

**SEEDING CHANGE, PLANTING LOCAL FOOD, &  
GROWING YOUNG LEADERS**

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Masters of Arts in Cultural Sustainability

At

Goucher College  
May 2013

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## **ABSTRACT**

This is an exploration of community building, youth development and urban agriculture, as tools for economic, environmental, social and cultural development. In order to create effective and successful models of positive community change, we must understand what a healthy community looks like and examine the community assets that support this. We are currently faced with a variety of problems, including declining social capital, a lack of opportunities for youth, and a broken food system. This paper explores what is being done in these areas and how a significant approach to addressing these issues is one that combines youth development and urban agriculture. This emerging practice, as it pertains to building positive community change, can be seen in three different organizations: The Food Project, Massachusetts Avenue Project, and Youth Farm.

## **I. Introduction**

Urban America is faced with a number of economic, environmental, social, and cultural challenges. People are civically disengaged and youth struggle to find ways to contribute in their communities. Food deserts abound making food challenging to find and hard to afford. A variety of approaches have emerged to combat these problems, some offering economic revitalization while others address social rebuilding. A few innovative approaches have looked at promoting civic engagement and community wellbeing using youth development combined with urban agriculture. . The examination that follows explores how significant an impact urban agriculture powered by youth development can have on communities.

### *i) Culture & Diversity*

“Culture is the ‘glue’, the shared values and meanings that bind us together, that shape our lives and, indeed, shape our attitude about development and stewardship.”<sup>1</sup> Culture is important because it informs our decisions and guides our actions. We learn from it, each other, and it from us, thus forging the path of reciprocal and informed existence. Our children become a part of the community as they learn about their culture from us. It is a vital relationship; one that we need to recognize and support in order to help us preserve both community and culture both of which are truly precious shared resources and unique in each locale.

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<sup>1</sup> Tom Borrup, *The Creative Community Builder’s Handbook*, (Saint Paul: Fieldstone Alliance, 2006), 103.

A definition of American culture is the very notion of plurality: the cultural mosaic. We are not trying to preserve a single unifying entity, but rather our unity as an ever shifting, redefining society. The common thread is its heterogeneity, its patterned mosaic.

Cultural democracy is a concept that places value on cultural diversity and allows multiple traditions to co-exist, with none “dominating or officiating” another.<sup>2</sup> As James Bau Graves articulates in his book, *Cultural Democracy*,

*Cultural democracy offers a different paradigm, a system of support for the cultures of our diverse communities that is respectful and celebratory, that gives voice to the many who have been historically excluded from the public domain, and that makes no claims of superiority or special status.*<sup>3</sup>

The makings of cultural democracy arise when community members are able to continue and renew their traditions, and are supported by a broader public that recognizes the importance of maintaining cultural vitality. A concerted effort must be dedicated to conserving these cultures and allowing space for them to be practiced and presented as a means of combating the pressures of commercialization.<sup>4</sup>

We are currently experiencing what Alan Lomax coined a “grey out”.<sup>5</sup> As our concept of the globe expands, and the world in fact grows smaller as a result, the degree of cultural variation decreases. What must be emphasized is not the fixed notion that a mosaic implies, but rather the fluid ebb and flow of individual brightly colored pieces. We must

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<sup>2</sup> Don Adams and Arlene Goldbard, *Cultural Democracy: A Brief Introduction*. Webster’s World of Cultural Democracy (online), 1995. <http://www.wgcd.org/cd.html>.

<sup>3</sup> James Bau Graves, *Cultural Democracy*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 17.

<sup>4</sup> Bau Graves, *Cultural Democracy*, 85.

<sup>5</sup> Alan Lomax, “An Appeal for Cultural Equity,” (from the Program of the Festival of American Folklife, edited by Thomas Vennum, Jr., Smithsonian Institution, 1985).

draw guidelines in order to create the firm structure from which improvisation takes place.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately this improvisation as Beth Lomax Hawes speaks of, is not equitably integrated in urban planning policy. There must be a decentralization; an opportunity for all cultures to share “air time”.<sup>7</sup> As a whole, we must overcome this “cultural myopia” and view these multiple cultural channels as prime forces for cultural equity.<sup>8</sup>

## *ii) Cultural Building Blocks*

Culture refers to collective beliefs and practices. Often prosaically confused solely with opera, symphonies and Renaissance Europe, culture in fact reflects “all of the component parts of our lives that define who we are...provid[ing] the building blocks of our identity as social beings.”<sup>9</sup>

Food and children are rooted at the center of both culture and community. Food is what sustains us, gives us life, brings us together and enables us to further our species. From the milk we take from our mothers’ breast, to the first meal we share with another, food lies at the center of community. Food defines us, and we define ourselves by the shared practices, preferences and tastes of food; reinforcing our cultural identity. A shared rallying cry among grandmothers around the world is often reduced to “you should eat something”, followed by a meal that is emblematic of her family’s heritage; rich with history, culture and tradition. In order to develop community, and ourselves, we must be fed.

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<sup>6</sup> Bess Lomax Hawes, *Sing it Pretty: A Memoir* (Chicago and Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 143.

<sup>7</sup> Lomax, “An Appeal”.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Bau Graves, *Cultural Democracy*, 15.

Children lie at the center of community and become our culture bearers for the future. As infants, children must be sheltered, fed and nourished. In early stages of development, they are porous and subject to the multiple influences that surround them. “The ways people view the world, think about its events, and discuss them with their peers are determined in large measure by the traditions of the culture into which they are born and live their lives.”<sup>10</sup> Children carry the cultural teachings of their community. By nourishing them in ways that strengthen their bodies and minds, we cultivate them into key elements for sustaining community.

