Community Gardens

The London Community Resource Centre
Prepared by:

Carly Ellis
Kelsey Moore-Nielson
Graciela Rivera
Stephanie Warden
Eden Wright

What Are the Benefits of Community Gardens?

Social Aspects

South-East Toronto, characterized by high poverty rates, reduces the average cost of store-bought foods by substituting with community garden produce in addition to increasing the consumption of vegetables in many cases. Community gardens foster social inclusion where marginalization is a pervasive problem and allows individuals of varying ethnicities to grow and eat culturally relevant food. By benefiting the community, these gardens foster conversation and problem-solving. Oftentimes, members collectively agree to grow their foods without pesticides thus reducing exposure to dangerous chemicals

and can improve long-term health.

Wakefield, S., Yeudall, F., Taron, C., Reynolds, J., & Skinner, A. (2007, Feb 26). Growing urban health:

Community gardening in South-East Toronto. Oxford University press. Retrieved

Community gardens act as a measure to grow social capital which encompasses three important components: cohesion, support and connectedness. Socially isolated individuals are over three times more likely to commit suicide. By reducing social isolation, community gardens demand group strategies which both mobilize and empower residents to commit to positive changes within their shared garden. Social connectedness allows people to interact with others who they normally would not meet, therefore creating new relationships

Kingsley, J., & Townsend, M. (2007). Dig in' to social capital: Community gardens as mechanisms for growing urban social connectedness. *Urban Policy and Research*, *24*(4), 525-537. doi: 10.1080/08111140601035200

Community gardens work to combat local crime as they provide a safe place where community members can gather. By creating a sense of 'togetherness', fewer transiency occur in neighbourhoods with gardens. By bringing individuals outdoors, neighbourhood surveillance is also increased, thus deterring crime committers. By allowing individuals to be more in control of their actions, community gardens act as a strategy to reducing mental fatigue and anger which are both precursors to violent crime. As individuals often have to work together within their community garden, conflict-resolution skills are necessary, providing a non-violent way to resolve problems.

Herod, M. (2012, May). *Cultivating Community: Connecting community gardens and crime prevention*. Retrieved from https://uwaterloo.ca/environment-resource-studies/sites/ca.environment resource studies/files/uploads/files/ThesisCultivatingCommunityMay2012herod.pdf

Community gardens offer much more than just a source of food. For many, they provide long-term rewards such as basic training in horticulture and landscaping that can then be used to obtain employment. Individuals with some garden experience and an improved skill set can then enter the workforce with greater confidence in themselves. This development of new skills may also allow for networking amongst neighbourhoods, local businesses, educational institutions and even local governments. By providing even more opportunities for individuals to build trusting relationships, they may gain additional support and recognition for their community garden.

Feenstra, G., McGrew, S., & Campbell, D. (1999). *Entrepreneurial community gardens: Growing food, skills, jobs and communities*. (pp. 7-26). Oakland, California: Communication Services. Retrieved from http://books.google.ca/books?hl=en&lr=&id=d0i D2bolXQC&oi=fnd&pg=PP9&dq=food from the hood community garden&ots=rkCZD9tVTR&sig=A1YGgHBOT_QE64oTuc1p1FKQOtM

Collective efficacy can be described as mutual trust that causes individuals to feel connected to one another. Garden environments help to increase collective efficacy and act as catalysts for neighbourhood activity. High levels of collective efficacy are often associated with decreased risky behaviour, obesity prevention, and improved self-appraisal of health. By encouraging gardeners to exchange actions and assist one another, community gardens generate civic engagement. Gardens often act as an agent of change within their community by supporting the spread of health via good, nutritious food and access to resources that are protective against poor health.

Teig, E., Amulya, J., Bardwell, L., Buchenau, M., Marshall, J., & Litt, J. (2009). Collective efficacy in Denver, Colorado: Strengthening neighborhoods and health through community gardens. *Health & Place*, *15*(4), 1115-1122. Retrieved from http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1353829209000598

Community garden programs have been shown to reduce a youth's likelihood of becoming a smoker, alcohol abuser, or drug abuser. Garden programs aimed at youth require ongoing commitment, patience, and delayed gratification as gardens require constant attention and care. These attributes gained by participating youth can help to improve their learning and increase their engagement at school. Continuing contact with nature which can be in the form of play areas, presence of plants in the home, or simply viewing nature on a regular basis helps to improve an individuals' cognitive functioning which includes an improved attention span and less impulsivity.

