

Urban farm could be late addition to Tampa's Encore project

By [Laura Reiley](#)



Travis Malloy and Joe Dalessio at the Temple Terrace Farmers market Saturday. [Photo Luis Santana | Times]

TAMPA — If all goes as planned at a meeting with the Tampa Housing Authority on Jan. 4, a 2-acre working farm will become a late addition to the city's Encore project.

The 40-acre mixed-use redevelopment district being erected downtown close to the intersections of Interstates 4 and 275 has brimmed with ambitious components, including apartments, condos, retail, restaurants, hotels and services. But this brings something vital that continues to elude many big-city urban renewal projects: access to local, organic and affordable produce, meats and dairy.

The Encore project hasn't been without its challenges — as recently as May the housing authority fired Berkley Surety Group and Tron Construction for problems and slow work — but this new farm component brings together luminaries in the local small farm movement. Travis Malloy is one of the founders of TrailBale Farm in Temple Terrace, which specializes in organically fed, sensibly raised, pastured meat and eggs. Joseph Dalessio and Kristin Beauvois run Waldenponics, an organic farm in Lutz offering seasonal produce.

They lucked into it, says Malloy of what they will call Meacham Urban Farm.

"The Housing Authority has had it in the plans to put in an urban farm with the Encore build-out and no one submitted a proposal. We heard about it from a friend of a friend, that they were looking for an established farmer. I'm not a produce farmer. I'm a meat and egg guy. But I knew Joe and Kristen."

For Malloy, who founded the Temple Terrace Farmers Market and won that Chamber of Commerce's Citizen of the Year award this year, it's important that this project provides a good working example of a for-profit urban farm. And because the land is owned by the Hillsborough County School Board, there will be a huge education component as well.

Through certified-organic, bio-intensive growing practices, Malloy estimates the farm will gross \$327,000 annually from produce sales, with not-insignificant startup costs of \$366,000 for land development, infrastructure and the first year's running costs.

Assuming final details are ironed out at the Jan. 4 meeting — the farmers want 50 chickens as part of the project, but the city is not yet convinced — ground will be cleared in January, and planting will begin in August with a first harvest in mid September. The farm plans entail 93 in-ground permanent beds between four plots and two greenhouses.

Dalessio will function as head farmer, Beauvois is in charge of marketing and farmstand sales and Malloy will head the educational component and side projects like composting.

"For the Encore residents, this will mean they are no longer in a food desert, with fresh produce right there," Malloy says. "And there will be work shares so that if it's financially out of reach, residents can come in and work for an hour and get fresh produce. We will also bring in products from other farms so it will become a centralized hub two minutes off the interstate."

The long-term vision for Meacham Urban Farm is that it becomes a hub in the Tampa Bay agriculture and food community. With it, Malloy and the team envision chefs and community members finding farms and farmers finding engaged buyers, a growing trend in metro areas around the country.

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