It is also important to note that most of our economic and political process (i.e. globalization and deindustrialization) are primarily cultural processes. “Economic and environmental policy, poverty, gendered labor markets, and economic growth strategies are culturally constructed, embedded in the daily material, political, and social relations of communities and their cultural productions, not vice versa.”<sup>11</sup> We determine, create and develop these processes ourselves based upon community needs and demands. These in turn, are influenced by the cultures housed within them. This is why we see a variety of processes, rather than a universal one that is replicated among communities and countries worldwide. In matrilineal societies like many Native American, African and Oceanic kinship groups, women serve as the basis for economic, political and social organization. In contrast, globalization and industrialization are indicative of the patriarchy of Western first world countries, whose histories and cultural landscape of

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 41.

<sup>11</sup> Kelly Fetault, “Development Folklife: Human Security and Cultural Conservation,” *Journal of American Folklore* 119, No. 471 (2006).

individualism, free market ideology, and independence have set the stage for these processes. In this way, we must understand the implications and influential power that culture has, and include it in the discussion, not relegate it to the fringe.

To sustain culture, we must identify and allow for this multitude of beliefs and values to be shared collectively, in order to inform development, planning, and policy processes. It is only more recently in sustainability discourse, that culture, specifically, has been explored for its role in sustainable development and the application of sustainability ideas to cultural concerns.<sup>12</sup> And as with the fluidity of culture, so too is the fluid nature of the definition of cultural sustainability.

*We must move candidly beyond documentation, memorialization, and preservation towards active creation, forging a poetics of cultural transformation that frankly acknowledges and incorporates as an active element the migration we ourselves regularly facilitate.<sup>13</sup>*

Rather than something prosaic and static, we must continue to mobilize and support the natural evolution and dynamics of culture and ultimately human existence. Cultural workers, community development organizations, social, political, environmental and economic movements must all thread this understanding into the work that is being done in order to insure success and sustainability.

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<sup>12</sup> Vermont Folklife Center, <http://www.vermontfolklifecenter.org/education/cultural-sustainability/cultural-sustainability.php>.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Cantwell, "Folklore's Pathetic Fallacy," *Journal of American Folklore* 114, No. 451 (Winter 2001): 66.



*ii. Youth Development theory*

Programs that have supported family and youth development have roots dating back to the mid-1800s, but at the time, were a response to deficit and delinquency issues. It was only toward the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that the focus shifted to positive prevention, following the publishing of a 1960 book by Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin that championed the opportunity theory: that youth turned to delinquency in response to the lack of opportunities available to them.<sup>14</sup> Recognizing that youth are a major dimension of social organization, youth development has now begun to receive attention in the national discussion of community development.<sup>15</sup> There has been a shift away from thinking that youth problems are the principle barriers to youth development, and a move towards embracing youth development as a strategy that serves to prevent youth problems.

The premise of youth development is that through community-based initiatives (development efforts that are located in and driven by the community), youth experience “meaningful improvements” in their life chances to become “economically self-sufficient, be healthy, have good family and social relationships, and contribute to their community.”<sup>16</sup> Positive indicators of these long-term outcomes include youth expectations of the ability to support themselves and their families, positive and dependable family and friendship networks, community contributions that “indicate their

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<sup>14</sup>Ronald F. Ferguson, and William T. Dickens, eds., *Urban Problems and Community Development* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1999), 101.

<sup>15</sup> Ferguson, *Urban Problems*, 58.

<sup>16</sup> Ferguson, *Urban Problems*, 282.

connection to a common good larger than their own.”<sup>17</sup> To do this, young people must learn to be productive and job ready. They must learn to connect with adults and community members in positive ways, and to navigate challenges, social spheres, and developmental milestones as they move from adolescents to adults. This learning is supported by social relationships, meaningful opportunities for involvement, challenging and engaging activities, physical and emotional safety, and adequate nutrition, health care and shelter. The consistency of support is imperative in order for youth to productively navigate the path to adulthood.<sup>18</sup>

Strategies for achieving these goals abound, but most effective ones are rooted in the idea that there is an urgent need to address these issues and that this work must be done in an equitable fashion, involving all stakeholders- youth and adults. In fact, youth development models that address and provide these supports are having profound success in community building efforts across the globe and demonstrate how integral youth are to the process. Youth are becoming more engaged in community institutions, local government and advocacy, and are beginning to bridge cultural and economic divides. By committing to personal development in service of community development, young people today are helping to revive the spirit and strengthen the presence of community.

### *iii. Food Systems*

Over the past century, there has been a significant and rapid shift away from local food sources and towards a mainstream, industrial food system. “In the early 1900s, nearly 40

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<sup>17</sup> Ferguson, *Urban Problems*, 282.

<sup>18</sup> Ferguson, *Urban Problems*, 283.

percent of Americans lived on farms, compared with 1 percent in 2000, and much of the food bought and consumed in the United States was grown locally.”<sup>19</sup> Now, we can easily purchase an avocado from Mexico or a bag of rice from China, as globalization, technology and demand has reinforced this process.

While there is no generally agreed upon definition of local food as it pertains to the distance between production and distribution, when we talk about local food systems, we are referring to the demand for, production and distribution of food produced near its point of consumption.<sup>20</sup> In addition, local food can also reflect social and supply chain characteristics. The growing interest in local food has been spawned from a number of different movements. From an environmental standpoint it encourages people to consider how the transport of food and subsequent emission of greenhouse gases contributes to the overall geographic dimension of their choices. Culturally and socially it seeks to enhance access to safe, healthy, and relevant food for all consumers, as well as reflect the interest in understanding the origin of food and traditional ways of growing, producing and preparing it. It is also represented as a response to the dominance of “fast”, mass-produced and homogenous food as seen in the context of the Slow Food Movement.

