

FARMS

► *Continued from Page 7*

"At the end of this year we'll have three farmers with enough experience to operate their own urban farm and be profitable," said Griffin, noting that expenses for such an endeavor are nominal. "We want to demonstrate the power of urban farming and that it is worthwhile to be trained in these techniques."

"Urban farming is not a panacea for employment, but gradually we will have dozens and dozens of small-scale urban farmers scattered all throughout Philadelphia who can start their own businesses. The byproduct is that communities in Philadelphia will be made beautiful, people will have better access to fresh food, and jobs will be created."

That's welcome news to government partners of the effort, including the city Commerce Department and the Philadelphia Workforce Development Corp.

"This demonstrates the diversity of our economy and adds a new dimension to the Philadelphia economy," said com-

merce director Jim Cuorato, a Northeast resident.

And it hasn't cost too much to get this pilot program off the ground. Funding for the entire project is less than \$150,000.



MICHAEL A. APICE / FOR THE TIMES
Joseph Griffin: "People can actually earn a modest living doing seasonal, full-time farming of a small piece of land."

In addition to job creation, proponents of the pilot program believe that urban farming can function as a component of Mayor John Street's Neighborhood Transformation Initiative.

The anti-blight program has cleaned and cleared more than 30,000 vacant lots in the city during the last two years.

Many of those spaces could serve as urban farm sites and provide a needed splash of color against the sometimes cold, concrete backdrop of the city, noted Griffin, himself a college academic turned farmer.

"The beauty of farming is that it represents the American drive for independence, to do your own thing. You are your own boss, nobody tells you what to do. It's as American as apple pie," Griffin said as he scanned the half-acre farm. "This is a field of dreams." ••

Reporter Julian Walker can be reached at 215-354-3038 or jwalker@phillynews.com

