



# STREET FARM

*Growing Food, Jobs, and Hope  
on the Urban Frontier*

**MICHAEL ABLEMAN**





# ABOUT THE BOOK

Street Farm is the inspirational account of residents in the notorious Low Track in Vancouver, British Columbia—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. It is a story of recovery, of land and food, of people, and of the power of farming and nourishing others as a way to heal our world and ourselves.

During the past seven years, Sole Food Street Farms—now one of North America's largest urban farm projects—has transformed acres of vacant and contaminated land into city farms that grow artisan-quality fruits and vegetables. The Sole Food project has empowered dozens of individuals who are managing addiction and chronic mental health problems by providing jobs, agricultural training, and inclusion in a community of farmers and food lovers. Sole Food's mission is to encourage small farms in every urban neighborhood so that good food can be accessible to all, and to do so in a manner that allows everyone to participate in the process.

Author-photographer-farmer Michael Ableman, the cofounder and director of Sole Food Street Farms, is one of the early visionaries of the urban agriculture movement. In this book, Ableman chronicles the challenges, growth, and success of this groundbreaking project and presents compelling portraits of the neighborhood residents-turned-farmers whose lives have been touched by it. Throughout, he also weaves his philosophy and insights about food and farming, as well as the fundamentals that are the underpinnings of success for both rural and urban farms.

Street Farm will inspire individuals and communities everywhere by providing a clear vision for combining innovative farming methods with concrete social goals, all of which aim to create healthier and more resilient communities.

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# PRAISE FOR STREET FARM

"Michael Ableman has a finely honed sensibility. Read how he gardens society, grows well-being, weeds out despair, and sows hope in this wonderfully written testament to life." —Paul Hawken, author of *Blessed Unrest*

"Whenever Michael Ableman sees a barrier, he runs over and kicks it in. Lucky for us, this strikingly focused anarchist writes about it too, sharing the deeply moving story of reclaiming land and building real community in the most unlikely places, from the ground up. Read this book and be amazed." —Dan Barber, chef/co-owner, Blue Hill and Blue Hill at Stone Barns; author of *The Third Plate*

"In this inspiring book, Michael Ableman documents that generating paradise by growing vegetables amidst the urban jungle also rehabilitates lost souls, builds community, and creates genuine economic value. Street Farm is a great antidote to pessimism, illustrating how even seemingly broken people can contribute to themselves, to society, and to our shared ecology." —Gabor Maté, MD, author of *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts*

"I have known Michael Ableman for over twenty years. He is one of the pioneers of small-scale urban farming, growing quality food for urban communities. He has worked through the challenges inherent to urban farming and is a premier trainer in the industry. Michael has been and is an inspiration to myself and many urban agriculture leaders around the country and the world." —Will Allen, founder and CEO, Growing Power

"This is the most inspiring book I have read in years. I found myself trembling at the monumental challenges that Michael Ableman and his colleagues faced and overcame in creating a set of urban farms in some of the most downtrodden neighborhoods on the continent. Told in moving vignettes and full of useful tips for those who want to try to heal the urban food grid, this is an important book. It's essential reading for everyone in the urban food movement." —Toby Hemenway, author of *The Permaculture City* and *Gaia's Garden*

"In a publishing world where trivial passing thoughts are blogged into barely passable books, it is a serious pleasure to come upon a warts-and-all account of a deeply important enterprise. Ableman has written an important, inspiring, and bravely honest book." —Joan Gussow, author of *Growing, Older and This Organic Life*

# PRAISE FOR STREET FARM

"Michael Ableman is an innovator extraordinaire whose projects have a track record of benchmarking new models of best practice. He is one of the handful of inspiring visionaries on the planet who are redefining our future food systems." —Patrick Holden, founding director, Sustainable Food Trust

"Michael Ableman's work and passion helped make Vancouver a global leader in urban food systems, with happier and healthier people." —Gregor Robertson, mayor, Vancouver, British Columbia

"Street Farm tells it like it is on a gritty urban farm, introducing us to rough but real people who learn to live again through growing food and nurturing the soil. Michael Ableman shows us that we can amend distressed soils and distressed communities alike." —Novella Carpenter, author of Farm City