Urban agriculture is emerging as division of the local food movement that brings significant advantages that cut across a variety of sectors. While there is no formal definition, urban agriculture generally refers to the growing, processing and distribution of food and other products through the intense plant cultivation and animal husbandry in

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<sup>19</sup> USDA, Economic Research Service, *Local Food Systems: Concepts, Impacts, and Issues*, by Steve Martinez et al., ERRN 97 (May 2010), 1.

<sup>20</sup> USDA, *Local Food Systems*, 3.

and around cities.<sup>21</sup> During the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the importance of and engagement in urban agriculture accelerated dramatically throughout the world in response to political, economic, environmental and technological changes. In the United States, an upward trend in urban agricultural production reflects a direct variation between an increase in urban area and population and an increase in agricultural production. As such, between 1980 and 1996, this increase was 30-40 percent, and now, nearly twenty years later, more than one third of every dollar spent on agricultural produce is spent on items produced in urban areas.<sup>22</sup> So while the number of families living on farms has decreased, there is still a significant portion of local food being produced by urban agriculture.

*Sustainable urban agriculture means closing ecological loop currently open, and integrating food, fuel, medicine and ornamental production and processing into the urban fabric of community life.*<sup>23</sup>

Urban agriculture provides fresher food to communities, thereby improving the health and productivity of these populations as well as creating a springboard for social equity. It can improve a community's well-being by building energy through community organizations and generating solidarity. Urban agriculture also helps improve neighborhood aesthetics and helps to engage higher levels of social interaction. Evidence shows that "neighborhoods that include urban agriculture generally have higher levels of social interaction and better security, in part because the activity is on the streets rather

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<sup>21</sup> Community Food Security Coalition, [http://www.foodsecurity.org/ua\\_home.html](http://www.foodsecurity.org/ua_home.html).

<sup>22</sup> Jac Smit, Joe Nasr and Annu Ratta, *Urban Agriculture: Food, Jobs, and Sustainable Cities*. (The Urban Agriculture Network, 2001). Chap. 2, 3.

<sup>23</sup> Smit, *Urban Agriculture*, chap. 1, 10.

than behind closed doors.”<sup>24</sup> And though less tangible, individual empowerment can be a social benefit of urban farming. Individuals engaged in this work can bring improvements to their lives not only nutritionally and economically, but can increase self-image and standing in the community.

When we look at issues of environmental sustainability, what is imperative is that there is a balance of resources and an ultimate reduction in the amount of input and output in the resource stream. Incorporated into many urban agriculture practices are methods that reuse waste to produce food and fuel, thus reducing the amount of resource consumption and ultimately making the city more ecologically balanced. This can increase biodiversity, reduce pollution, and ameliorate local climate change. In addition, these edible landscapes serve a dual function of effective resource management through productive green space in an otherwise nonproductive definition of open urban space.

Farms already housed in urban communities have easier access to a range of selling venues that agricultural producers in rural areas don't have. Local producers in the city or community can capture between 50-80 percent of the retail price of their product as opposed to rural competitors who, when selling more regionally or globally, are further removed from the markets, and therefore receive significantly less profit.<sup>25</sup> Local agriculture retains local dollars and offers employment and enterprise development opportunities. Local production for self-consumption further removes barriers to food access, as it not only reduces the amount of family income spent on food- making it

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., chap. 7, 12.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., chap. 1, 14.

available for other expenditures like education and healthcare-, but it allows for more nutritional control over diet.<sup>26</sup>

#### *iv. Healthy Communities*

*If we speak of healthy communities, we cannot be speaking of a community that is merely human. We are talking about a neighborhood of humans in a place, plus the place itself: its soil, its water, its air, and all the families and tribes of nonhuman creatures that belong to it. If the place is well preserved, if its entire membership, natural and human, is present in it, and if the human economy is in practical harmony with the nature of the place, then the community is healthy...A healthy community is sustainable; it is, within reasonable limits, self-sufficient and, within reasonable limits, self-determined—that is, free of tyranny.<sup>27</sup>*

This notion of a healthy community is impacted by a variety of factors: economic, social, cultural, political, and ecological. “Places differ from one another, the local economists say, therefore we must behave with unique consideration in each one; the ability to tender an appropriate practical regard and respect to each place in its difference is a kind of freedom.”<sup>28</sup>

Given the cultural diversity that is highly concentrated in cities, it would be prudent to reflect the various needs of these divergent communities when it comes to policy, economics, and culture. When we look at planning policy, however, there is very little evidence that attention is paid to the specific community cultural needs. According to Carole Rosenstein, there has been progress in the efforts of cities to expand existing cultural agencies and programs, but “cities have done less to recognize and systematically

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., chap. 7, pg. 3.

<sup>27</sup> Wendell Berry, *Art of the Commonplace* (Berkeley: Counterpoint Press, 2002), 202.

<sup>28</sup> Berry, *Art*, 243.

promote the cultural lives of urban neighborhoods and their residents”.<sup>29</sup> In most cases, policy is drawn up and enacted with a blanket, homogenizing approach; a one size fits all for place making. This is reinforced by an approach to policy making that:

*ignores wider social processes of cultural differentiation and exclusion. An unintended effect of policy responses may be that they force culturally different communities to assimilate to dominant culture, or otherwise suffer from social and economic marginality.*<sup>30</sup>

In order to move towards a vision of a culturally inclusive and differentiated space, we must address the shortcomings of the current policymaking process. Neighborhood vitality, and the progress and success of a city, depends on the social, economic, intellectual and environmental factors that are shaped by public policy. More attention to policy that engages diverse members within cities will contribute to the health of communities at the neighborhood scale as well as to the city overall. This inclusive engagement will help address these shortcomings and offer important and appropriate solutions, as opposed to a one size fits all scheme.

