people and interacting with the neighborhood for a long time; becoming a part of the organization seemed like a natural progression for him. He furthered this concept through working with project SUPERMAN and eventually, MFA.

James’ main objective is to feed the neighborhood. He plans to complete this by using agriculture to introduce entrepreneurship and politics to youth, which is fueled by project SUPERMAN. Project SUPERMAN supplies jobs for impoverished, inner city youth in the community. James hires youth through project SUPERMAN to work on his operation and also acts as a mentor to the youth. His focus on youth stems from his desire to leave this world as a better place for the next generations and his own children, which is possible through teaching the youth the skills and craft necessary to be successful in their own lives. James Matias is a first year farmer in the Minnesota Food Association (MFA)’s basic farmer training program. James is from Minneapolis, Minnesota. He moved around the metropolitan area throughout his life before getting married and landing in St. Paul between 1996 and 1997. He lives in his Frogtown home with his wife and six children. James has been working in downtown St. Paul as a security guard for eight years. He is also the vice president of his union.

James discovered MFA’s farmer training program through online research.

He looked at many different programs and chose MFA as the perfect fit. Not only was MFA closer to his home than the other programs, but it also had lower risk. He did not have a lot of money, support, time, or tools to start this program, which made finding a program hard for him. MFA was able to work with James and provide the support and tools for him to start his dream of working in agriculture with youth, while also teaching him financial management and providing a farming location that was accessible for him. James stated, “[By farming with MFA], you feel like you are a part of building something. Everything is more personal, not just business.” He also enjoyed that MFA’s programs have a more personalized teaching style that allow him to do things he is learning as they are taught. James’ connections with other farmers in MFA’s programs have been key to his success during his first year. Currently, he is looking into marketing options through his partnerships with organizations such as project SUPERMAN. This season (2015), he is growing onions, kale, cabbage, collards, tomatoes, brussel sprouts, spinach, and other produce. In the future, he wants to try growing beets, butternut squash, and black walnuts. His dream is to eventually use fish in an aquaponic system and to farm his own land. In this system, he would like to try to grow things that are not traditional for Minnesota, such as mangoes and other exotic fruits. He also wants to look at what is possible in Minnesota with the rise of climate change. James wants to continue partnering with producers in other agricultural fields to see what other ideas he can think of.

The biggest challenge James has faced has been staying on schedule and staying on time. “In agriculture, time is everything,” he stated. He also stated that the financial part of it all, including budgeting and figuring out what your returns will be for the year, has been stressful. He hopes to use these challenges to show youth entrepreneurial skills and to teach them to be savvy business people. If James had not found the basic farmer training program, he thought he would have taken an activist role in his community through organizations such as Neighborworks, who focus more on issues such as housing. James’ passion for agriculture, youth, and maintaining a healthy agricultural landscape is admirable. With the MFA basic farmer-training program, James has been able to work towards achieving his goals.