



## Street Farm

Growing Food, Jobs, and Hope  
on the Urban Frontier

by Michael Ableman

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“ All of us at Sole Food have come from such heavy roads, but we all survived. ”  
- Nova, Sole Food farmer

Deaths due to overdoses of heroin and opioid pain relievers are on the increase—just one sign of the urgency to rejuvenate marginalized communities and provide support networks that empower individuals to heal themselves. Urban agriculture presents a unique opportunity to address both of these goals.

In Michael Ableman's new book, *Street Farm*, he shares the inspirational account of residents in one of the worst urban slums in North America, who joined together to create an urban farm as a means of addressing the chronic problems in their neighborhood. In the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver, British Columbia, a broad menu of drugs are for sale along every street. It's also home to one of the continent's highest concentrations of open prostitution. In this squalid setting Ableman and cofounder Seann Dory, along with a ragtag crew of local residents, launched Sole Food Street Farms in an abandoned parking lot.

Sole Food has since grown to transform acres of vacant and contaminated urban land in Vancouver into street farms that grow artisan-quality fruits and vegetables. The Sole Food project—now one of North America's largest urban farm initiatives—has empowered dozens of individuals who are managing addiction and chronic mental health problems by providing jobs, agricultural training, and the chance to be part of a vibrant community of farmers and food lovers.

Working at Sole Food has not been a magic solution for the farmers, but it has helped many of them find stability and purpose. One crew member, a woman named Seven, reflects on how she finds peace every time her hands touch the soil. "I think about my life and what I am doing with it," she says. "The farm is where I come to make choices. It's the right environment...a getaway from the hood."

*Street Farm* shows how urban agriculture can be added to the toolbox of solutions facing troubled neighborhoods. It provides a clear vision for combining innovative farming methods with concrete social goals to help create healthier and more resilient communities, while at the same time increasing awareness about our food system.



**Michael Ableman**, the cofounder and director of Sole Food Street Farms, is one of the early visionaries of the urban agriculture movement. He has created high-profile urban farms in Watts, California; Goleta, California; and Vancouver, British Columbia. Ableman has also worked on and advised dozens of similar projects throughout North America and the Caribbean, and he is the founder of the nonprofit Center for Urban Agriculture. He is the subject of the award-winning PBS film *Beyond Organic* narrated by Meryl Streep. His previous books include *From the Good Earth*, *On Good Land*, and *Fields of Plenty*. Ableman lives and farms at the 120-acre Foxglove Farm on Salt Spring Island in British Columbia.

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