

Community gardening: A key to food security?

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FOR INNER-CITY RESIDENTS, community greening isn't good because it looks pretty. It's good because it fights hunger and saves money.

In 1993, a study by the Southern California Interfaith Hunger Coalition found that "food security in the inner city is a serious problem." The study, supervised by Robert Gottlieb and Peter Sinsheimer of the UCLA Graduate School of Urban Planning, looked at hunger and nutrition in South Central Los Angeles.

Researchers found that 27 percent of the people living in one South Central neighborhood "did not have enough money to buy food. The emergency food network was overwhelmed, with the amount of food distributed increasing from 25 million pounds in 1979 to over 450 million pounds in 1990."

The study also found that inner-city residents had virtually no easy access to a nearby grocery store because "the food retail industry has abandoned the inner city." To compound the problem of acquiring food, 30 percent of residents reported "problems bringing home large amounts of groceries" due to the lack of a car or nearby public transportation.

"More local and state support should be directed toward... urban agriculture," the study concludes.

Gottlieb and Sinsheimer also note that "much interest among consumers in urban agriculture programs. Sixty-eight percent of those surveyed in the case study area reported interest in participating in a community gardening program in their neighborhood. Urban agriculture pro-

vides significant economic and community development possibilities, but receives very little municipal support. A 64-square-foot plot can save a family up to \$600 in food purchases per year..."

Other studies confirm that food grown in community gardens can be a valuable addition to the family table. Research from New Jersey and Pennsylvania found that urban gardeners increased their consumption of

vegetables, and that community and home gardeners reported saving money and improving their diets.

Ishwarbhai C. Patel of the Rutgers, New Jersey, Urban Gardening Program estimated that the 905 community gardens involved in his study grew produce worth over \$450,000.

Nationally, the U.S. Department of Agriculture estimated that urban gardeners involved in its programs grew \$16 million worth of fresh food in 1993. This food is particularly important to the unemployed or people on

low incomes, according to a 1992 study of 361 community gardeners by Richard Mattson and graduate students from Kansas State University. They found that 48 percent of unemployed people surveyed reported savings of at least \$150.

"Community gardens provide significant economic benefits to unemployed people and impoverished families," the Mattson study concludes. "Food produced in community gardens supplements limited incomes... investment in community gardens and their expansion will return significant economic, physical, and psychological benefits." 🍷

