



Fairchild gets NASA grant to develop a food technology education facility

By: Jeanne A. Becker | June 25, 2018

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Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden has received a grant from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) to create the world's first makerspace in a botanic garden. The grant of nearly \$750,000 supports Fairchild's Growing Beyond Earth Innovation Studio, a new community workspace dedicated to the technology of growing food.

“With help from NASA, Fairchild will be equipped for anyone to help develop new food growing technologies,” said Carl Lewis, Fairchild’s director. “We are thrilled that our community can help find better ways to grow edible plants on Earth and in space.”

Fairchild will focus on specific challenges that are related to NASA’s food production initiatives, including growing



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plants in small containers with the limited resources available on spacecraft, and using automation to plant, harvest, and maintain crops with little or no intervention from astronauts.

The planned makerspace is a new concept for botanic gardens and for NASA, and will be unique within the maker community. It will be the first public facility dedicated to NASA's food production challenges and the first project to leverage community input in the development of plant-growing hardware.

To create the new makerspace, Fairchild has selected two existing centrally located buildings for renovation. The grant will help equip the facility with fabrication equipment including 3D printers and laser cutters, allowing users to turn ideas into reality.

“The Growing Beyond Earth Innovation Studio will now allow us to offer an open approach for students, Garden visitors and the maker community to think creatively, conduct experiments, test technology, and exchange ideas to address real-world challenges.” said Amy Padolf, Fairchild's director of education.

The Growing Beyond Earth Innovation Studio is being developed in collaboration with Moonlighter Miami, a makerspace with broad local outreach programs, and the Nation of Makers, a nonprofit organization that fosters collaboration among makerspaces nationwide. It will serve students in elementary, middle, and high schools, local community members of all ages, and makers throughout the United States.

Fairchild's project is one of three proposals selected by NASA's Teams Engaging Affiliated Museums and Informal Institutions (TEAM II) program from 43 applicants.

Goals of Fairchild's TEAMII project include: (1) creating an innovative and accessible facility for the community; (2) providing science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) education opportunities for students, and (3) developing a national network of professionals and non-



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professionals to help design plant growing systems for use aboard spacecraft and other planets.

Growing Beyond Earth is Fairchild's classroom science project, designed in partnership with NASA Kennedy Space Center, to advance research on growing plants aboard spacecraft. As NASA looks toward a long term human presence beyond Earth orbit, there are specific STEM challenges related to food production. Fairchild's project is addressing those challenges by expanding the diversity and quality of edible plants that can be grown in space.

Growing Beyond Earth is now underway in 120 Miami-Dade middle and high schools with a special focus on under-resourced, Title 1 schools. Beginning in 2018, 30 pilot sites have been established outside Miami-Dade, in other Florida locations and in Ohio, Pennsylvania, Colorado, and Puerto Rico. Growing Beyond Earth is based upon work supported by NASA under Award No. NNX16AM32G.

Established in 1938 and comprising 83 acres, Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to exploring, explaining and conserving the world of tropical plants. The world-renowned plant collections feature unusual plants from throughout the tropical world. Fairchild has the largest botanical education program of any metropolitan area, reaching more than 200,000 schoolchildren each year. Special events include Chocolate, Mango, and Orchid Festivals in addition to an annual art exhibition, concerts, plant sales and more.

For more information, visit www.fairchild.org and follow on Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest.



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