

## Victory Gardens: Mann and Soil

By Hailey Morris

At Victory Gardens on what some would call a lazy Tuesday afternoon, Bryan Mann spends his time building. Not building buildings or playing with wood, but with soil. And as everyone in offices begin dreaming about their sweet sunset drive down Maize road to their homes, you can find Mann on his farm loving the soil.

Upon driving to Mann's gardens with my photographer Shiloh Campos in the driver seat, we found Mann doing something that most don't do: mowing leaves in early November. This is what started our journey on good soil. Bryan Mann grew up around conventional farming his whole life alongside his family here in the United States for almost six generations, even some of those generations trying their hand in Canada as well. It was only when Mann settled down in his career that he decided to pick farming up seriously again. From his childhood background in the soil of several states, he had a great way into understanding the soil of Kansas.

Mann states, "We spend a lot of time trying to build our soil out here; that's what we do...If you have healthy soil, you're far less likely to have to use chemicals for things that are not sustainable, that come from petroleum products...." This is a huge issue for many of the windy plains. The soil, mostly dry and clay-filled requires so much attention to detail, that maybe farmers with more than one to three acres cannot show the "tender love and care" that our soil needs.

Mann showed us how he uses the natural plants that work together such as potatoes, tomatoes, and onions to fight certain predators while still growing a good crop. Within a five by eight feet square hugel bed, which is a very popular form of composting, Mann creates good

soil, growing crops on top of layers of composted trees, soil, leaves, and past crops, creating a really rich environment. Even flowers, such as marigolds, serve as a beautiful yet purposeful crop around the beds. Mann seemed to find a way to use everything, with input and output so much more complicated than I, with my city background, could begin to wrap my mind around. He also gave great insight into where these crops are going, a hidden peek into who actually supports our local farmers.

It was extremely encouraging to talk to Mann, to see the soil, to know what it's doing and where it is going. Mann states, "I believe in sustainable farming; I truly do; that is the future of agriculture. I'm from a conventional farming background. We can't keep going this way." With talk of the fear of the future, specifically for my generation, Mann gave optimism. Yes, what we are doing now with soil will not last, but Mann finds a way through passion to give hope to those who would think it not possible as he explains that farming is not only a passion, but a lifelong dream:

"To me this seems much more real, it's something that I've always wanted to do.... Sometimes life has you doing other things, like maybe you're in school, or you're going to have a family, stuff happens, and you always have in your mind what you want to do. This is what I want to do.... All those years."