With little Annette dropped off at preschool, Vicente Acuña, Janette Carballo, and their two-year-old make the quick half-mile drive down the block to Finca Tres Robles, our 1.5-acre urban farm in Houston’s Second Ward. A breeze rustles through the three large oak trees, a mix of English and Spanish chatter can be heard as they join the other parents in our Community Farm Share Program. Through a collaboration with Ninfa Laurenzo Early Childhood Center, the local HISD preschool, and the Houston Food Bank, parents like Vicente and Janette receive weekly bags of our fresh produce sponsored by community members and one Friday each month they gather for a cooking class to share a laugh, a moment, and a meal together at their community farm. Vicente is typically the only father but he and Janette have prioritized attending together for their family, a choice that is deeply personal—Janette is eating for two.

Four years ago, when we began Finca Tres Robles, we were constantly asked why we would start a 1.5-acre farm in the city, instead of finding 100 acres at the rural periphery of Houston. For most, this idea had no rationale because the only value much of society sees in agriculture is the food it produces. What would be the point of a small farm when it could only produce a fraction of the food? Our motivations for starting a farm are founded in a deep responsibility and care for the people and place where we live. Large parts of the Second Ward are food deserts where many residents lack access to fresh healthy food options within a reasonable distance from their homes. Our time, energy, and commitment have been focused on building impactful relationships between the farm and the community in which we serve; almost every school within two miles of the farm has been out for a field trip. We’ve worked with Austin High School students to build community gardens at three elementary schools. Through a Texas Department of Agriculture grant, Community Family Centers has been purchasing fresh produce from us for meals prepared in the cafeteria for preschoolers attending their Los Niños Early Childhood Montessori Program. We have had AARP sponsor free gardening and cooking classes for the community. Local small businesses including Chocolate Wasted Ice Cream, Sipping Sisters Fermentation, and Metal Rain Tanks have taught classes on the farm to share their trade and professional expertise. We have played host to dance performances, poetry readings, concerts, weddings, birthdays, pop-up dinners, and community potlucks. The farm has become a central hub.

During a 1995 presentation to a group of Houston public school teachers, Dr. James Comer, the noted child psychologist and education pioneer said, “No significant learning occurs without a significant relationship.” For years, Dr. Comer promoted...
“Agriculture is not about plants, but about people. Humans began domesticating plants 10,000 years ago in order to provide a stable source of food for themselves and their families, leaving behind nomadic hunting and gathering which had defined human reality up to that point in our history.”