National Association of Conservation Districts

2017 URBAN AGRICULTURE CONSERVATION GRANT INITIATIVE FINAL REPORT

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Overview

Background

In the spring of 2016, the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) partnered with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to pilot a much-needed service across the country: conservation technical assistance (CTA) for the vastly growing industry of urban agriculture. This service was provided through an urban agriculture conservation (UAC) grant program for conservation districts.

In that first year, UAC grants were awarded to 42 conservation districts in 25 states. A summary report of those projects is available at www.nacdnet.org/about-nacd/what-we-do/urban-and-community/urban-agriculture-conservation-grant-recipients/.

The following year, NACD and NRCS again partnered to provide urban agriculture conservation funding to districts. The NACD Urban and Community Resource Policy Group (RPG), composed of district officials and partners, embraced the continued opportunity to help districts enhance their services. The RPG reviewed the Request for Proposals (RFP) and selection criteria. The RFP was then distributed to members nationwide, and all were encouraged to submit proposals for launching and/or growing their services.

The grant awards for the 2017 program were announced at the NACD Summer Board Meeting in Altoona, Iowa. Nineteen conservation districts in 14 states received funding as listed at www.nacdnet.org/about-nacd/what-we-do/urban-and-community/2017-urban-agriculture-conservation-grant-recipients/.

Promotion

Following the initial press release in July 2017 (www.nacdnet.org/newsroom/nacd-announces-2017-urban-ag-grants/), the UAC Initiative was reported in the Fall 2017 issue of NACD's quarterly magazine *The Resource* (https://indd.adobe.com/view/9d0a5029-11b4-4aed-86a6-60e19d14dd15). Individual projects have been featured each month in NACD's weekly online newsletter, eResource, since December 2016. Those are available at www.nacdnet.org/news-and-events/publications/eresource/. Some of the projects were showcased on NACD's monthly Urban and Community Conservation Webinars, available at https://www.nacdnet.org/general-resources/webinars/.

Coordination

Throughout the year, NACD served as a facilitator and promoter of the 19 projects. Representatives of the districts were added to the already-established UAC listserv and given access to a members-only website for the grant recipients. These two services allowed the new grant recipients to connect and share with each other as well as the previous 42 awardees. Webinars were offered for the grant recipients to share their projects, including successes and challenges.

While the 2017 UAC Initiative is completed, most of the conservation districts have chosen to remain connected via the listserv and other sharing opportunities.

Outcome

The goal of this 2017 grant program was to continue growing conservation technical assistance in urban agriculture with a strong emphasis on underserved areas, particularly those known as food deserts. The work completed this year was as varied as the first year, including assisting and creating gardens for food banks, homeless shelters, schools, senior living facilities; evaluating and enhancing soils for urban agriculture in communities, wellfields, utility easements, front yards; and reaching out with education and resource tools through advisory committees, partner organizations and businesses.

As with the first round of grants, this group leveraged funds through in-kind services and donations. That information will be compiled and added to the records of 2016. Those grant recipients almost doubled those funds within one year. And, as in 2016, many of this year's recipients requested a project deadline extension in order to expend the grant funds due to the substantial contributions of time and resources by partners and participants.

Partners continued to make huge impact on these projects. In addition to traditional partners NRCS and Extension, these projects opened doors within local governments, food and medical industries, schools and universities, churches and faith-based organizations and even a correctional facility.

Throughout the year, individual districts and their partners, including NRCS, were recognized through press, radio and television newscasts, and especially social media.

As in the 2016 report, the true results speak for themselves in the individual summaries below, which provide a description of each project's accomplishments and efforts toward sustainability. Still, these stories don't show the energy, enthusiasm and effort involved in every grant project. That comes from personal contact with the respective districts; project contact information is provided at the end of this document for that purpose.

Sebastian County Conservation District, Arkansas

The Sebastian County Conservation District (CD) began projects at nine locations in two counties in the Arkansas River Valley. These projects include community gardens, gardens serving homeless shelters, educational gardens at elementary schools, native pollinator plantings and urban meadow plantings. Each project site has been led by the community, implemented by volunteers and assisted by the conservation district.

Discovery Garden

Through the project, the district has expanded its partnerships in the community and across counties. With these partnerships, the district has been able to develop gardens in schools, homeless shelters and public spaces, and also incorporate conservation education into area schools with pollinator programs and plantings.

The urban meadow installations benefit a part of the community without access to green spaces. That project will incorporate redevelopment of a parking lot to provide recreation space for children. The gardens at the shelters have provided, beyond the produce, a place for the residents to work and learn skills they can take with them after they leave. The school gardens have provided the opportunity to introduce fresh foods into classrooms, and teachers have begun incorporating the gardens into their curriculum.

To better promote the program in the community, district staff with the urban initiative have done many programs with the local Master Gardeners, community organizations, Boy and Girl Scouts, churches and other civic groups. All of the programming has focused on how homeowners can make an impact on their environment through simple landscaping choices to benefit water quality, wildlife habitat and native plant restorations. The community was initially intimidated to try these techniques. But, once given some overall strategies and resources for further learning and research, the participants were much more enthusiastic about adding these features to their property

Sustainability

As the year has progressed, the district board has found further grant funding to extend its work in urban programming; additionally, the schools have secured funding to continue their gardens. Future projects, beyond continuing to support the current projects, will focus on rain garden installations, pollinator habitats at elementary schools to be integrated within the curriculum, an urban food forest and potentially, an expanded community garden in Fort Smith.

Fort Smith Regional Art Museum
Pollinator Habitat Installation

The Sebastian County Chief Executive Officer supports the new pollinator program, as is the incoming Fort Smith Mayor. The neighboring conservation district applied for funding to expand the work just begun there.

Partners such as First Presbyterian Church of Fort Smith have been great supporters and have committed to continued work in the community gardens and pollinator spaces as part of their mission's program. The relationships with local Master Gardeners and other civic groups will also continue to develop.

The district utilized traditional news sources and social media extensively throughout the urban agriculture conservation initiative. The district commits to continue public awareness for urban programs through excellent relationship with legacy media and through its social media program, which includes a website, Facebook and extensive email list.

Inland Empire Resource Conservation District, California

Delivering the CSA to the Redlands location

The Inland Empire Resource Conservation District (RCD), in partnership with Huerta del Valle Community Garden (HdV), worked to increase the effectiveness and reach of HdV's Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program. CSA programs are designed to offer weekly boxes of fresh produce at a set cost using produce grown seasonally at the farm.

CSA programs offer a great opportunity to introduce members to new vegetables and fruits as the boxes often contain less common produce items. The community surrounding HdV is primarily low-income and the surrounding region is considered a food desert. In order to increase access to healthy, local and organic produce, HdV began a low-income CSA program as a means of encouraging all residents to participate in urban agriculture and nutritional eating regardless of economic, cultural and social classifications.

A CSA coordinator was hired to work on expanding the low-income CSA and enroll new members. At the start, there were 10 families enrolled; a year later, over 40 families were being served by the program. In order to offer the boxes to community members at highly affordable rates, the CSA was also made available to community members who could afford a full-priced box. Each full-priced box allowed for a subsidized box that could then be offered to a community member in need. The coordinator took steps to ensure families had nutritional information on the contents of the box, healthy recipes for how to use the produce, and opportunities to provide feedback on what they would like to see in the CSA. Staff worked closely with the farmers to help plan the crop rotations to ensure produce was matching the demands of the CSA. The program will continue to grow and improve in future years.

In addition to expanding and improving the CSA program, another goal was to engage CSA members and other community members in nutritional workshops. Over the course of the year, the district offered four workshops ranging from herbal remedies, nutritional cooking classes, and a workshop on making refrigerator pickles. For each of these workshops, there were close to 60 attendees, and community members were consistently asking for more workshop opportunities. Each workshop was led by expert community partners, which guaranteed attendees were getting the best possible information while allowing the district and HdV to develop lasting partnerships.

