



COMMUNITY SNAP GARDEN

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THE PROBLEM

Food insecurity presents major problems for Arkansas as nearly 20% of households in the state lack reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable and nutritious food, leaving 28.4% of children at risk. Washington county has the 3rd highest rate of food insecurity in the state prompting the work of local organizations, such as Feed Communities, which provide healthy, organic, and locally sourced food to members of the community. Low income communities often have less reliable access to fresh and affordable produce. Creating a local sustainable food network allows community food security and alleviates hunger while also fostering a sense of equality and inclusiveness which is the goal of the community SNAP Garden.



SUSTAINABILITY

Natural:

This project focuses on organic and local food production which relies heavily on the interconnectedness of Earth's natural processes and emphasizes the importance of environmentally sustainable action.

Managed:

The garden is directly tied to a sustainable managed system approach through organized methods of production and distribution. Community gardens can boast short life cycle analysis by drastically reducing the journey from farm to fork. Individual members produce their own food with organized instruction making all involved an important part of the garden's success.

Built:

The garden operates under the sustainability of built systems framework based on the preservation of natural resources and emphasis on environmental quality. A compost pile and drip irrigation system contribute to this aspect of sustainability while smart planning allowed construction to adapt to an urban setting without harming the natural environment.

Social:

This project is strongly motivated by the sustainability of social systems with its commitment to social justice and equality. The goal of the project is to integrate members of the community from all walks of life and teach them about the relationship between humans and their environment.

THE PROJECT

Feed Communities received a federal grant to build a garden that will operate on a sliding pay scale, with an emphasis on integrating members of the community receiving SNAP benefits. This will involve working with the Fayetteville Farmers Market to raise awareness and encourage members of the community receiving SNAP benefits to purchase seeds and food producing plants.



The first part of the project consisted of deconstructing the old community garden to prep the site for the new garden. It involved removing soil from the beds to be treated at a later time to be used for the new beds. The soil infested with Bermuda grass was discarded. The beds were taken down and recycled throughout the community. The area was then cleared of carpet that was previously used as a bottom layer for the old garden beds and other materials that would not be used for this project.



The second part of this project involved the construction of the layout for the new garden. Sheeting and plastic were laid as a bottom layer on which the wooden beds were placed. Holes were drilled into the sides of the beds which allowed tubing to be installed to create a drip irrigation system. The beds are being filled with the treated soil to prepare for seeds and vegetation to be planted.

THE OUTCOME

Preparing the site for planting is just a small part of the project's overall vision. In addition to recruiting members through Feed Communities, more outreach will be done to raise awareness for the SNAP Garden in partnership with the Fayetteville Farmers Market. Planting is set to take place mid spring at which point there will be community gardening hours, garden tools supplied by Feed Communities, and on site classes to teach members about growing, preparing, and preserving organic food in an effort to aid the mission of obtaining food security in Northwest Arkansas. The garden will act as a model to replicate community SNAP Gardens in other areas of Northwest Arkansas.

CLOSING REMARKS

We'd like to thank Feed Communities for allowing us to construct the garden site for the community SNAP Garden project. We'd also like to thank Jared Phillips, the program manager, for his garden design. We plan to continue to serve as ambassadors for the SNAP garden, to spread awareness, and assist in maintaining the sustainable garden to reduce food insecurity in the community.