

Policy Implications of Community Gardens

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Purpose of Presentation

- Identify the potential of community gardens to improve the health of people living in public housing.
- Explain how urban agriculture promotes community participation and social change.
- Describe future policy implications of community gardens.

Background

- According to BRFSS data for North Carolina in 2005, 73% of black adults were overweight or obese.
- A community garden was piloted in New Hanover County, NC as a way to address obesity rates in low-income communities.
- Classes were offered to participants about nutrition, cooking and gardening.
- In total, 35 families participated in Community Garden Project activities from several public housing sites and the local neighborhood.

Focus Groups

- Two focus groups consisting of participants in the Wilmington Housing Authority Community Garden Pilot Project provided insight into the local impact of a community garden.
- 22 black participants ranging in age from 11 to 80 expressed their enthusiasm for continuing the project, creating pride in the community, learning about gardening and possessing the ability to provide themselves with nutritious foods.

Improved Nutrition

- Results identified by focus group participants:
 - eating more fruits and vegetables
 - being able to provide food for themselves and their families
- The young adults in particular pointed out that participating in the Community Garden Project increased their fruit consumption.

Improved Nutrition

- Studies have shown that people who grow their own food have a higher intake of fruits and vegetables (Carter & Mann, 2006).
- Gardening also provides recreational opportunities that may lead to a more active lifestyle.

Improved Nutrition

- A study in New York reported that community gardeners:
 - have greater consumption of fresh vegetables compared with non-gardeners
 - lower consumption of sweet foods and drinks (Blair, Giesecke, & Sherman, 1991).

Community Health

- Many community gardens involve factors important to health promotion in minority communities including:
 - social support
 - an emphasis on informal networks
 - community organization(Fisher, Auslander, Sussman, Owens, & Jackson-Thompson, 1992).

Self-sufficiency

- Focus group participants stressed their pride in being able to provide nutritious food for themselves and their families.
- Many gardeners also shared fresh produce with neighbors.
- In a study sponsored by Penn State Cooperative Extension, urban gardeners in Philadelphia ate more fresh produce from their gardens for at least five months of the year (Blair, Giesecke, & Sherman, 1991).

Increased Access to Nutritious Foods

- Community gardens can be particularly helpful in urban, disadvantaged and minority communities where:
 - city residents often have difficulty obtaining nutritious food at a fair price
 - fewer supermarkets provide them with less access to healthy food and nutrition choices. (Baker et al., 2006).

Community Development

- Learning provided the foundation for leadership development and community organization.
- Participants stepped forward to guide one another.
- Participants stressed the importance of working together, especially adults teaching youth.

Community Development

- Participants expressed respect for themselves and their community through gardening and producing food for themselves.
- Community gardens provide a symbolic focus, which increases neighborhood pride (Armstrong, 2000).
- Community gardens serve as a catalyst for residents to begin to address issues collectively, which is an important public health strategy to facilitate organizing and empowerment (Wallerstein, 1992).

Successful Components of Community Garden Programs

While each city's approach to community gardening is unique, the following key elements are integral to their efforts:

- commitment of local leadership and staffing
- involvement of volunteers and community partners
- availability of skill-building opportunities for participants

(Twiss et al., 2003).

Sustainability

- Focus group participants expressed enthusiasm for continuing the community garden project and making it their own neighborhood garden within the housing development
- Effective community garden projects function to maximize sustainability and community ownership (Baker et al., 2006).
- The concept of a community garden helps to focus on creating a healthy community at a specific, concrete place (Hanna & Oh, 2000).

Increase Funding/ Comprehensive Policy

- Participants not only wanted to continue the project, but to expand it as well.
- Additional public and private funds can ensure sustainability of community gardens.
- Public and private funding for initiatives like the USDA Food Security program can create the opportunity for even more comprehensive responses that link low-income consumers and local produce growers (Brown & Jameton, 2000).

Program Development and Community Partnerships

- Understanding community partnerships is vital in the evaluation and program planning process.
- Public health practitioners often evaluate community programs by actions and outputs that measure whether or not a project is meeting its goals.
- It is equally important to evaluate the nature of community partnerships (Smith, Johnson, Lamson, & Sitaker, 2006).

Suggestions for Future Success of Local Community Gardens

Lessons learned from Wilmington Housing Authority Community Garden Project:

- Engage community organizations
- Provide skill-building opportunities for participants
- Build commitment of local leadership and staffing
- Provide land for gardens on-site in public housing developments

Questions/Comments

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