To understand a healthy community, we must understand both our limits as well as our relationships that inform identity, connectivity, and sustainability. “For example, an ecosystem, even that of a working forest or farm, so long as it remains ecologically intact, is inexhaustible”.<sup>31</sup> If we understand this premise, we can ensure that our landscapes (economic, social, political, cultural and environmental) are “sustainable and abundantly productive” by “maintaining in them a living formal complexity something like that of

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<sup>29</sup> The Urban Institute, “Cultural Development and City Neighborhoods”, by Carole Rosenstein, (Urban Institute 21: July 2009), 1.

<sup>30</sup> Bauder, “Neighborhood Effects and Cultural Exclusion,” *Urban Studies* 39 (2002): 90.

<sup>31</sup> Wendell Berry, "Faustian Economics: Hell Hath No Limits," *Harper's Magazine*, May 2008.

natural ecosystems”.<sup>32</sup>

Laying the foundation for culture, youth and food systems helps us understand the intersections, and illuminates the ways in which these elements can be instrumental to economic, social, and cultural development of urban communities. Youth development through urban agriculture can generate a significant impact in shifting the paradigm towards a local, self-reliant, and civically engaged community.

## **II. Problems**

Our communities are out of whack. The current social sphere is individualistic and isolated, disengaged from collective action, decision-making and public concern. Without a population that participates in the governance and reformation of its communities, our connectedness and true essence of democracy is lost. This is being passed on and made manifest in young people today, and threatens the continued breakdown of social, cultural, and economic spheres. The industrialized food system is threatening these spheres as well, offering little else in the way of substantial and powerful alternatives. In 2009, only five multinational organizations controlled more than half of the genetically modified seeds sold worldwide, and further, use patent law protection to ensure that their products are the ones controlling the market.<sup>33</sup> Without choice in what we eat and from where it comes, we also lose our connectivity, sustainability and even our identity.

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<sup>32</sup> Berry, “Faustian Economics”.

<sup>33</sup> Elsadig Elsheikh, “Bowman v. Monsanto: The monopoly over the global food system”, *University of California, Berkeley*, <http://diversity.berkeley.edu/bowman-v-monsanto-monopoly-over-global-food-system>.



*i) Bowling Alone*

The fabric of American civil society has shifted over the past few decades. An era of sit-ins and bus boycotts, bowling leagues and public meetings has given way to a solitary existence. The remote control garage door and the air conditioning unit have helped pave the way to this notion of bowling alone, ushering us away from sharing with neighbors and instead retreating to our home entertainments centers. This has had an impact on the connectedness of our communities and on our youth. But, there are movements emerging across the country that are working to revive this loss of civic engagement, and many of them involve youth themselves.

When Robert Putnam's groundbreaking work *Bowling Alone* first appeared onto the scene, it revived an interest in problem of decreased democratic participation and political involvement, which had been attributed to an unraveling of the social fabric of American life. Civil engagement was becoming a thing of the past as more and more people were becoming disconnected from their families and their communities.

Relationships were fraying, and the importance that these social interactions have for the strength of communities and the nation, along with them. So the term social capital was reborn.

Just as we speak of capital in economic terms, we can refer to the collective benefits of social structures and networks as assets; assets which can be put to productive and inexhaustible use. Social capital refers to the various mechanisms and institutions found in society: churches, town committees, PTAs, bowling leagues. It refers to person-to-

person relationships, group dynamics and is an important ingredient for building healthy communities.<sup>34</sup> Social capital is a vehicle for which democratic processes are carried out and maintained; facilitated by active civil engagement. Without these mechanisms, the nature of society erodes, for unlike with economic capital, lack of use here leads to decay and depletion. And while this concept had been tossed around for over a century, it was with renewed focus from a number of scholars, Putnam's article and book included, that it emerged as a codified and necessary topic of sociological study and discourse.

There are a number of reasons to put forth as to why this decay has become a trend in American civic life- and there are: a breakdown of the traditional family unit, urban sprawl, race relations. It can also be attributed to the advent of television and electronic entertainment. We have become spectators of our own lives and have wedged a divide between ourselves and our neighbors, as a result.

*Without social capital to sustain problem solving within distressed communities and to link community residents to the broader society, efforts at addressing specific problems of individuals, families, and neighborhoods will make little difference.*<sup>35</sup>

Social capital shapes society and the development of its children.<sup>36</sup> Second only to poverty, social capital profoundly affects youth development in terms of both breadth and depth. While not the only determinant (parent education, racial composition and poverty rates included), social capital is correlated to keeping kids from being born small,

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<sup>34</sup> William Potapchuk, Jarle P. Crocker, and William H. Schechter, Jr., "Building Community with Social Capital: Chits and Chums or Chats with Change," *National Civic Review* Vol 86, Issue 2 (Summer 1997): 129.

<sup>35</sup> Potapchuk, "Building Community", 129.