The last goal was to work closely with farmers to encourage them to become involved in the CSA program, while also introducing them to programs through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to improve soil health, irrigation efficiency and other natural resources concerns. District staff organized four workshops throughout the year for farmers focusing on topics including pest management, soil health and irrigation water management. Through the connections at these workshops, NRCS developed conservation plans for seven new farmers, several of whom received funding through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

NRCS District Conservationist speaking with local farmers about conservation programs through the Natural Resources Conservation Service

Sustainability

This project year has been invaluable both for the district and HdV in growing the CSA and connecting with community members and farmers. Several steps have been taken to ensure continued success for these projects. Additional funds have been secured for a coordinator, and through lessons learned this year, it is expected future sales from the CSA will primarily fund the position.

Through the four nutritional workshops offered this year, new partnerships were developed with organizations whose missions are focused on nutrition. The district and HdV plan to continue offering nutritional courses with these partners including Master Food Preservers of San Bernardino County and Carmel Connections Foundation.

The Farmer Outreach workshops brought the district's attention to how many underserved groups of farmers reside in the 1,300 square mile area. In order to provide more direct services, the district has hired technical staff who will work alongside NRCS staff on soil testing, irrigation water management training, technical assistance and program outreach.

New Castle Conservation District, Delaware

The New Castle Conservation District (CD) provided support and training to urban farmers, community gardeners and home growers in northern Delaware. The Urban Agriculture Coordinator (UAC) created and facilitated the Grow It Yourself (GIY) gardening series in partnership with the Rose Hill Community Center. This gardening education program focused on sustainable, low-cost container gardening for adults looking to grow their own food. GIY encouraged people who thought they couldn't to try growing their own produce and brought people together to talk about gardening and their food system. The district was able to reach new audiences and build an understanding of its mission in new communities.

The district created and facilitated the Grow It Yourself gardening series in partnership with the Rose Hill Community Center

With the help of the Urban Ag Coordinator and district cost-share funds, the district was able to provide over $12,000 of mini-grant funding to community-led urban agriculture projects across the county, including community garden improvements, a youth education program and a farmers market.

During the year, the UAC also served as the Communications Coordinator for the Delaware Urban Farm and Food Coalition (DEUFFC). In this role, the UAC helped to coordinate the 2018 Urban Ag Session of Delaware Ag Week, the only urban-focused event during Delaware's Ag Week. The UAC also created a bi-weekly newsletter to promote coalition member events, increasing the visibility and reach of the DEUFFC.

This project helped create a niche for the district in the urban ag world and helped to bring the district's voice in a new way to conversations around food, agriculture and sustainability in Delaware.

Sustainability

Because of the positive outcomes of these new urban agriculture projects, the district will be using money from its general fund to support the activities of the UAC in the 2018-2019 program year. The 2017-2018 UAC will train the new UAC and share the documentation created over the course of this grant to ensure a smooth transition from one UAC to another.

Grow It Yourself gardeners

Fulton Soil and Water Conservation District, Georgia

Early planning meeting with newly hired Urban Ag Program Coordinator

The Fulton County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) partnered with Groundwork Atlanta and the City of Atlanta's Office of Resilience to successfully launch the AgLanta Grows-A-Lot Urban Farm Program. The farm is located on three acres of blighted, under-utilized utility easements strategically located in designated food desert areas within the City of Atlanta. This pilot phase was used to help meet the Atlanta Resilient Strategy Target to "identify and distribute 25 acres of arable land in the city for healthy food production by 2020."

The program established a replicable new urban agriculture initiative through five small, urban farm businesses – Ecosystem Farm Orchard; Gratitude Botanical LLC; Farm Awry; Outdoor Fresh Farms; and Small Farms/J. Angelou Farm Inc – that were given access to arable land, infrastructure and technical support to create farm plots along these easements. Four of the five small businesses are operated by women and minority farm entrepreneurs. Fifty percent of the pilot team's new farm businesses are located in the neighborhoods where they were raised or currently live. The farmers are committed to improving the diets and lives of their neighbors.

Outreach and education efforts increased the likelihood of long-term natural resource protection. The Urban Ag Program Coordinator worked closely with the pilot farmers to help them utilize best agriculture practices for sustainable food production. District board members and NRCS staff provided technical assistance with site establishment and erosion control.

The AgLanta Farmers hope to develop an "AgLanta Grown" brand that represents their values: "AgLanta is a collective dedicated to bringing local, thoughtfully grown agriculture to the Metro Atlanta Area. Our farms and gardens serve the unique needs of our communities and are built on vacant spaces in the city. We are creating innovative ways to grow food, end food deserts, and build sustainable urban agriculture businesses. We plant with purpose."

The AgLanta farmers and partners plan to continue working with the district to develop practices that will increase yields and demonstrate how these urban farms are cultivating a more resilient, equitable and accessible food system for One Atlanta.

Fundraising event, AgLanta Eats!, hosted by Groundwork Atlanta and the City's Office of Resilience

Sustainability

Over the year, the project's partners have established efforts to sustain the program for the future. The most direct way to sustain the program is to ensure sufficient funding is available. The following efforts will help keep this program continuing: Groundwork Atlanta hosted the fundraiser AgLanta Eats!, which raised nearly $50,000; partners developed an IOBY online donor campaign with a goal of $50,000; MailChimp is donating $25,000 for a Crop Cooler, a self-contained storage unit that will sit on the Collier Urban Farm site; and Groundwork Atlanta is partnering with a group of local farmer organizations to obtain NRCS funding opportunities, including the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

Johnson Soil and Water Conservation District, Iowa

The purpose of the Johnson Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) project was to improve land quality at the Johnson County Poor Farm, where fresh produce was being grown by the nonprofit Grow: Johnson County for donation to area food pantries and the Iowa Valley Global Food Project, a community garden program that creates opportunities for immigrant community members and underserved populations. Improvements were expected to benefit both nonprofit organizations leasing land at the farm in fulfilling their missions to increase food for the greater Johnson County community.

Despite the high volume of food grown, there were barriers to growing at this location. Poor drainage was one of the largest obstacles to production success. This project implemented recommended conservation practices and drainage infrastructure, assisted with conducting soils health tests, conducted four on-farm soil health workshops targeting underserved populations, and developed a successful educational and outreach campaign through social media.

Through the project, cover crops were seeded; waterways were shaped, seeded and matted; and tiling installed. In preparation for installation of conservation practices, meetings were held with Grow: Johnson County and contractors. Soil health monitoring analysis was conducted every 15 days through the life of the project starting in September 2017, outside of winter freeze weeks.

Lettuce growing with irrigation drip tape on JC Poor Farm

Soil samples from bean field

Facebook updates were done on the district page throughout the project. Photo documentation was taken of conservation practices being installed. A soil health field day was held in November by Continuum Ag. That event, co-sponsored by Practical Farmers of Iowa and Grow: Johnson County was the first of five educational events.

Four others were organized by Iowa Valley RC&D and IVGFP and were held at various Johnson County locations including St. Andrew Presbyterian Church, Wetherby Park and the Johnson County Poor Farm. Topics included Nutrient Management at Home and on the Farm; Garden Design; Cover Crops in Annual Vegetable Production; and Iowa's Soil Creation and Farming with Nature's Ecology.

Sustainability

The district board members, staff and county board of supervisors are committed to the Poor Farm being a model urban agriculture farm for the community. They support the goals of preserving and improving soil health and water quality, long-term food production benefitting underserved populations, historic preservation, public education and critical stakeholder engagement. County supervisors have signed longer-term leases with both Grow: Johnson County and Iowa Valley Global Food Project in order to ensure more sustainable farming operations and encouragement in soil health building.

The county board of supervisors is engaged in the master planning process for the entire Poor Farm site (160 acres) which, when complete, will guide the continued implementation of land improvements that focus on conservation best practices. Johnson County Planning, Development and Sustainability Department staff will continue to provide expertise and technical assistance to the Poor Farm in the future. District board members and staff will continue to conduct targeted outreach to underserved populations and partner with smaller producers to promote technical and financial assistance programs as demand grows for locally-produced food.

