

Student digs urban farming

July 02, 2012 1:30 AM Michael Joe
mjoe@tulane.edu

For two weeks in June, Tulane senior John Tiebout III explored urban agriculture in Detroit, where he discovered the potential for urban farms to rejuvenate communities and a possible future for himself.



Earlier this summer, senior John Tiebout III learned about commercial and nonprofit urban farming in Detroit. (Photo from John Tiebout)

Tiebout, an English and psychology major from Madison, Wis., cleared vacant lots, learned to make compost and volunteered at two urban farms with radically different approaches.

He spent three days at Earthworks Urban Farm, a project run by a Franciscan ministry that serves thousands of free meals daily using food it grows. Then, he worked at Hantz Farms, a for-profit venture with plans to create the world's largest urban farm on underutilized city land. Detroit has roughly 40 square miles of vacant land and an unmet demand for fresh food in many neighborhoods.

“Smaller, community-oriented farms like Earthworks can build strong ties within a neighborhood, and that's great, but they are not going to solve Detroit's food problem and they won't make money,” Tiebout says. “I'm more interested at this stage in solving bigger-scale problems, and I think for-profit farming has more potential to do that.”

Before the start of his final semester this fall, he will write a paper comparing community farms with larger, for-profit farms regarding their potential to fill open space, meet demand for fresh food, and forge community and economic resilience.

Tiebout also plans to apply to a commercial urban agriculture program starting in January. “I could very well see myself doing this program and trying to dive head-first into the business,” he says.

Tiebout is one of two winners of the [2012 Timothy Sykes Award for the Talented](#), an annual cash prize award that recognizes individuals connected to Tulane with non-traditional areas of interest. Senior Colin Kemper, the other winner, will work with a professional string quartet to perform a musical piece he composed.

Michael Joe is a senior writer in the Office of Development.