<sup>36</sup> Jane Jacobs, *Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Modern Library, 1961), 41.

decreasing high school drop outs, decreasing the number of babies born out of wedlock and more.<sup>37</sup> Learning is influenced by the wider community as well as by the home and the school, and the level of social capital is a strong predictor of achievement. In fact, the density of social connectedness can be directly linked to high student performance and lower levels of student misbehavior.<sup>38</sup>

The presence of this social connectedness allows for the emergence and continued enforcement of positive standards for youth. Social capital not only offers access to economic resources and emotional support, but it opens up opportunity for mentorship and role models. Without it, youth are often left to their own devices that manifest themselves in other less favorable forms, i.e. gangs, neighborhood crews.<sup>39</sup>

As this social capital void continues, so too does the decline of financial and human capital in many neighborhoods. In response to this, community building efforts have “re-emerged as a change strategy that assumes that social and human capital are as critical as physical and economic capital in the creation of lasting change”.<sup>40</sup> Rather than relying on traditional community development efforts that offer particularly formulaic models for reform, these new building efforts are a means of resident organizing and empowerment that rely on collective and individual assets as a strategy for maintaining reform and reconnection. This collective action and awareness, in turn, creates human, family, and

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<sup>37</sup> Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 298.

<sup>38</sup> Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 301.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 312.

<sup>40</sup> Tolman, J., & Pittman, K., with B. Cervone, K. Cushman, L. Rowley, S. Kinkade, J. Phillips, & S. Duque (2001), *Youth Acts, Community Impacts: Stories of Youth Engagement with Real Results*, Community & Youth Development Series, Volume 7, Takoma Park, MD: The Forum for Youth Investment, International Youth Foundation, 13.

social capital as residents organize themselves and assume responsibility to change their own destinies.

Historically, youth have been a marginalized group in society; subject to the exclusion and disempowerment of adults in decision-making processes. In many cases, these community development efforts have been reserved for the collective action of adults, excluding young people.

*Paternalism plays a large role in restricting youth participation. This view is buttressed by academic theories found in the sociological and psychological literature of the past century. While the “storm and stress” depiction of adolescence - espoused by scientists such as Erickson, Freud and Hall – has been toned down significantly by modern researchers, it resurfaces regularly in popular culture, reinforcing the idea that youth, by nature, are incapable of adopting adult roles.<sup>41</sup>*

What emerges from this is often a struggle for young people who are confronted by the “persistent marginalization and exclusion from the justice, respect, dignity and equality embedded in the ideology of Americanism and democracy.”<sup>42</sup> The struggle with identity and the climate of inequality are among the numerous issues that young people today face, including unemployment, crime, and drugs. We must understand that this struggle is more a social problem and less one of individual failure. As Anne Goldbard states in *New Creative Communities*, “every day we see public issues treated as personal troubles, as when young people struggling with urban poverty slip into illegal activity to help

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<sup>41</sup> Irby, M., Ferber, T., Pittman, K., with J. Tolman, & N. Yohalem, (2001), *Youth Action: Youth Contributing to Communities, Communities Supporting Youth*, Community & Youth Development Series, Volume 6, Takoma Park, MD: The Forum for Youth Investment, International Youth Foundation, 3.

<sup>42</sup> Suzanne Oboler, *Ethnic Labels, Latino Lives: Identity and the Politics of (Re)Presentation in the United States* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 45.

support their families and society's response is to condemn them for criminality and throw away the key."<sup>43</sup> Additionally, a lack of access to fresh and healthy food, and food related health issues are becoming paramount for youth.

According to the United States Department of Agriculture's report on access to affordable and nutritious food, on average 38.1 percent of low-income individuals across the United States live in a food desert, meaning they have limited access (a distance of greater than one mile) to the nearest supermarket. Of this, 2.2 percent of people do not have access to a vehicle either.<sup>44</sup> This means that the majority of food purchases are made at corner bodegas and are in the form of packaged foods, rather than at farm stands or supermarkets with fresh, healthy produce. This distances people from knowledge of where their food comes and any potential for a sense of connection to the land.

*ii) Broken food system*

*"Food is our most basic need, the very stuff of life". – Vandana Shiva<sup>45</sup>*

Food is a basic human need and right, yet the prevalence food insecurity- "a combination of limited income at the household level, limited access at the community level, and limited social networks"- is a critical reflection of the failure of the current food system.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Arlene Goldbard and Don Adams, *New Creative Community: The Art of Cultural Development* (Oakland, CA: New Village Press, 2006), 41.

<sup>44</sup> USDA, Economic Research Services, *Access to Affordable and Nutritious Food: Measuring and Understanding Food Deserts and their Consequences*, by Michele Ver Ploeg et al., (Washington, D.C., 2009), 19.

<sup>45</sup> Vandana Shiva, *Stolen Harvest* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2000), 5.

<sup>46</sup> Katie Martin, "Food Security and Community: Putting the Pieces Together", Hartford Food System, May 2001.

Given that food is such a vital part of our human existence, it is important to recognize how the implications of the dominant power structure have conditioned a broken food system. “Within economic disciplines, localization of food continues a ‘tradition’ of analyzing the decentralization of power and bureaucracies”.<sup>47</sup> Not only does food define our identity, but it also shapes our physical, mental, social and economic existence. As Warren Belasco posits in his book *Food Nations: Selling Taste in Consumer Societies*, we must “reposition food as a primary focus of social enquiry instead of merely a useful tool”.<sup>48</sup> In doing so, we demonstrate how entrenched food is in all sectors of society, and can thereby develop more appropriate course of action for the ways in which we address reform. How does our food and where it comes from affect our individual choices and communities? Is there a perceptible difference between different modes of production and consumption as it pertains to our constructed and natural worlds?

Cities require a lot of resources. They consume 75 percent of what is harvested from the earth, which requires a great deal of natural resources and energy use to satisfy the demand.<sup>49</sup> To adapt, agriculture has become highly industrialized, replacing biodiversity with monoculture, given its efficiency at a large scale. These farming practices are becoming more problematic as their ecological footprint is damaging the earth’s capacity to support life and civilization in the name of consumerism.