Grow: Johnson County staff demonstrate using a broad fork to participants in the November 2017 PFI educational event

Douglas County Conservation District, Kansas

Douglas County Conservation District (CD) and city personnel created a guidebook and toolkit for implementing and participating in the Lawrence Common Ground garden and incubator farm program. A series of stakeholder meetings were held with county and city staff to conduct an internal report and program evaluation of the Common Ground program.

An urban agriculture demonstration high tunnel and education garden were installed at the county fairgrounds. The high tunnel will be managed and maintained by the county's Master Gardeners program.

Urban agriculture demonstration high tunnel and education garden

The project team conducted a series of conservation practices workshops and a high tunnel workshop designed to help individuals with the process of permitting and erecting a high tunnel within city limits.

The project also provided participants with education opportunities through visits to other regional urban agriculture programs, attendance at the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) conference, participation at the American Planning Association conference, and presentations at the Urban Food Systems Symposium.

Sustainability

The toolkit has provided a blueprint and foundation for future guide updates. Management and updating of the toolkit was turned over to the Lawrence Sustainability staff. Presentations regarding the program, updates and changes will be made annually to county commissioners.

Common Ground garden and incubator farm

The high tunnel laid a successful foundation for an urban agriculture education garden at the Douglas County Fairgrounds. Care and maintenance of the garden and high tunnel will be the responsibility of the county Master Gardeners program and Kansas State University Research and Extension staff. Staff will use the garden for future research, field trials and food donations.

The garden has been central to the development of Master Gardeners vegetable trials in Douglas County. These trials provide data to Kansas State University (K-State) and are aggregated with information from other counties to evaluate how different varieties perform in Kansas.

In addition, the garden provided over 200 pounds of food to the local food bank, Just Food. The demonstration area has plans to expand in 2019 with the addition of several perennial fruit trees.

The K-State Extension and Douglas County Horticulture program have committed to continuing the high tunnel. Programming is being developed to use the garden as a teaching resource.

Prince George's Soil Conservation District, Maryland

The Prince George's Soil Conservation District (SCD) project focused on urban communities throughout Prince George's County (PGC). While advocates and community partners in the county have recognized urban agriculture is an important piece of the puzzle to increase access to healthy food and create more active living opportunities, no one has addressed the soil and water resource concerns associated with this land use. The project set out to identify and address these resource concerns.

Planting at New Brooklyn Farms

There is a need for additional fresh food in the urban and peri-urban areas for improved health and economic growth along with education and outreach to the population at large. The district's urban agriculture conservation program is focusing on the health, education, economic development and environmental benefits of urban agriculture. This land use can bring a myriad of additional benefits, such as providing mental health benefits from additional green space, improved physical activity, and opportunities to educate new farmers on soil health and water conservation. Improved water filtration may reduce stormwater runoff in urban and peri-urban areas and potentially reduce the need for expanding stormwater management infrastructure.

A variety of partners interacted with the district to provide woodland management workshops, women in agriculture learning circles, urban farmer production, and economic development workshops including farmers markets; American Farmland Trust; PGC Food Equity Council; PGC Forestry Board; urban ag producers; University of Maryland Extension (UME); and ECO City Farms. USDA-NRCS provided an X-ray Fluorescence (XRF) soil analyzer to identify heavy metals. This device will help develop a "heavy metals" soil map in the county.

X-ray Fluorescence Soil Analyzer

The project provided producers with information and skills to better understand the interaction of soils, water and nutrients associated with their activities on the landscape. Each operation is unique and there is no one-plan-fits-all. Major concerns identified are potential soil erosion, heavy metals and other soil contaminants; zoning issues; navigating local, state and federal regulations; soil health; drainage; dust control; good neighbor relations; lack of water for

irrigation; identifying best management practices for soil and water conservation; and underground and overhead utilities.

The district began developing networking and mentoring programs for urban ag producers as well as a brochure/booklet to connect producers with resources and agricultural service providers.

ECO City Farms, Bladensburg

Other accomplishments included 96 farm visits resulting in 12 Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plans; four USDA-EQIP contracts for high tunnels; 12 individuals signed on as new district cooperators; and two applications for the county's urban ag property tax credit. The district developed an urban producer profile form, established farm plan guidelines, and standardized the process for developing those plans through a conservation plan checklist and resource inventory worksheet specific to urban agriculture.

This project provided an opportunity to work with the county's legislative and executive branches to secure a full-time urban ag conservation planner position and to address zoning issues affecting expansion of urban ag operations. Farm planning software is being developed specifically for this program, making the district the first in Maryland to use this new software. The most significant accomplishment is the creation of a new conservation program within the district to provide locally-led soil and water conservation to a new, previously underserved customer base.

Sustainability

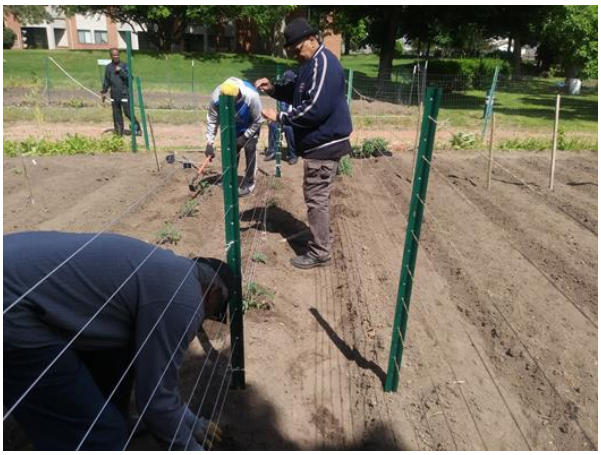
The district hired a permanent, full-time urban agriculture conservation planner funded by the county government. Customers who became district 'cooperators' obtained USDA-FSA farm/tract numbers, making them eligible for federal programs. The district will continue to participate in outreach and education events, including but not limited to the University of Maryland (UM) Eastern Shore small farmers conference, UM Urban Farmer Field School and beginning farmers workshops, UM "Wheel's Up" business planning for small farmers, UM's Annie's Project risk management course, Prince George's Forestry Board urban forestry workshops, UM Master Gardeners and local FFA chapters through the school system's Environmental, Agriculture and Natural Resources Advisory Committee.

Genesee Conservation District, Michigan

The Genesee Conservation District (CD) project reached over 500 community members through outreach events and workshops. Those included pollinator education on Earth Day, reducing home food waste, an 1890's scholarship student event, and wildlife/ habitat management.

Technical assistance was provided at a number of community gardens within the district.

The Unicorn Garden, planted and maintained by residents of an apartment complex, was facing a few issues. The district tackled their biggest concern, which was the loss of half the crop each year due to improper staking, by introducing a simple trellising technique. Near the end of the garden season, staff followed up with the community members and discovered the trellis had saved nearly all tomatoes from rotting.



Unicorn garden members building a trellis to save tomato crop from rotting

My Brother's Keeper had a small garden that was constantly overgrown. Some of the adults there are homeless veterans, many of whom are not able to crouch down or bend over to work in a garden. The district created a raised bed that would stand 3-4 feet off the ground and materials for a second bed.

Renaissance Center's community garden located next to their agriculture house

The Renaissance Center is developing resources for people in the Civic Park community, including an agriculture house that will contain a certified kitchen and food storage. District staff attended multiple meetings and designed a simple garden as a food resource and pollinator garden. After community members saw the garden, they requested something to encourage gardening, gathering and healthy lifestyles in other parts of the neighborhood. The district developed community garden beds with a butterfly garden adjacent to an outdoor concert stage.

Hispanic Tech developed a community garden but had constant groundhog issues. The district designed and built a raised "U" bed that is fenced to keep the groundhogs out. Additionally, a pollinator garden was installed by the raised beds.

A community member on Flint's east side reached out in an effort to clean up his neighborhood. As a business owner, he noticed visitors are skeptical of the area because it is heavily blighted. He presented an idea to plant the boulevard, making it more attractive. The district helped him develop a plan that would burst in color from spring into late summer. Four beds were planted this fall, and plantings will continue in the spring of 2019.