"Michael Ableman examines the heart and soul of urban agriculture through the eyes, hands, and hearts of people in need of a place of civility and serenity. The passion and humility of the farmers who work at Sole Food Street Farms in Vancouver shines through. They are neighborhood folks, many with transgressions of addictions, who find solace in farming. Ableman strongly believes that farming must be grounded in an economy in which food has value and so do the people who grow it. From Street Farm, we learn that urban agriculture indeed takes a village of planners, politicians, investors, and believers to envision such an economy, with urban agriculture as the new economic engine providing jobs, feeding families, and building communities." —Karen Washington, urban farm activist; cofounder of Black Urban Growers

"Michael Ableman recognises that urban growing is not just about producing lovely, healthy, local food. It's about creating meaningful work that pays a decent living and showing that the cities where most of us now live can play a vital role in building a better, more resilient food system. In Street Farm, Ableman writes about many of the issues that we also grapple with as we strive to build a better food system in London. Sole Food Street Farms is an uplifting demonstration of how communities really can change the world: inspiration for all those who feel they might be too small or powerless to make a difference."

—Julie Brown, director, Growing Communities







# MICHAEL ABLEMAN

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**"Ableman is a gracious rebel who knows that industrialized farming wrings the life out of both soil and communities. His joy in stewardship and in people celebrates a psychic sustainability that won't appear on spreadsheets." - Sierra, Magazine of the Sierra Club**

**"Michael Ableman has never been one to settle for low-hanging fruit. His mission is to test the mettle of agriculture by cuddling it ever closer to the hearths of the urban dilemma." – Santa Barbara Independent**

A renowned speaker, storyteller, photographer, and author, Michael Ableman is highly sought after for his expertise in organic agriculture, urban agriculture, food security, and related social and ecological issues. Ableman offers a unique and authentic perspective, grounded in a forty-year career working on the land growing food. His books and lectures have inspired people to become active participants in how food comes to them. With a warm and engaging speaking style, Ableman uses storytelling to empower audiences to address complex social and environmental issues and to actively use food as a gathering point for community and for social, environmental, and personal healing.

Awarded an environmental leadership award from the governor of California, the SUSTIE award from the Ecological Farming Association, a Food Hero award from Eating Well Magazine, and the Land Award from the Real Estate Foundation of BC for his work on Vancouver's Skid Row, Ableman is considered one of the fathers of the Urban Agriculture movement, and one of the early pioneers of the sustainable and organic agriculture movements.

Patrick Holden of the Sustainable Food Trust called him "one of a handful of inspiring visionaries on the planet who are redefining our future food systems", author Paul Hawken says "Michael Ableman has a finely honed sensibility.... he gardens society, grows well-being, weeds out despair, and sows hope", chef and author Dan Barber says that "whenever Michael Ableman sees a barrier, he runs over and kicks it in", Will Allen of Growing Power refers to Michael as "One of the pioneers of small-scale urban farming ", and activist Karen Washington says that "Ableman strongly believes that farming must be grounded in an economy in which food has value and so do the people who grow it."

Ableman's early activism earned him a journalist's title of the "Spartacus of Sustainable Food Activism" and Julia Child referred to him as a "Food Terrorist" for his speech demonstrating how the American food system was broken.

As an author, Ableman has written and photographed four acclaimed books which have been distributed around the world- From The Good Earth; A celebration of growing food around the world, On Good Land; The autobiography of an urban farm, Fields of Plenty; A farmer's journey in search of real food and the people who grow it, and most recently Street Farm; Growing food, jobs, and hope on the urban frontier. He is the subject of the award-winning PBS film Beyond Organic narrated by Meryl Streep and his work in Vancouver is featured in the new feature length documentary A New Economy.

Ableman's photographs have appeared in publications around the world and in solo exhibitions at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art, The Field Museum of Chicago, and the Oakland Museum. His work has been profiled in numerous print and electronic media including National Geographic, National Public Radio's All Things Considered, the New York Times, CBC, BBC, Gourmet Magazine, the L.A. Times and many others.

Ableman is the co-founder and director of Sole Food Street Farms, one of North America's largest urban agriculture enterprises established to provide employment to individuals in Vancouver, British Columbia who are managing poverty and addiction. He is the founder of the non-profit Center For Urban Agriculture, the registered charity Cultivate Canada, the Center For Arts, Ecology, and Agriculture, and co-founder of the Agrarian Elders. Ableman currently lives and farms with his family at the historic 120-acre Foxglove Farm.