*...the industrial use of any “resource” implies its exhaustion. It is for this reason that the industrial economy has been accompanied by an ever-increasing hurry of*

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<sup>47</sup> Georgina Holt and Virginie Amilien, “Introduction: from local food to localized food”, *Anthropology of Food* S2 (March 2007).

<sup>48</sup> Warren Belasco and Philip Scranton eds., *Food Nations: Selling Taste in Consumer Societies* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 51.

<sup>49</sup> Smit, *Urban Agriculture*, chap.10, 9.

*research and exploration, the motive of which is not “free enterprise” or “the spirit of free inquiry,” as industrial scientists and apologists would have us believe, but the desperation that naturally and logically accompanies gluttony.*<sup>50</sup>

Only a handful of organizations control the entire food chain and prevent alternatives, therefore we have a veritable food monopoly. Indian ecological activist Vandana Shiva calls this the “emergence of food totalitarianism”. This dictates the variety and type of food being produced, and leaves us out of the process of proactive decision making. Instead we are provided with a limited number of options and are forced to choose what to consume based on those limited offerings.

*One of the primary results- and one of the primary needs- of industrialism is the separation of people and places and products from their histories. To the extent that we participate in the industrial economy, we do not know the histories of our families or of our habitats or of our meals. This is in fact a culture, of the one-night stand.*<sup>51</sup>

We have become disconnected, alienated from the process of food, whereby instead of understanding and being involved in the process we are so far removed that it is of little consequence what we put into our mouths. Yet, “eaters must understand, how we eat determines how the world is used”, as Barbara Kingsolver proclaims in *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*.<sup>52</sup> Eating is a cultural and an agricultural act, something that most participants in the industrial food system no longer recognize. They see food as simply a product and they the passive consumer, rather than a participant in agriculture. Most people have lost the connection between eating and the land, thus suffering from “a

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<sup>50</sup> Wendell Berry, *The Art of the Commonplace*, 230.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

<sup>52</sup> Barbara Kingsolver, *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2007), 211.

cultural amnesia that is misleading and dangerous”.<sup>53</sup> We are kept ignorant of the true inner workings of the system, by those who yield the power of the monopoly, but in large part by ourselves so as not to discover that its “overriding concerns are not quality and health, but volume and price.”<sup>54</sup>

According to Eric Bandfeldt in “A Community Based Food System”, a strong food system should:

- advance the health and wellbeing of a population
- improve a local community’s economic wealth and vitality
- increase connections and opportunities to meet demand and increase food access
- enhance the capacity to produce, process, distribute, and consume food locally.<sup>55</sup>

Unfortunately, as it exists currently, our nations food system leaves millions of households food insecure and the vast majority relying solely on the industrial food system. This is seen to be an increasingly critical issue in urban areas, as “food security and nutrition are worse among the urban poor than the rural poor.”<sup>56</sup> Poor, food insecure families in urban areas often spend a substantial share of their budgets on food, due in part to the fact that they purchase small quantities, at higher prices and must often travel far to access affordable food.

**Strong Food Systems:**

- Advance community health
- Improve economy
- Increase food access
- Enhance local food capacity

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<sup>53</sup> Berry, *Art of the Commonplace*, 322.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 324.

<sup>55</sup> Virginia Cooperative Extension, *A Community Based Food System*, by Eric Bendfeldt, Martha Walker, Travis Bunn, Lisa Martin, and Melanie Barrow (May 2011), 1.

<sup>56</sup> Smit, *Urban Agriculture*, chap.7, 3.



Further, this food system has arguably precipitated a national health crisis that dramatically affects children and adolescents. One in three are categorized as overweight or obese, which according to the US Surgeon General means that “today’s youth may actually have a shorter lifespan than their parents”.<sup>57</sup> Additionally, studies have shown that “40-75 percent of adults and children living in low-income urban areas in poorer cities have diseases that limit their capacity to learn and work.”<sup>58</sup> Hunger and nutritional deficiencies are a by-product of the fact that food choices and the actual ability to purchase healthy food in these areas is significantly limited.

The fact that ours is a heavily industrialized society, one that dissociates us from our goods and histories, prevents us from attaining “competent knowledge of the economic and ecological effects of our lives,” ultimately leads us to support a system “that is by intention, and perhaps by necessity, ecologically irresponsible.”<sup>59</sup>

*If our economic ideal is maximum profit with minimum responsibility, why should we be surprised to find our corporations so frequently in court and robbery on the increase?*

– Wendell Berry<sup>60</sup>

### **III. What is being done**

As economic, environmental, social, and cultural problems have arisen, so too have a variety of attempts to solve them. Many of them focus specifically on a particular sector of society and have proven successful in their approach; providing new frameworks and principles. Individually, urban revitalization, youth development and food system work

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<sup>57</sup> Virginia Cooperative Extension, *A Community Based Food System*, 8.

<sup>58</sup> Smit, *Urban Agriculture*, chap.7, 9.

<sup>59</sup> Berry, *Art of the Commonplace*, 237.

<sup>60</sup> Berry, *Art of the Commonplace*, 233.

are all examples of current efforts to address these problems, yet efforts that combine all of these create a more holistic, sustainable and healthy community ecology.

*a. Urban revitalization: economic & community development*

Food is a common thread that weaves many development and revitalization efforts and has a profound impact on the ecology of our lives. But there are a variety of these reform efforts that employ other means to galvanize change. To many sustainability and urban redevelopment advocates, a sustainable city is comprised of an interplay of balanced land use for housing transportation, jobs and recreation that is integrated in an efficient and productive way so as to create economic prosperity and a more equitable distribution of growth.<sup>61</sup> Further, these elements are incorporated into the municipal government, which is proactive in addressing potential problems. When problems arise and communities are unable to harness or produce these areas of capital (financial, political, physical, intellectual, social), community development can help preserve what does exist and prevent further deterioration.