Sustainability

The district worked with organizations that displayed a need and offered a solution. All groups work with community members to improve neighborhoods by decreasing homelessness, hunger, blight or crime. The projects helped to beautify neighborhoods as well as build culture around growing their own food or pollinator support. The district UAC coordinator's position will be sustained for at least one year. Other grant funds will be sought beyond this year to continue providing much-needed urban agriculture and conservation services to the community.

Upper Big Blue Natural Resource District, Nebraska

Project GROW, "Growing Rotational crops On Wellfields", is a partnership between the City of York and the Upper Big Blue Natural Resource District (NRD). GROW is a 5-year project on 160 acres of the city's wellfield property

This project is the first of its kind in the State of Nebraska and consists of three components: a soil health demonstration, community garden and pollinator habitat. The goals are to maintain profitability while improving soil health, increasing awareness of the importance of pollinator habitat, and providing a community garden for the citizens of York.

Year one was fruitful with an inaugural group of gardeners in the community garden. The triticale growing season and harvest on the soil health demonstration acres was very successful. The harvested seed was contracted to a cover crop company for use in their cover crop mixtures. The triticale harvest was followed with a manure application and cover crop seeding. The cover crops were grazed in mid-September and reseeded to a winter cover crop in October. Soil health will be measured through rigorous soil and plant biomass sampling. As the soil health improves, so will the soil sample results.

The district has also been building soil health in the pollinator area by keeping vegetation growing most months. Even if vegetation on the land surface was not growing, the roots and soil bacteria below ground were thriving. Pollinator seed was planted in the fall with the goal of seeing pollinators of every species doing their job in the summer.

The community garden had 11 gardeners the first year. Each one brought different resources and expertise to the garden area. A variety of fruit-bearing shrubs and trees were planted on the site to allow community groups to harvest the fruit and sell it as a fundraiser for their organizations.

Project GROW Community Garden in York

Sustainability

An interlocal agreement was signed by both the Upper Big Blue NRD and City of York for this project to continue until 2021. The NRD and City have budgeted funds and are committed to making Project GROW a success. Two more years of funding were secured through a Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality: Source Water Protection Grant to continue the educational efforts and provide technical assistance surrounding Project GROW.

Ocean County Soil Conservation District, New Jersey

The goal of the Ocean County Soil Conservation District (SCD) initiative was to offer technical support in Lakewood Township, a 'food desert' as identified by USDA. A UAC Advisory Committee was established consisting of: Ocean County SCD, Lakewood High School (LHS), Georgian Court University (GCU), Lakewood Township Public Works, Brick Township Municipal Utilities Authority (BTMUA), Fulfill, Farmers Against Hunger (FAH) – a component of the New Jersey Agricultural Society (NJAS) and Barnegat Bay Partnership (BBP).

A new food garden was established at Lakewood High School consisting of 36 raised beds, offering over 200 square feet of planting area. Materials for the creation of this garden consisted of donated wooden frames for raised bed structures, weed cloth and a mixture of topsoil, coir and compost.

NRCS soil scientists gave soils lessons to the students, tested the area for heavy metals, and offered a clean bill of soil health

Labor was provided by UAC partners and volunteers. Upon its completion, students in the Lakewood HS Horticulture program planted turnips, eggplant, peppers, tomatillos and herbs for their first season under the direction of their Horticulture teacher. They donated approximately 200 pounds of fresh food to the Christ Church Food Pantry. Shrubs, small trees and perennials were donated to beautify the school grounds around the garden.

Lakewood High School horticulture students participated in several "gleaning" events organized by Farmers Against Hunger. Approximately 9,000 pounds of cabbages, 4,000 pounds of apples, and 3,600 pounds of butternut squash were harvested and donated to local food pantries.

The Mercy Garden, a teaching and demonstration garden located on the Georgian Court University campus, was enhanced and augmented. A volunteer coordinator was supported by the project, vegetable seedlings were donated from Fulfill and volunteers and GCU students did the planting. Kale, eggplant, peppers, tomatoes, swiss chard and herbs were grown. Four 4'x 8' compost corrals were reconstructed and pollinator garden beds were revived. The Mercy Garden expanded its existing 960 square feet of growing space with the addition of new raised beds. Donated wood combined with 5-gallon self-watering containers were used to demonstrate techniques for growing food in urban settings.

Education and outreach efforts strengthened partnerships within the Lakewood community. Growing containers, plants and information in both English and Spanish were given out during a

two-hour workshop provided to Christ United Methodist Church families. A make-and-take "Self-Watering Container Garden" workshop was offered to Lakewood and surrounding communities. A "Healthy Soil, Healthy Food, Healthy You" interactive after-school program was presented to Clifton Avenue Elementary students and families, who each received 10 pounds of fresh produce including sweet potatoes, carrots, apples and avocadoes through a food distribution effort. A "Soil Health" training program was presented to Master Composter trainees through the Ocean County Department of Solid Waste Management. In addition, the district's signature literary resource, "Low Maintenance Landscaping Guide", was translated into Spanish, and 3,000 copies were printed and distributed. A comprehensive "Tool Kit" of resources was compiled on the district website.

Sustainability

The UAC Advisory Committee partnership continues to support the goal of ensuring access to fresh food and healthy food resources for the Lakewood Township community. The district is committed to augmenting food production in the Lakewood High School vegetable garden and the Georgian Court University Mercy Garden, and continues to promote education and outreach opportunities and food distribution efforts throughout Lakewood Township.

Gleaning field trips are being organized by Lakewood High School for 2019 to offer opportunities for horticulture students to harvest and donate fresh produce to pantries. The partnership built with Christ United Church, linking the GCU Mercy Garden production operation with the Christ United Church food pantry distribution system, will help ensure access to fresh food by the community.

Lakewood High School horticulture students gleaned 9,000 pounds of cabbages from a local farm

Several members of the UAC Advisory Committee now hold leadership positions on the newly established Community Garden Network of Ocean County, an offshoot of the UAC project. CGN is a partnership between the district, Rutgers Cooperative Extension and Master Gardeners of Ocean County, Fulfill, Hunger Foundation of Southern Ocean, Soil to Soul, Wrangle Brook Community Garden and Community Garden of Beach Haven. The mission is to create a network of community gardens, sustain existing and help develop new community gardens, increase community food security and improve access to healthy food, provide education and share resources. CGN has also adopted Riverwood Park Community Garden in Toms River, N.J., to use as an education and demonstration garden site for the community.

Ciudad Soil and Water Conservation District, New Mexico

In partnership with others, the Ciudad Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) hosted two conservation easement workshops, four
sustainable agriculture workshops, piloted an accredited high school agricultural program, and developed a conservation easement guidebook for landowners. Partners included private landowners, municipalities, local nonprofits and Bernalillo County Open Space (BCOS).

The conservation workshops were held in August and October. To promote the second workshop, mailers were sent to all agricultural tax-exempt property owners in the valley; turnout was higher as a result, with 30 participants. The mailers were funded and provided through partnerships between the Mid-Region Council of Governments, BCOS and Rio Grande Agricultural Land Trust (RGALT).

The sustainable agriculture workshops were attended by an average of 30 participants representing diverse relationships to the agricultural community. The methods discussed assisted in providing hands-on and applicable techniques for soil and water conservation in fields within the Middle Rio Grande Valley. Out of the four workshops held, the No-Till workshop was the most attended. The fourth workshop, Soil Building on Degraded Lands, was the most hands-on for participants while the IPM (Integrated Pest Management) workshop had the highest involvement from high school interns.

NMSU IPM Specialist speaks with workshop participants from Grow the Growers, Rio Grande High School and local producers about pollinators and mixed production polycultures as benefiting and enhancing biological pest control methods

A primary focus of this project was the integration and support of Bernalillo County's Grow the Growers (GTG) farmer training program, particularly by providing professional developmental support for trainees. Technical training exposed trainees and youth interns to calibrated topics
with specific "shovel-ready" techniques demonstrated. Trainees were involved in all workshops and additionally assisted with in-field and class-based mentorship to Rio Grande High School interns.

