

## **Program Plants Youth on Urban Tract**

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Convenient access to healthy food is a widespread problem throughout many New Orleans neighborhoods. By interning at Tulane City Center's Grow Dat Youth Farm project, students from the New Orleans Charter Science and Math High School are on the front line of a battle for better health through fresh vegetables.



Sci High student Franchel Stevenson snips leaves from a plant at the Hollygrove Market and Farm. (Photos by Sabree Hill)



Macon Fry, right, an educational farmer at Hollygrove Market and Farm, works with Sci High student Tyrione Williams at the Hollygrove farm.

When money gets tight, 15-year-old John Mason says his family does their grocery shopping at a dollar store. Several years ago, doctors told Franchel Stevenson, 16, that too much sugar in her diet was making her pre-diabetic. And when 16-year-old aspiring chef Raymond Martin wants to cook, he can rarely find a store stocking his favorite vegetables.

Last week, 13 student interns began dividing their after-school and weekend workdays between tending crops and selling them at Grow Dat's booth at the Hollygrove Market and Farm, says Grow Dat director [Johanna Gilligan](#). The interns had to complete a rigorous application to be accepted, and Mason proudly reports they have already received their first paycheck.

The farm is noteworthy for combining in one project many of Tulane's civic-engagement initiatives, such as architecture, social work, entrepreneurship and public health, says [Leah Berger](#), director of Community Affairs Programs at the Tulane School of Medicine. The work inside Tulane's community health clinics is just 10 percent of a patient's health, Berger notes. What's outside ? their economic situation, education and food ? counts most.

"We're trying to help people realize that your health starts before you get to the doctor," says Rod Teamer, Blue Cross Blue Shield director of business development,

during a check-presentation ceremony on Feb. 25.

Whole Foods, another Grow Dat sponsor, is committed to improving the communities where it operates, says community relations director Kristina Bradford. “Our goal one day is to have your produce in our produce departments,” she told the student interns before leading them on a tour of Whole Foods Arabella Station, where they also will engage in cooking classes.

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