Ober Allen, J., Alaimo, K., Elam, D., & Perry, E. (2008). Growing vegetables and values: Benefits of neighborhood-based community gardens for youth development and nutrition. *Journal of Hunger and Environmental Nutrition*, *3*(4), 418-439. doi: 10.1080/19320240802529169

Recent controversies about using vacant lots for community gardens have lead *Real Estate Economics* to assess the economic effect of having a community garden in a neighbourhood; particularly the effect on housing value. The study showed that the effect was most positive in a low-income neighbourhood. It also found that the higher quality the garden, the better impact on surrounding housing value.

Voicu I, Been V. "The Effect of Community Gardens on Neighboring Property Values."*Real Estate Economics*, 36(2):241-283, 2008.

Health Aspects

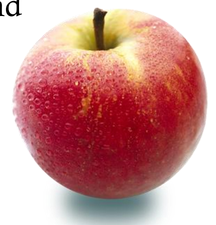
Individuals living in low-income communities typically eat fewer portions of fruits and vegetables. Low-income communities are also often considered 'food deserts' meaning residents are forced to rely on convenience stores to support their nutritional needs, most of which carry unhealthy food. By enhancing an individual's knowledge about food, community gardens 'teach' individuals about the importance of fruits and vegetables. By reducing low-quality diets and obesity, these gardens improve the quality of life of many of their members by acting as an affordable and accessible food source for people of all socioeconomic status

Herod, M. (2012, May). *Cultivating Community: Connecting community gardens and crime prevention*. Retrieved from https://uwaterloo.ca/environment-resource-studies/sites/ca.environment-resource studies/files/uploads/files/ThesisCultivatingCommunityMay2012herod.pdf

Community gardens situated in neighbourhoods with lower socioeconomic status can help to greatly improve the lifestyle of the impoverished youth residing there. Youth who live in more affluent neighbourhoods experience better physical and mental health, a better quality diet and weight, academic success and less delinquency and criminal activity. These community gardens help to increase involvement, shared values and social support for youth, putting individuals deemed 'less fortunate' at a level comparable to youth living in affluent neighbourhoods.

Ober Allen, J., Alaimo, K., Elam, D., & Perry, E. (2008). Growing vegetables and values: Benefits of neighborhood-based community gardens for youth development and nutrition. *Journal of Hunger and Environmental Nutrition*, *3*(4), 418-439. doi: 10.1080/19320240802529169

Vitamin G, known as the 'green' vitamin, is a nickname to describe the effects of green space on overall health. Exposure to green areas, such as community gardens, may not only reduce feelings of anger, frustration, and aggression, but also encourage individuals to commence outdoor physical activity. By enhancing physical activity, green spaces also indirectly reduce levels of stress and mental fatigue. People who reside within areas considered 'green' perceive their physical and mental health status as better compared to their less green counterparts.



Groenewegen, P., van den Berg, A., de Vries, S., & Verheij, R. (2006). Vitamin g: effects of green space on health, well being, and social safety. *BMC Public Health*, *6*(149),

Eating sustainably promotes a more environmentally and socially responsible food system. Sustainable eating also has a multitude of health benefits. These include: decreased cholesterol levels, decreased risk of cancer, increased colon function and increased mineral intake. Sustainably growing food results in richer soil, which in turn allows plants' roots to uptake nutrients more efficiently.

Food and personal health. (2013). Retrieved March 14, 2013, from http://www.gracelinks.org/271/food

Local food systems have the potential to generate other public benefits. These include: economic benefits such as a community's money remaining local, and growth in labour markets; and health benefits such as improved nutrition by offering fresher food items and encouraging consumers to make healthier choices, obesity prevention, reduced risk of chronic disease, and improved community health outcomes. Children exposed to a garden-based education curriculum reported greater fruit and vegetable consumption, even though no effort was made to improve the availability of local foods at the schools.

Martinez, S. (2010). Local food systems: concepts, impacts, and issues. *United states department of agriculture*,*97*, 42-45. Retrieved from http://permanent.access.gpo.gov/lps125302/ERR97.pdf

A telephone interview was conducted in Flint, Michigan to assess whether there is a relationship between participating in a community garden and vegetable intake. Results showed that families who had at least one household member participating in a community garden consumed more vegetables per day than those families who did not have a member participating in a community gardens. This suggests that participating in a community garden may have a positive impact on vegetable intake for urban citizens.

Alaimo K, Packnett E, Miles RA, Kruger DJ. "Fruit and vegetable intake among urban community gardeners."*Journal of Nutrition Education & Behavior*, 40(2): 94-101, 2008

What can LCRC learn from other Communities?