The internship program implemented by Querencia Institute provided educational opportunities to eight students, culminating in 30 hours of classroom education and 30 hours of field internship. Four schools from Albuquerque Public Schools had participating students complete

the internship. Student involvement, attendance and participation was generally excellent, with successful individual and small group projects, involvement on completed assignments and note taking by interns throughout the program. Student interns were informed about the GTG program and often learned alongside GTG participants. The program included joint training sessions and shared classroom instruction.

The Conservation Easement guidebook was produced by the RGALT. It is useful in educating the public on the technical, legal and financial aspects of the conservation easement process, as well as the various practical, ecological and economic reasons in securing agricultural properties in conservation easements. Partners, such as BCOS and NRCS, were specifically mentioned and were represented at the workshops.

Sustainability

The district has been actively engaged with partners to provide continuity. BCOS agreed to support these individual projects into the future with funding provided through a 2014 Open Space Mill Levy, which can be used toward conservation and utility of working lands for agricultural use in urban and semi-rural landscapes. The district and BCOS are working toward a Joint Funding Agreement that would allow for partnership and guidance on future programming and workshops in the area of agricultural conservation. In 2019, through collaborative efforts, BCOS will investigate the feasibility of developing a cost-assistance program to help establish conservation easements on private lands within the county.

The district has been instrumental in prolonging the impact generated through partnership with Querencia Institute and Rio Grande High School. Efforts are underway to secure $14,000 from BCOS to provide for the continuity of the high school internship program for 2019, which will allow more comprehensive involvement with the GTG trainers and trainees, ideally serving as a mentorship model for youth interested in localized and sustainable agricultural production.

The last workshop held at Sanchez Farm Open Space pulled together local expertise to demonstrate simple, cost-effective ways degraded land in arid regions can be restored and soil health improved with the use of sheet mulching, on-contour swales and weir structures from willows used on site; soil testing and materials utilized were also discussed

San Juan Soil and Water Conservation District, New Mexico

The San Juan Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD)'s project Farm Farmington! had a tiered approach. The first tier provided conservation technical assistance, supplies and capacity-building support to the New Beginnings Community Garden (NBCG) located at the New Beginnings transitional housing program for survivors of domestic violence and their families. Outcomes at NBCG include 14 raised garden beds, a plumbed 2,500-gallon water storage tank, a soil health plan, a chicken run and coop with resident-managed hens, recommendations for prairie dog and deer management and the "New Beginnings Community Garden Operations Manual." The manual was printed and presented to the NBCG community and will serve as a model for other gardens in the area.

San Juan College Carpentry Program students and instructors deliver and set up the chicken coop they built for New Beginnings Community Garden as a class project

The next "tier" of focus provided a combination of supplies funding, conservation technical assistance and programmatic and capacity-building support to five other "growing" gardens and organizations in the area, including the Samaritan Village Community Garden and Four Corners Foundation's community garden at PATH, a transitional housing center. Highlights included a composting workshop at First Baptist Church-Bloomfield Community Garden and publication of the "Low Cost Home Gardening Guide," which was put on display at the Tres Rios Habitat for Humanity Store.

The third approach can be summarized as "connecting the dots." Farmington had a number of projects, groups and resources dedicated to urban and community agriculture, but community members reported difficulty finding these groups and working together on shared goals. In response to these challenges, the district brought people together in new ways, as well as plugged them in to existing planning efforts. An advisory committee was assembled with community gardeners, agency representatives and others and has now transitioned into a Local Foods Task Force after receiving an EPA "Local Foods, Local Places" grant.

The final step made resources and information more accessible to the community by producing the Farm Farmington! Guide to Urban and Community Agriculture in the San Juan River Valley. This guide includes a map of local agriculture initiatives in the area, regional land use history, resources for starting a garden, suggestions for creative partnerships and more. The guide, map and reports can be found at https://sanjuanswcd.com/farm-farmington-community-agriculture/.

Sustainability

At New Beginnings Community Garden, the goal was to conserve soil and water while reducing labor and monetary inputs. This was accomplished and will be continued through the row garden's new layout and perennial walkways, along with the Operations Manual, which will improve institutional memory through staff turnover, and help with future garden development.

Other partner gardens are connected to resources they can access in future years, such as the Master Gardener spring gardening class series. The Four Corners Foundation garden at PATH and First Baptist Church-Bloomfield Community Garden are both running composting bioreactors as a yearlong project starting October 2018.

In July 2018, the district partnered with the Four Corners Foundation and Farmington Municipal Schools to hire a Community Agriculture AmeriCorps VISTA Volunteer. This one-year program will introduce soil, water and school garden curriculums in Farmington elementary schools and after school programs, including field trips to nearby gardens to get students hands-on experience. So far, three schools have expressed interest in starting school gardens. All lesson plans are available online at https://sanjuanswcd.com/education/lessons-and-class-materials/. The VISTA has also been coordinating with the district and Master Gardeners to organize small-scale agriculture workshops on composting, cover crops and more, and is providing continued technical assistance to new community gardens.

Finally, this project has brought stakeholders together under the umbrella of urban and community agriculture, and the resulting collaboration is continuing to pick up steam. The Local Foods, Local Places Community Action Plan incorporates many goals that include urban and community agriculture, including the vision of urban agriculture as part of a vibrant downtown. The local foods task force put together under this initiative is carrying the vision of Farm Farmington! into the future.

Volunteers work at New Beginnings Community Garden in Farmington as part of the first annual Four Corners Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service in 2018; this event was held again in 2019 and added a new garden in Aztec as a volunteer site

Nevada Tahoe Conservation District, Nevada

Bijou Elementary greenhouse

The Nevada Tahoe Conservation District (CD) helped form a school district-wide garden committee that brought together representatives from each of the local elementary schools to promote a cohesive garden program. Previously, each school garden worked separately, and minimal interactions between the programs occurred. Now, the committee is ranking project needs and discussing opportunities that affect the whole district. The committee's coordination caught attention of the school board, and they created a temporary position under the science coordinator. This position is working with all schools to determine needs for STEAM curriculum and the garden programs. There has also been work done to create a Tahoe-specific garden curriculum that follows California state standards. Currently, it is being used in one of the elementary schools and the school district is looking to expand the use of it throughout the district. Other outcomes of the school garden committee include meeting with the school board to discuss additional support and funding, discussions with FoodCorps regarding two members to work in the elementary schools in the district, and numerous grants to continue improving the garden spaces.

In the beginning of the project, the Bijou Elementary greenhouse was built. This was a hands-on community effort involving an enormous amount of volunteer hours thanks to a garden committee created by the Bijou Elementary Parent-Teacher Association. While building the greenhouse, the whole garden space was given a face lift. Five new and more durable planting beds were installed, drainage was improved, a teaching area was graded, and natural seating was added. A full new underground irrigation system was also added to the entire space, significantly reducing weekly maintenance requirements. This fall, all students in the school got out for at least two lessons in the garden space, and the greenhouse was planted for the first time.

The committee also worked to raise money to erect the fourth outdoor garden space at the Lake Tahoe Environmental Science Magnet School (LTESMS). It raised over $30,000 from numerous sources, including the Parent-Teacher Association of LTESMS, Raley's Giving, Whole Kids Foundation Garden Grant, Lake Tahoe Education Foundation, Kiwanis Club of Lake Tahoe and many more public and private donors. A new garden space was designated in front of the school,

and a greenhouse, along with a utility shed was erected this fall. With the installation of this greenhouse, all four of the elementary schools in the Lake Tahoe Unified School District have greenhouses and outdoor garden spaces.

The secondary committee formed with help from this urban agriculture project is working on bringing more local produce to South Lake Tahoe. It is creating ties to local El Dorado County farmers and the Tahoe Food Hub, a local non-profit that currently only works in North Lake Tahoe. A pilot program of four weeks occurred in October and November 2018. This assessed viability and created connections to local restaurants. Six restaurants along with 14 individuals participated in the pilot. Full roll-out of the expansion to South Lake Tahoe is planned for Spring 2019.

