

Urban Farm, Urban Problems

We finally have built up the urban farm we call Mezzacello to be a functional enclosed ecosystem. After four years of building infrastructure, and planning we thought we were almost there. Urban farms, urban problems.

We'd been busy planting, composting, improving soil, preparing beds, buying (and rebuying tools). Many of the tools were stolen by transients and thieves. We were digging and building a fish pond, and getting all the animals and systems in place.

I was busy getting situated for a [City of Columbus Health Department-approved farmyard](#) with all the necessary outbuildings and components. We thought we'd identified all of the obstacles in our way to completing our vision of an enclosed urban ecosystem. You can probably guess it went awry.

The First Three Years

During these past three years when we found that neighbor dogs, raccoons, and groundhogs were attacking our animals, we managed that problem. When thieves and transients walked away with our tools, we [bought new tools](#) and installed security cameras and better locks on our fences and outbuildings. Gates, fences and technology were the tools for combating these omnipresent threats.

We never dreamed we'd have a new predator: malicious teenage kids with a penchant for vandalism. In hindsight, we should have known better.

The Neighbor You Don't Know

It started midsummer 2017. We've always had young kids from the neighborhood coming to visit and explore the ideas of Mezzacello. We'd never had a problem of them coming uninvited onto the grounds of Mezzacello. The kids were often curious about the animals and all of the work we'd been doing.

We welcomed them. After all, it is part of our mission as an urban farm agricultural learning laboratory. But then they started coming and destroying property. That quickly escalated to freeing and harming the animals. It ended with them stealing and killing several of the animals with nothing but malicious intent. That was a devastating shock.

It had never occurred to us to lock up the animals – they'd been perfectly fine for the past three years. But we did not think like vandals. It did not occur to us that someone would want to come in and just hurt defenseless animals. We had to change our mindset.

Not Living in Fear

I refuse to live in fear, and I won't paint all young people with a broad brush. We knew vandalism was going to be an issue but we underestimated their capacity for destruction and cruelty.

Do not lose your love of your mission, nor your respect and concern for the community you live in.

Jim Bruner

Luckily, we had built up a lot of goodwill in our community, and several of those young people came forward and identified the vandals and we dealt with the issue very quickly and decisively, but with compassion and concern for these kids as well.

The lesson here is that in a garden you will have multiple threats. Be prepared for a lack of empathy and value for innocent life to be one of those threats. But do not lose your love of your mission, nor your respect and concern for the community you live in.

Evil exists in the world. Be a force for good, and believe in that good. Bitterness and anger will poison any garden. It

will also make you a bit wiser and better prepared for any new threats in the future.