While theories about the best method for community development abound, it is perhaps a mix between asset-based and place-based development that is most effective. Asset-based community development (ABCD) focuses on “discovering and mobilizing the resources that are already present in a community. The ABCD point of view encourages people to recognize that their community is a glass half full of assets, not a glass half empty with

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<sup>61</sup> Linda Ashman, et al., “Seeds of Change: Strategies for Food Security for the Inner City,” (Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Urban Planning Department, 1993), 272.

needs”.<sup>62</sup> The key to this method is that is it internally focused and relationship driven. This means that the focus on discovering what can be productive in a community is found inside that community, and is built through relationships that allow people to “give their gifts”.<sup>63</sup> An element that contributes greatly to this approach is social capital, for it is the nexus for many of these internally focused relationships.

*ABCD makes visible and concrete the basic structure for building a strong community. Strength comes from three interconnected activities: discovering local assets, connecting these assets to work together, and then creating opportunities for these assets to be productive and powerful together.*<sup>64</sup>

As Mike Green talks about in *When People Care Enough to Act*, there are five building

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| <p><b>Five Building Blocks of Community:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Individuals</li> <li>○ Associations</li> <li>○ Insitutions</li> <li>○ Local economy</li> <li>○ Physical world</li> </ul> |
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blocks of community: individuals, local voluntary associations, institutions, the local economy, and the physical world. All of these factors reveal the assets and possibilities of a community and by connecting them; their power can be harnessed and multiplied. The key to successful community development is that it improves each

of these five areas of capital, for individuals and for the collective whole, and does so in a way that is “neighborhood oriented, resident driven and empowerment focused”.<sup>65</sup>

Part of successful cultural and community development planning has to do with the extent to which “institutions, events and activities are grounded in cultural identities”.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Mike Green, *ABCD in Action: When People Care Enough to Act* (Toronto: Inclusion Press, 2006), 14.

<sup>63</sup> Green, *ABCD in Action*, 15.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>65</sup> Ferguson, *Urban Problems and Community Development*, 13.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 227.

In order to:

*create a collective well-being, it is necessary to interact, to talk openly and listen deeply, to include subjective feelings as well as whatever can be counted, weighed and measured, and that both “hard” and “soft” information must be given equal weight.*<sup>67</sup>

Underlying this is an anthropological approach that links cultural resources to “broader agendas for economic development, sustainability and quality of life”.<sup>68</sup>

Community development work was promoted heavily in the late 1960s and 70s as interests in economic development of urban ghettos came to the fore. Persistent efforts by the leaders Central Brooklyn Coordinating Council helped influence the passage of the Title VII amendment to the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, which created the Social Impact Program for community development. This provided government funding for “the first generation of nonprofits that called themselves community development corporations” whose work produces assets to improve the quality of life for residents.<sup>69</sup>

This kind of community development can be carried out in multiple ways; through the work of community development corporations, community building and comprehensive initiatives, as well as work through various human service provisions, nonprofits and government agencies. The scope is wide, but the core elements remain the same in that they all contribute to “produce assets that improve the quality of life for neighborhood residents.”<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Goldbard, *New Creative Community*, 229.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ferguson, *Urban Problems*, 18.

<sup>70</sup> Ferguson, *Urban Problems*, 4.

*b. Youth development programs*

While adults are often at the core of community building efforts, there are a number of youth who possess the desire to effect positive community change as well. This energy is being harnessed in a way that enables them to emerge as a powerful force in creating direct results on these communities.

*Contrary to popular portrayal of young Americans as self-absorbed and socially inert, this generation is not seeking to distance itself from community, but is instead looking for new and distinctive ways to connect to the people and issues surrounding them.<sup>71</sup>*

This harnessing of energy is carried forward in the field of youth development and most profoundly exemplified in youth organizing. The prominent theme is that youth are involved in every step of the process, empowered through meaningful action to create a unique environment where they are valued and prioritized as decision makers and leaders. The activities and modes of participation are such that they support the development of personal skills, group skills, and conflict resolution so as to create meaningful pathways that link learning, work and contribution. These “opportunities and activities that attract young people embody real responsibilities and real work. They are concrete, result in learning of value to the broader society and have clear significance to the local community”.<sup>72</sup>

*There are mainly two components of our work: youth organizing around education reform and youth leadership development. These two things have to go together: it is pointless to give young people skills without giving them a chance to use those skills. Yet, we can't expect young people to be effective organizers*

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<sup>71</sup> Tolman, *Youth Acts Community Impacts*, 7.

<sup>72</sup> Irby, *Youth Action*, 10.

*without teaching them strategies and skills that help them organize.*<sup>73</sup> – Eric Braxton, Philadelphia Student Union.

Youth development approaches and organizations fall on a spectrum in terms of the degree to which youth leadership and governance is integrated. There are those that involve youth as clients or participants and those that are youth driven, run and even led.

They all, however, privilege the voice of the youth. The very culture of these organizations is such that they support the development and capacity of these young people in order to address power dynamics and shift adult

perspectives, thus redefining intergenerational relationships. Youth emerge from these models having engaged in a real “life cycle of learning” that allows them to combine analysis with action and reflection.<sup>74</sup> This “micro society” allows youth to experiment with social and cultural change while taking responsibility for community wellbeing.<sup>75</sup> The benefits of this extend from increased youth civic engagement to other types of civic action and community involvement; working to improve both the self and the community as a means to “ensure lifelong engagement”.<sup>76</sup>

<p><b>Youth Action:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Motivation</li><li>○ Capacity building</li><li>○ Creating opportunities</li></ul>
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Youth Action has developed an innovative approach. A product that resulted from a Ford Foundation and International Youth Foundation study, this model focuses on the reciprocal contributions of both youth and community. Young people and adults work

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<sup>73</sup> Tolman, *Youth Acts, Community Impacts*, 15.