Community Soup Night, featuring food made by the local schools

Sustainability

The school garden committee will continue to meet and develop goals to further the use of the elementary school gardens and look to expand the garden program into the middle school and high school. These goals include improving outside garden spaces at the schools and continuing the development of lesson plans that can be integrated into the new STEAM curriculum. The committee is also working with the school board to fund a garden position in each school after the temporary position has finished. There are efforts to bring FoodCorps members to the schools in the future who can work with the gardens and expand the curriculum. Due to the formation of the school garden committee and the energy put forward to create growing spaces at all of the elementary schools, many donations from individuals, PTAs and small foundations have been acquired.

The Tahoe Food Hub did a one-month pilot program to test the feasibility of extending their services to South Lake Tahoe, which also works with schools through their Sierra Agroecology Center (SAC). SAC works with local schools to provide training on growing year-round in the area's cold climate. Bringing the Tahoe Food Hub down to South Lake Tahoe will bring this knowledge base and potential funding source to provide similar opportunities to the south side of the lake.

Colonial Soil and Water Conservation District, Virginia

The goal of the Colonial SWCD project was to introduce a hands-on, project-based learning opportunity via urban agriculture at a local high school in Williamsburg. To do this, the district partnered with Warhill High School and local nonprofit Williamsburg Community Growers (WCG) to develop an interactive outdoor learning space, later named the Warhill Pride Garden. The space includes a traditional row crop garden, raised beds, a solar-powered irrigation system and an educational walking tour. The district and WCG share a goal of educating the public about sustainable agriculture and conservation, and they recognized the lack of agricultural education opportunities at most local schools.

Students in Warhill's "Nature of Man" course split into several teams, outlined below, to work on planning and building each component of the garden. A group devoted to fundraising and grant writing to raise money for these projects was also created. Various volunteers and local experts assisted in advising and mentoring each group.

- Agricultural Engineering Team: Developed and installed solar-powered irrigation system
- Education Team: Developed educational walking tour and subsequent talking points for each station along the tour, assisted with planting plans for the row crop garden and raised beds
- Farm to Community Team: Created recipes for produce grown on-site, assisted with cafeteria produce delivery, and helped choose plants for the garden and raised beds
- Fundraising/Outreach Team: Planned and executed a t-shirt fundraiser, created a website and social media pages for the project, assisted with grant preparation

Students work on installing the drip line irrigation system after planting seedlings donated by Lowe's

Throughout the year, students were involved in all aspects of project development, from researching project possibilities, creating proposals and developing material lists and budgets to completing physical construction and maintenance of the site. The ability to fully follow through on these projects was a fantastic learning experience for the students. They not only learned about agriculture and conservation, but also how to manage their time and budgets, and troubleshoot issues as they arose. At the end of the school year, the class hosted a community night to show off their hard work and demonstrate the sustainable agricultural principles they learned.

Overall, the district, WCG and students and faculty at Warhill High School created a successful endeavor developing agricultural real-world learning opportunities. Many of the students had never worked in a garden before, almost none of them had ever worked with solar panels, and many were nervous about presenting a walking tour of their site, but by the end of the year, each student seemed comfortable and confident in their projects.

A student shows off his soil core while taking samples to determine soil nutrient needs

Sustainability

The garden is now in its second year and a new class of students are taking on their own projects to continue to improve the site.

Throughout the grant period, several small grants were submitted to support individual project needs for each student group. Students also hosted a t-shirt fundraiser that raised several hundred dollars to continue to support the garden. These fundraising efforts, along with important partnerships with businesses and organizations in the surrounding community, have been vital to the continuation of this project. As the project continues into its second year, several grants have been submitted to continue to fund the students' projects, and another student-led fundraiser is being planned.

While it can be difficult to keep school faculty and administrators engaged and supportive of these projects after secured funding has run out, the district is encouraged by the arrival of a new teacher with an agricultural education background to help run the program. The new teacher is passionate about using urban agriculture as a teaching tool and was drawn to the position partially because of the garden and its possibilities. The teacher's role is integral, as it ensures the continuation of the project while allowing the district to engage with new schools and continue to support urban agriculture efforts.

Lord Fairfax Soil and Water Conservation District, Virginia

The 5,200 square foot Strasburg Community Garden had an impressive first year of growth. It included an area filled with a collection of heirloom vegetables and herbs as well as native grasses and wildflowers in raised bed community plots and partner plots. The garden donated over 450 pounds of produce to two local food pantries and provided 14 educational workshops attended by over 295 people. The first annual Harvest Festival was held at the community garden, where 30 local artisans, farmers, nonprofits and organizations presented to the community the services and products they provide. The Harvest Festival had an attendance of over 400 people, and the town would like to make this a recurring event.

Day one of the Strasburg Community Garden on the left, then six months later, on the right; there were 18 community plots in the garden and three partner plots in the garden

The garden would not have been possible without several public-private partnerships that gave their time and shared knowledge via the newly formed Urban Agriculture Working Group. Pot Town Organics, a local plant and garden shop, provided discounts on materials, space to hold educational workshops, and shared expertise with gardeners and district staff. The Town of Strasburg provided staff to help with the marketing of educational workshops and events as well as the space for the garden. The local Master Gardeners association and Extension agents were integral to the success of the educational workshops and events. Other partners included the Boy Scouts of America, Girl Scouts of America, Rockingham Cooperative, Strasburg United Methodist Church, local high school and middle school FFA chapters, Strasburg Farmers Market, Natural Art Garden Center, Gabalot Gardens, local food pantries, Massanutten Regional Governor's School, Strasburg Rotary and Kiwanis Club of Strasburg.

In addition to the many partnerships, unique aspects of the garden will also keep it sustainable. A rainwater harvesting system was installed with the help of Signal Knob Middle School's FFA. This system provides and stores up to 1,525 gallons of rainwater, which garden plot holders can

use to irrigate their crops. The Strasburg Rotary Club was successful in obtaining a grant to build a shed for the garden and use solar power to energize a pump for the rainwater harvesting system, making it much more efficient. The handicapped-accessible, raised beds created by a local Eagle Scout and his troop will continue to provide space for those who could not have access to a garden otherwise. A bioswale planted with native grasses, installed by local high school students, will continue to collect and treat stormwater runoff protecting the garden from flooding. Volunteers like these students have been fundamental to the garden's success, contributing over 1,295 hours to the project.

A rainwater harvesting system, designed by Lord Fairfax SWCD and installed with help from a local middle FFA chapter, kept the garden plots irrigated throughout the growing season

Sustainability

The district will be stepping down as the primary manager of the Strasburg Community Garden in 2019. The garden was created for demonstration and education to the public, inspiring locals to grow their own produce. Keeping with that theme, the district is recruiting a collegiate student to take over the managerial responsibilities of the garden. A creative young mind will continue the passion that made the garden such a success. The district has reached out to over 30 professors at five colleges in the area, seeking a student interested in this great opportunity.

The district will still have a plot in the garden and will be heavily involved in workshops and work days. Keeping a small plot there will maintain the face of the district within the garden while allowing staff to monitor and answer any questions the new manager might have. A "Garden Manual" has been created, outlining the details of the Strasburg Community Garden. This will provide the new manager information on everything from workshops and managing plot holders to maintaining infrastructure. The district will ask for weekly updates to ensure everything is being supervised properly.

With the great success of the first year of growing, and the amazing support of the Town of Strasburg and its locals, the Strasburg Community Garden will continue to educate and provide fresh produce to the community for years to come.

Cascadia Conservation District, Washington

The Cascadia Conservation District (CD) project provided education and outreach to all citizens of Chelan County. Activities included educational workshops, technical support, and liaisons with community partners for educational events, developing new opportunities to support urban agriculture.

Students in the Lewis and Clark Elementary after school urban ag program work to weed and harvest from their raised beds

The district created a new urban agriculture after school program, which served to introduce agricultural concepts as well as hands-on work in the school gardens and experiential nutrition education.

Staff attended and participated in various urban ag educational events at farmers markets, Master Gardeners meetings and school plant sales. Technical assistance was provided in person, over the phone, via e-mail and through informational articles in district newsletters and the Wenatchee World.

