On a hot June day a large group of gardeners, farmers, and public agency staff met in the Longfellow neighborhood of Minneapolis to visit Bullthistle Gardens. David Gray and his family grow in a high tunnel on a parking lot leased from the landowner and 3,200 sq. ft. lot in the Standish-Ericson leased through the Minneapolis Garden Lease program. David shared his experience with high tunnel construction, urban growing, and more. He plans to use the high tunnel as a farm stand in the winter together with other local growers. They are growing quantities of fresh food right here in Minneapolis. He said the City was extremely supportive.

Gray discussed the regulations for high tunnels, including commercial vs. residential, permanent structure vs. temporary, and size limitations based on location. Gary worked with the City to expedite the process. He provided photos, manufacturer and installation instructions, the anchoring process as well as a site/plot drawing with measurements and boundaries to neighboring properties. Lastly, the Grays had liability insurance prior to applying for the permits. “Submitting everything along with the application, including fees, said Gray, “made for a smooth process, but you have to do your homework!” The Grays will continue their work on providing a healthy soil source to other growers. Along with composting and soil testing, they are implementing a pasteurization system to minimize soil contamination and pests. The Gray’s are concerned with water quality and how it may alter the soil, e.g., pH, salts, heavy metals and are exploring water testing and filtration techniques.

Dan Mahoney and Brandon Dahl, Farm Service Agency, discussed the resources for urban and suburban growers from the FSA. The Twin Cities are home to a new Urban FSA County Committee, which David also serves on. Dan encouraged growers to vote for or participate in the urban committee. Farmers are encouraged to contact their local USDA service center directly or send an email to daniel.mahoney@usda.gov. Also, Kajsa Beatty, MN Dept. of Ag., explained the drought relief program to assist farmers cover expenses incurred from the drought in 2021.

"We're grateful for the opportunity to tell our story and share our vision and goals as an urban farm", said Gray, “It was an amazing turnout with local gardeners, urban farmers, and members of MDA and FSA. Having the opportunity to discuss our farming history and experiences brought us full cycle from our beginning days, with the help from both organizations. A special thanks to Karl Hakanson and the Metro Growers Network!"

www.sfa-mn.org/twin-cities-growers-network

Questions? Contact Network coordinator Karl Hakanson, Agriculture & Natural Resources, U of MN Extension-Hennepin County / khakanso@umn.edu / Photos Katie Feterl, Karl Hakanson – v7/6/22

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