Nourish programs have been used in various locations in the United States with the intention of opening a dialogue about sustainable food in schools and communities. The Nourish curriculum of the Diabetes Prevention Program in Santa Barbara, California helped low-income Latin youth understand their relationship with food as a whole through various learning activities. The Victory Garden Foundation & Nourish program in California's East Bay encouraged people to grow their own food through screening of and discussion about the Nourish: Food + Community DVD. New Jersey's City Green is a program inspired by Nourish that allows high school students to work at an urban farm stand for the summer and receive training in finance, nutrition and environmental issues. As a result, the students were more readily able to identify food issues that impacted their own families and communities.

Act: Nourish in action: Communities. (2013). Retrieved March 14, 2013, from http://www.nourishlife.org/act/nourish-in-action-communities/

The National Farm to School Network connects schools with local farms by serving local food in school cafeterias, as well as giving students food engagement opportunities such as farm tours, school gardens, and culinary education. This program strengthens students' attitudes about nutrition, the environment, food and agriculture. It also increases students' fruit and vegetable consumption, thereby improving childhood nutrition and reducing obesity. It also benefits the schools by reducing food budgets by making seasonally appropriate menu choices. It also promotes economic development and job creation across numerous sectors while reducing environmental impact through reduced emissions from food transportation.

National farm to school network: Nourishing kids and community. Retrieved March 13, 2013, from http://www.farmtoschool.org/aboutus.php

Allen outlines ten ways that business operators are making their business more sustainable:

1. Grow it Yourself
2. Source from Sustainable Fisheries
3. Buy Organic
4. Compost Food Waste
5. Use Biodegradable Packaging
6. Recycling Cooking Oil
7. Demonstrate Positive Environmental Performance from Suppliers
8. Buy Local
9. Offer Fair-trade Produce
10. Construct Seasonal Menus

Allen, E. (2007). 10 steps to sustainability. *Caterer & Hotelkeeper*, *197*(4498), 42-48 Retrieved from http://search.proquest.com/docview/222789223/fulltextPDF?accountid=15115

The Community Food Projects Competitive Grants Program connect with low-income communities to accomplish the goals of improving food access while addressing farm and nutrition issues. They have developed a number of practical approaches for low-income communities across the United States to establish their own comprehensive, sustainable food systems. These approaches include creating activities to combat these issues such as: providing education to the youth regarding school gardening, promoting local food purchases, promoting the benefits of using farmers' markets and community gardens, and implementing farm-to-cafeteria and kitchen garden programs within the community. Partnering with other community programs with similar goals in mind assisted in executing these activities, such as the Community Agriculture Program who personally deliver seasonal fruits and vegetables to the elderly population. Providing education, skills, food and resources to these communities, especially of low-income, resulted in an increased consumption of fruits and vegetables, thereby improving nutritional health.

Kobayashi, M. (2010). The activities and impacts of community food projects 2005-2009. Retrieved from http://www.hungerfreecommunities.org/wp content/uploads/2011/09/CPF_Activities

Scientists at the Samuel Roberts Noble Foundation conducted this study wherein a "family"scale fruit and vegetable production and retail enterprise was created to determine the economic feasibility of such an operation. This was socially encouraged as the North American populations are demanding more locally grown food and are demonstrating a willingness to pay a higher price for such products. Hired labour represented 55% of the project costs, which demonstrates an opportunity for the London Community Resource Centre (LCRC) as labour costs would not be incurred. Losses were evident in the perishing of produce due to poor sales and poor produce selection by the organizers (luxury goods such as flowers saw 91% of harvest perished where as watermelons saw 10% of harvest perished). The target population of this project was also much smaller and less affluent compared to the London community. The major lessons gained are the willingness of the consumers to pay higher-than-supermarket prices for local produce, a need to advertise the benefits and availability of local produce and the advantage of free labour available to LCRC.

Biermacher, J., Upson, S., Miller, D., & Pittman, D. (2007). Economic Challenges of Small-Scale Vegetable Production and Retailing in Rural Communities: An Example from Rural Oklahoma *Journal of Food Distribution Research, 3*(38)

The findings of this case study set in the nearby Southern Ontario urban centre of Brantford, demonstrated the non-economic reasons why people choose to purchase produce from local and independent vendors. These findings justify the intent of the LCRC to become a local vendor of produce to meet consumer demand. The consumers value social embeddedness (social interaction, knowledge of the vendors) and spatial embeddedness (food freshness, supporting local), which are associated with a motivation to buy local. The LCRC has the ability to satisfy both of these values by selling fresh, local produce in a small, consumer-friendly setting. Of the Brantford shoppers surveyed, 85% "agreed strongly" with buying local to support the community.

