The New "Victory Gardens": How Community Gardens in Western, NY Alleviate Food Insecurity

Danielle Vazquez, B.A.1; Gabrielle Cohen B.A. 2; Samina Raja, Ph.D3

Food Systems and Health Communities Lab

Abstract

This research seeks to analyze how effective community garden members are in addressing food needs in low wealth neighborhoods. We used three quantitative indicators along with one qualitative, open-ended response from the survey to examine how community members utilize their gardens. The four questions we analyzed from the survey are:

1. Utilization: What types of crops are being grown in these gardens? How do community gardeners utilize crop growth?
2. Preservation: How many community gardeners use food preservation methods? Where did they learn these methods?
3. Consumption: Where do community gardeners obtain their produce?
4. Support from Gardens: What were community gardeners thoughts on community garden initiative to support and promote sustainability in their neighborhoods?

Background

The community gardens survey is a subset of a larger study cited the Buffalo Neighborhood Food Project (BNFP) done data from 21 community gardens spread across Erie County. Erie County, located on the border of Western New York to the north and south, in terms of the third poorest city in the United States. The city of buffalo, which is the second largest city in the state has a median household income of $31,688 compared to New York State’s income of $35,462, and has a 40.9% poverty rate (2), low wealth communities in the city of buffalo lack groceries stores and fresh produce markets to provide residents with nutrient rich foods to maintain a healthy lifestyle. About 66 percent of Erie County neighborhoods lack a food and vegetable market. On the contrary, there are about twenty six restaurants available per thousand persons in Erie County neighborhoods, which is a higher incidence than any other food destination in the county. This food environment has influenced the community members to increasingly spend a bigger share of their food dollar eating out. (3) Community members lack a place themselves to turn using vacant lots or even landlord-provided parcels to create self-sustaining local food systems, which is a piece of where the research is focused. Transforming urban areas into green, food-friendly urbanized growth and social engagement empowers local neighborhoods to address concerns of food insecurity. Food insecurity is defined as "10 persons in a community having access to culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate foods at all times" (4). There are many factors that play a role in determining whether a community is food insecure. For this research, we used data gathered from 21 gardens to analyze their role in providing access to healthy food within neighborhoods.

Demographics of Survey

Community Gardeners’ Profile by Race and Ethnicity, 2015

Utilization

Preservation

Consumption

Support from GGB

Summary of Findings

The Project GGB is ongoing research project with a incomplete data set, from the community gardens survey results we found:

Utilization
1. Slightly less than half (44%) of respondents grow food beyond the growing season.
2. The majority of the food grown in the community garden is used within respondents’ own household or they share it with neighbors, family, and friends. Some also report using the food in schools, for nutrition workshops and demonstrations, and through church pantries.

Preservation
1. Slightly less than half of respondents grow food beyond the growing season.
2. The majority of the food grown in the community garden is used within respondents’ own household or they share it with neighbors, family, and friends. Some also report using the food in schools, for nutrition workshops and demonstrations, and through church pantries.

Consumption
1. Over 90% of respondents report growing fresh crops for consumption.
2. The most common fruit crops are: blueberries, raspberries, strawberries, grapes, melons, blackberries, black raspberries, black cherries, coffee beans, cherries, and Canteloupe.
3. The most common vegetable crops are: kale, beans, greens, onions, peppers, squash, radishes, tomatoes, and potato.

Call for Further Research

1. Challenges with research (who are the voices being heard?)
2. Respondents are [insert] white, middle-class, homeowners, and car owners, with advanced degrees.
3. Respondent demographics are only from those gardens. The Food Bank of WNY, Trinity-Hagar Garden, and Cottage District York Garden.
4. No limited English proficiency respondents

Findings

Community Gardeners’ Household Income, 2015


References

1. Navae, S., Healthy Eating and Active Living, for Children in the City of Buffalo, POLICY & PLANNING BRIEF July 2013. 2013, University of Buffalo.
2. Buffalo Neighborhood Food Project (BNFP) done data from 21 community gardens spread across Erie County.

Support from GGB

GGB serves as an important organization for facilitating community gardening in Buffalo. The opened ended response section of the survey illustrates how community gardeners feel about GGB’s impact on their experience as gardeners.

“Use of the garden has allowed for students to engage in a healthy and nutritious sharing experience.”

“I love how there were grants provided for people free of charge at the went side nursery. I would offer them personally, but some really appreciated the assistance.”

“Gathering funding materials to help teach the students of City Walls about gardening and ensure rich programming for them. Would help support a large variety of plants as well.”

“GBC is a great job! Help other people getting되기 어렵고 건강한 식사를 할 수 있도록 도와줘야 할 것입니다.”

“Gardens have a potential to serve in the community and give myself a chance to get to know some of our clients on a more personal level. It has already supported us as in establishing and fostering positive relationships with our population.”

“Continue to facilitate volunteers and volunteer groups to help with the seasonal tasks. Our lead gardener put in 15-20 hours per week as an average and we have only 2-3 other people who help very sporadically. It is very difficult in a heavy renter/elderly neighborhood to get people involved.”

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