Three bilingual educational handouts (water wise, compact composting and container gardening) were developed for use at workshops and events. Three events were held to promote the brochures: "Composting 101", "Container Gardening Workshop" and "Your Lawn, Watered Right."

Informational booth at the Wenatchee Farmers Market on the basics of composting in seven steps, using the new brochure

The project supported the application for and implementation of a City of Wenatchee grant for improvement of an established community garden through installation of a new shed, garden art, fresh compost, sponsorship of several community garden events and signs identifying the new locally-chosen name for the garden. District staff helped develop new community gardens, as well as assisted with upkeep of those already in existence (obtaining compost, holding seed-starting events, sponsoring gardening workshops).

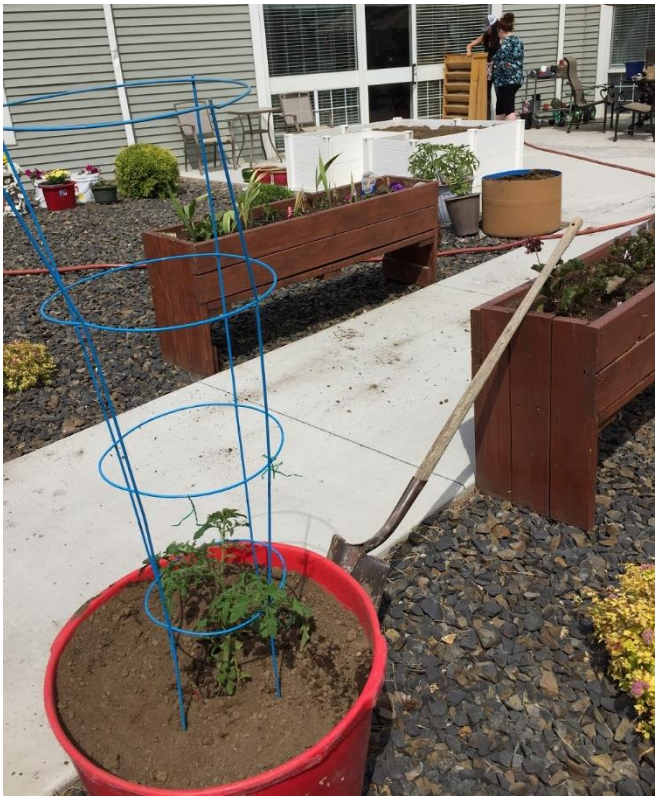
Sustainability

The district board has supported the urban agriculture program by adding it to the Long-Range Plan over the next five years. This will include some funding from the district's base budget for staff time to run the program. Partners have committed to continuing some of the programs. For example, the Master Gardeners will continue to support the after-school Urban Agriculture Program. The district has also secured several small grants to continue to fund various projects started this year and will continue to apply for more as opportunities arise.

Grant County Conservation District, Washington

The Grant County Conservation District (CD) had three objectives: to include and set up community gardening structures for seniors and others who would benefit most in a designated food desert such as this area of central Washington; to obtain and provide healthy organic soils, like composted manure, to provide a nutrient-rich medium; and to provide the equipment, drip irrigation systems and garden structures so each site could continue to be successful.

The district wanted the project to be about sustainability, gardening activities for seniors, and supplemental food production. Eight retirement and assisted living facilities around the district's area of service were identified. There was no cost to the facilities, and all approached were eager to participate. They were happy to provide residents with healthy outdoor activities. The district provided the equipment and volunteer manpower to set up the gardens; irrigation systems were installed where possible with drip nozzles for water conservation.



Container gardens at Brooksdale Assisted Living

In preparation, several kinds of vegetables and herb seeds were purchased and started indoors, and larger, mature plants were purchased for replanting as needed. Gardening tools were purchased and made available for each of the eight sites. Tools such as garden creepers, watering cans, sprinkler nozzles and hoses were bought for some of the sites. The compost was donated by three livestock facilities.

The local Columbia Basin Walleye Club (non-profit) provided hours of volunteer in-kind labor to help with the construction of raised beds and vertical gardens as part of their community service. Once the structures were in place, other volunteers helped with shoveling, filling up wheelbarrows and distributing the compost into the raised beds. In addition, maintenance staff at some the facilities helped with watering, irrigation system timing and oversight.

In addition to the eight facilities, the district set up a vertical garden with drip irrigation system at an Alzheimer's facility in Moses Lake, and donated several yards of compost to the Othello Community garden and the Moses Lake Community garden.

Compost being delivered to Othello Community Gardens

Sustainability

Each facility has interested residents who enjoy caring for the gardens and have taken the lead for weeding and watering. Additional volunteer labor is being recruited.

The raised gardens are filled with compost and are made out of materials that will withstand the weather. Compost will be available if any of the sites need refreshing at no cost and will be supplied by the district.

Drip irrigation systems have been installed in the gardens, ensuring that irrigation will function for several seasons. Maintenance staff at the facilities are responsible for irrigation scheduling.

Hand tools and supplies such as hoses, creepers and sprinkler heads have been provided to the facilities, which will last several years if maintained properly.

On weekends, district employees will provide occasional in-kind maintenance and irrigation systems monitoring.

Kitsap Conservation District, Washington

Located at the Kitsap Conservation District (CD) office, the GRACE Garden Project houses on-site demonstrations of conservation methods, low-flow irrigation design, and season extension techniques, and offers workshops and public outreach targeting urban audiences. The GRACE Garden provides fresh vegetables for the Central Kitsap Food Bank and restorative justice and community service opportunities for criminal offenders from the Mission Creek Corrections Center for Women (MCCCW).

The success of the project far surpassed all initial benchmarks for production conservation, educational, and community impacts. In the first year, the GRACE Garden donated 12,055 pounds of fresh produce to four local food banks, grew 8,800 pounds of pumpkins, and continues to deliver an average of 300 pounds of fresh greens, squash and potatoes weekly. The MCCCW Community Work Crew completed fall and winter plantings of kale, chard, broccoli and salad greens, and work continues on a reduced schedule until spring, when the project ramps up for summer production.

Fourteen container gardening workshops taught food bank clients, EBT/SNAP Ed recipients and community members how to grow salad greens, herbs and fall vegetables for their families. Community education and outreach activities highlighted project conservation practices including drip irrigation, water conservation, weed suppression, and soil testing for nutrient management.

"Salad Bowl" container gardening class

Equally as impressive as progress toward project conservation goals, the impact of the GRACE Project on the women from MCCCW exceeded all expectations. They gained knowledge and skill in propagation, cultivation and harvesting fresh produce, in the process gaining self-worth, confidence, and a desire to continue growing food and working in natural resource conservation. Several women plan to pursue degrees in environmental studies upon release from custody.

Members of the MCCCW community service crew transplanting

All the women working in the garden over the course of the grant maintain they learned and continue to learn as part of the GRACE Garden Project – and in many cases acknowledge what they gained had less to do with growing zucchini and everything to do with giving back to their community. Most recently, the work crew highlighted their work and accomplishments in the garden by harvesting and donating 300 pounds of pumpkins to MCCCW for a Halloween activity for inmates and their families.

The GRACE Project garnered notice on multiple fronts, including a visit from U. S. Representative Derek Kilmer, newspaper articles, a notable feature in the Sunday Seattle Times, and a special Community Service Award from the Kitsap Community and Agricultural Alliance. The project joined the Washington State Department of Corrections Sustainability in Prisons Project, with grant activities highlighted statewide in a blog and on social media. Collaboration with Kitsap County Food Bank Coalition, Washington State University Kitsap Extension, USDA SNAP Ed, Kitsap Health District, Harvest Kitsap Gleaning Program, Kitsap County Solid Waste, and farmers markets addressed food policy issues. Those community connections amplified project educational outreach and technical assistance activities for urban agriculture and community gardens, which in turn increased access to fresh, healthy food for residents of Kitsap County.

Sustainability

The district has taken a number of steps to ensure continuation and growth of the GRACE Garden Project, including continued funding for the MCCCW Community Service Crew to work in the garden.