Feagan, R., & Morris, D. (2009). Consumer quest for embeddedness: a case study of the Brantford Farmers' Market *International Journal of Consumer Studies, 33*, 235-243. doi:10.1111/j.1470-6431.2009.00745.x

Farmers' markets serve as social institutions that promote social learning and innovation, which leads to an overall increase in sales. This study found economic success of vendors is contingent on social learning (from customers and other vendors) not learned business innovation practices. The purpose was to determine what practices are implemented by vendors to garner enough success to support livelihood and contribute to regional economy. LCRC could benefit from participating in local farmers' markets as they are found to nurture small businesses by bringing the material and social resources and providing the opportunity for learning and improvement. Attending and selling at farmers' markets increase the opportunity for social learning. The learning attributed to face-to-face interactions with customers allows insight to customer receptivity and facilitates use of innovative market practices. Observing and comparing practices with other vendors allows vendors to strategize and steer their enterprise. This increase in intensity of innovation (from social learning) has demonstrated an increase in sales.

Hinrichs, C., Gillespie, G., & Feenstra, G. (2004). Social Learning and Innovation at Retail Farmers' Markets. *Rural Sociology, 69*(1), 31-58.

Although this report focused primarily on government functions necessary to improve opportunity for local produce vendors, there were key findings pertinent to the small-scale vendor. Barriers to profitable local food distribution in Canada were outlined as; legislation and regulation, infrastructure, access to financing and attitude. The "red tape" created by legislation and regulation is unavoidable in Canada and must be accommodated for. This is also true of the corporate overload local vendors are experiencing. Access to funding is difficult because most local food providers are relatively new and have limited records of success to demonstrate sustainability of the project. Long-term sustainability of local food producing projects is uncommon due to ineffective funding and political turnover leading to cuts in funding. Basic solutions provided in the report are extensive collaboration, infrastructure improvement, focus on quality and improved management.

Gooch, M., Marenick, N., & Zimm, V. (2010). *Increasing the Market Opportunities for Local Food.* (2). Guelph, ON, CAN: Value Chain Management Centre, George Morris Centre.

The content of this study pertains to the LCRC as it outlines necessary criteria to be considered when determining whether there is sufficient industry support to establish sustainable local food distribution projects. This includes economic, attitude and cultural considerations to identify and maintain a target market. A current barrier recognized in the study is the lack of convenience with buying local compared to the high convenience of supermarkets. Although consumers would theoretically prefer to buy local, they are not willing to severely alter their habits to do so. The establishment of a Local Food Distribution Initiative (LFDI) is intended to remedy the disconnect between the stakeholders at either end of the value chain; the producer and the consumer.

Gooch, M., Marenick, N., & Felfel, A. (2009). *Feasibility Study for Establishing a Local Food Distribution Initiative in Niagara & Hamilton.* . Toronto, ON, CAN: Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation.

The 2011 Regional Farm Market Sampling Survey conducted by the University of Kentucky College of Agriculture found that vendors providing samples of their products at farmers markets boosts sales. 55% of respondents said that they bought the sampled product the same day even though they had not originally planned to do so. In light of the survey, the university released this Best Practice for Sampling at Farmers Markets guide, which can be used by vendors to maximize their revenue from sampling. The main findings relevant to the LCRC include the following. Visitors like to sample products that they are already generally familiar with (fresh fruit, vegetables etc.) to see if they like the taste and if they should buy. Friendliness of vendors was the top reason visitors tried a sample. 34% of visitors who sampled from a vendor recommended that vendor to a friend. If the LCRC is to expand its practice to selling produce, it should consider providing samples to visitors. Even though it means investing some of the harvest, the above findings shows promise for greater return.

Woods, T., & Hileman, M. (2012). *Best practices for sampling at farmers markets: A practical guide for farmers market vendors.* (Best Practice Guide). Kentucky: University of Kentucky. Retrieved fromhttp://www.ca.uky.edu/cmspubsclass/files/extensionpubs/2012-19.pdf

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Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is becoming increasingly popular in the United States. CSA functions by selling 'shares' to the public who essentially pay a subscription fee. Each share consists of a box of produce that is either picked up by or delivered to customers during farming season/harvest. The concept of a CSA is relevant to LCRC for the following reasons. The LCRC would be able to market the produce from their gardens early and be paid up front, allowing them to fund further charity initiatives. The LCRC could develop meaningful reciprocal relationships with their subscribers, allowing them to raise awareness about LCRC's other initiatives and to further become woven into the community fabric. Some farmers allow their subscribers to leave behind the produce that their families do not care for. This produce is then often donated to a food bank or a charity. LCRC could benefit from these donations for market sale if this is available in the area. It is important to note the shared risk involved in a CSA. If the garden does not yield as much produce as expected, subscribers are not traditionally refunded in a CSA. However, some CSA participants maintain that this shared risk helps to create a sense of community among members.

Community supported agriculture. (2012). Retrieved March 15, 2013, from http://www.localharvest.org/csa/