In keeping with the district's motto, "Building partnerships to accomplish more," relationships established during the GRACE Project activities resulted in receiving an AmeriCorps Volunteer for a Community Garden/Conservation Specialist to coordinate the program for the 2019 growing season and beyond. Costing the district $6,000 annually, this 0.8 FTE position contributes 1,700 hours (0.5 FTE GRACE Project/0.3 FTE other conservation activities) in exchange for a monthly stipend, educational benefit and health insurance provided by partner agency Kitsap Community Resources.

A significant portion of the matching funds contributed to this project paid for four 10,000-gallon water cisterns and a drip irrigation system to ensure sufficient water for the garden. Sales of select items will pay for project supplies (seed, soil amendments, other materials). Generating $1,780 this first year, these enterprises include plant starts sold at the KCD Annual Spring Tree Sale; restaurant wholesale accounts; and a U-Pick Pumpkin Patch. Anticipated to increase over time, all income-generating activities fill unmet or underserved niche markets, avoiding competition with local farmers who direct market/wholesale agricultural products.

Snohomish Conservation District, Washington

A goal of the Snohomish Conservation District (CD) Lawns to Lettuce urban agriculture program is to create community food systems. This project allowed the district to pursue this goal and make some lasting positive impacts, not only within the food desert area of Monroe, but across Snohomish County. Partnership building was a key element to the success and will enable the Lawns to Lettuce program to provide greater impact in the coming years.

This homeowner received garden beds, rain barrels, vegetable starts, and removed lawn using the sheet mulching technique

Through a main partner, Housing Hope, the district worked with diverse landowners to encourage and instruct them how to grow food in their own front yards. Retrofits were performed to six single family homes, transforming conventional grass lawns to edible gardens.

Housing Hope's two group facilities were also provided with soil amendments, plant seedlings and weekly support to increase engagement. In conjunction with the retrofits, the district hosted a community event to give away seedlings grown by the Monroe High School FFA students and to teach people about the techniques used, including sheet mulching, raised bed gardening, and rain water catchment.

The district has developed strong partnerships with food banks throughout Snohomish County, getting fresh, nutritious food from a variety of sources, including urban gardeners through the "Plant a Row" program. This program encourages people to plant a row of produce for their local food bank. Community members who joined the campaign received free seeds and were supported throughout the season with Lawns to Lettuce resources. A new food bank mapping tool allows people to see which food bank is closest to them and what days and times they accept produce donations. That makes it very easy for people to get directions to the nearest food bank using their mobile devices.

Food banks throughout the county were supported through small and large-scale gleaning efforts. Produce was gleaned from farmers markets, homeowners' apple trees and gardens and commercial farms. These efforts generated around 20,000 pounds of produce, utilizing approximately 390 hours of volunteer labor.

Gleaning event with 86 volunteers

Throughout the duration of this project, the district has grown a very active online community with over 850 users. A new online Facebook group was created along with monthly newsletters containing gardening tips and tricks, volunteer opportunities, calls to action and online resources.

This growing Lawns to Lettuce community is also beginning to reflect the diverse demographic within Snohomish County. Through the project, the district connected with a new Latina leader and director of the Monroe Chamber of Commerce. After holding one Spanish-speaking class together on rain catchment this fall, the district will further engage underserved groups into the future.

Sustainability

Diverse partnerships were key to this project; they will continue to be the focus of the Lawns to Lettuce program. These partnerships ensure fresh nutritious food will become more readily available to citizens of Snohomish County, and especially those who live in food deserts.

This program helped build a strong base of volunteers who will continue the gleaning efforts. Their passion and dedication will help gather more partners to join the fight against hunger. The district has a large network of farmers who are becoming increasingly interested in being involved with the program.

The Plant a Row will continue next growing season to provide food banks with high quality produce. Lawns to Lettuce is quickly becoming a bridge between the urban and rural divide.

The district's active online community continues to grow through social media outlets and the monthly newsletter.

Plant A Row Handout

Diversity will continue to be a focus as the district looks for innovative ways to serve the broad urban demographic. This project demonstrated the 'proof of concept' to the district board of directors, jurisdictions and elected officials, and it provided the foundational support needed for urban agriculture efforts into the future.

Key Lessons Learned

Diane Fish, Kitsap CD, WA
The goodwill generated by the GRACE Project raised our profile in the community more than all of our other conservation activities and connected us to underserved communities in significant ways.

If your project is taking your district into new partnerships and areas of service, be patient. The connections you build to establish lasting and mutually beneficial relationships will be stronger in successive years than in the first year, but continue to nurture them. When serving urban audiences, especially in underserved and ethnically diverse communities, educate yourself on culturally appropriate practices.

Sandy Letzing, Cascadia CD, WA
By sending our staff to every kind of educational opportunity, community event and technical assistance possibility that had to do with urban ag, we were really able to reach a diverse set of the community in this way. It gave us the freedom to do a ton of outreach and really get a lot of information and awareness about urban ag and our involvement out into the community.

While there is a ton of money for implementing projects, there is limited funding for urban ag programs and staff time to support projects. Start your search for this type of funding early. Take your time involving those already engaged in urban ag in your community to build a stronger network instead of trying to reinvent the wheel.

Marie Krausnick, Upper Big Blue NRD, NE
In the beginning, this project was a way for the NRD to educate others on the benefits of soil health. In the end, we not only sparked interest in others, but gained a better understanding of ourselves.

Find a partner willing to go the distance. Rebuilding soil health does not happen overnight. It can take years of planting diverse crop rotations and cover crops to build soil. Having a partner willing to see the project through to the end is important. Have humility in the process. The teacher can also be the student.

Robyn Goad, Colonial SWCD, VA
The primary benefits to the district were all the new partnerships and connections we were able to build through our Urban Agriculture program.

We learned just how important those partnerships would be toward growing and sustaining our urban agriculture missions. We've relied heavily on our partners to be able to continue to develop our teaching farm and local school gardens, reach more students, and increase awareness about the benefits of urban ag.

Kevin Donnelly and Rachel Coyne, New Castle CD, DE
One of the biggest benefits was establishing close working relationships with community leaders and members of urban farms and gardens that serve and are located in the under-resourced areas of the county. We are looking forward to growing the relationships in the months and

years ahead. This experience was yet another example of the importance of how personal relationships and trust are critical to the growth and success of any program or project.

Most important was setting realistic goals. It's really easy to be excited about urban ag because, well, it's exciting! But it also sometimes leads to projects that may not be totally manageable in a one-year grant cycle. With urban ag programs, it can be really challenging to set meaningful benchmarking and progress measurement, to manage impact and outcomes. It's a good thing for districts to consider when writing grant proposals.

Angela Warren, Genesee CD, MI
We increased capacity to reach urban audiences unaware of our organization, mission, and the services we provide. Then we were able to provide a technical and financial assistance boost toward their conservation practice implementation.

Sean Ludden, Ciudad SWCD, NM
The district provides internships in the 2019 season for high school students through continued support from county funding, improves integration with the county's Grow the Growers farmer training program, and advocates for educational programming. This, among other initiatives, assisted the district in being recognized as a resource to the agricultural community at large, while solidifying support for agricultural conservation in our increasingly urbanized district.

Collaboration and an open ear to the local communities were influential in designing and coordinating these initiatives. As there were often many organizations and community members engaged in urban conservation efforts already - much of the work lies in coordinating and sharing resources between these groups. Collaboration with local government opened up resources which were leveraged to local work, education and discussions around urban agricultural conservation - providing greater awareness to the issues at hand. Working with nearby districts was a benefit as well, since there were multiple ways we assisted and provided cross-promotion, thereby reaching a greater audience and participation than if CSWCD had acted alone in these efforts.

Susie Kirschner, Inland Empire RCD, CA
Our project quickly expanded and improved a CSA program in a highly underserved community. Long-term, it demonstrated to district staff and board members the need to engage further in urban agriculture as the future model for sustainable agriculture in our developing region.

PROJECT CONTACTS

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