<sup>74</sup> Young Wisdom Project, *Making Space, Making Change*: Young Wisdom Project and the Movement Strategy Center (2004): 20.

<sup>75</sup> Young Wisdom Project, *Making Space, Making Change*, 21.

<sup>76</sup> Irby, *Youth Action*, 8

together “to create the necessary conditions for the successful development of themselves, their peers families and communities”.<sup>77</sup>

The types of action through which youth engage in these issues are incredibly diverse and come in the form of organizing efforts, policy advocacy, leadership positions and community service, where youth partake in active learning experiences, paid internships, and youth philanthropy. In comparison to other models, Youth Action moves beyond the individual to focus on broader impact, which is particularly relevant to the role of youth development in developing community social capital. It is a specific process that can be used in a variety of applications. Three themes can be effectively applied to youth in all areas of development work. Fostering motivation is an important first step to “building awareness of issues and root causes” and “deepening young people’s commitment and sense of responsibility.”<sup>78</sup> Capacity building, or “using and building youth’s leadership and action skills” helps to deepen knowledge about these systems and strategies in order to provide support for continued engagement.<sup>79</sup> The third theme is creating opportunities; helping young people to identify and create “a range of opportunities” that are “involved in real change efforts”.<sup>80</sup> When offered in combination, youth development work can extend the greatest impact.

These impacts can be seen in individuals as well as in communities, thus contributing to a strengthening and rebuilding of the social fabric. The assets found within communities

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<sup>77</sup> Tolman, *Youth Acts, Community Impacts*, 22.

<sup>78</sup> Tolman, *Youth Acts, Community Impacts*, 30

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

(economic, physical, cultural, spiritual, etc.) form both a “base of action from which young people can become engaged” as well as a “target of action—an area of community life which young people’s work can impact”.<sup>81</sup> The degree of impact varies across communities from the creation of new infrastructure to the preservation of existing natural beauty. The result of youth development and organizing work is:

*fixing problems, creating things that never existed, making sure that good aspects are not lost, fulfilling vital functions, helping communities continue to grow and progress, and changing the very nature of the places in which they live.*<sup>82</sup>

And while youth organizing and community building are only just beginning to gain momentum in the United States, there are a number of examples of “new hybrid groups” that are successfully negotiating the balance between youth development and community change in a way that is producing some significant impacts.<sup>83</sup> Such as Food What?! in Santa Cruz, CA, GRuB in Olympia, WA, and Grow Dat Youth Farm in New Orleans.

Many young people today are guided by other *older* young people, for whom opportunities decrease as they “age out” of programs.<sup>84</sup> By broadening the demographic, as well as allowing for young people to try on age appropriate community roles, organizations can be more inclusive of youth. And much of this comes with “deepening the understanding of the assets youth bring as community residents” and expanding the definition of impact.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>82</sup> Tolman, *Youth Acts, Community Impacts*, 24.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>85</sup> Tolman, *Youth Acts, Community Impacts*, 17.



Increased pathways for action must also be available to youth and supported by adults, which means providing access to ongoing support and opportunity. Doing so requires a close analysis of what is necessary to engage youth with adults in order to transform communities. This means ensuring that projects are both relevant and meaningful to the youth, as well as responding to the actual needs of the community.<sup>86</sup>

*c. Food system work*

There is a significant body of research conducted by the United States Department of Agriculture that demonstrates how community or locally based food systems can contribute to economic, social and environmental stability of local farms and communities. In fact, “food and farming are keys to economic vitality and community health, yet are often overlooked”.<sup>87</sup>

The idea of a local economy rests upon two principles: neighborhood and subsistence.<sup>88</sup> In Wendell Berry’s characterization of a local economy, “a viable neighborhood is a community, and a viable community is made up of neighbors who cherish and protect what they have in common”.<sup>89</sup> Prior to industrialization, we relied almost entirely on the local food system for this subsistence. An understanding of the importance of this re-emerged during the 1970s, but has only more recently gained prominent recognition at the development and planning roundtable. Many cities have begun to make inroads into

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>87</sup> Virginia Cooperative Extension, *A Community Based Food System*, 1.

<sup>88</sup> Berry, *Art of the Commonplace*, 260.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

making local food a priority with efforts that support the creation of local food policy councils, food action plans, city codes to support urban agriculture and distribution, as well as the support for school gardens.

Food policy councils are being created in cities across the United States to address concerns about food security, hunger, and local agriculture. Official plans that are adopted by local governments are instrumental in shaping the investments and development of a community as it pertains to food, and are done so through a variety of ways. Some cities incorporate food as an element within more comprehensive plans, such as Marin County, California's county-wide plan which includes a subsection that envisions the goals for food and agriculture in the region. But a growing number of local governments are creating stand-alone food systems plans or plans for a particular aspect of food systems, i.e. urban agriculture, as seen in New Haven, Connecticut's recently published Food Action Plan.<sup>90</sup> Both approaches can have a lasting influence on the health of community food systems and signal a move towards integrated and intentional city planning around issues of food and agriculture.

“A 1994 national gardening survey revealed that 30 percent of United States families were gardeners, with fully 80 percent of them urban dwellers”.<sup>91</sup> Urban agriculture, whether permitted through city zoning or through a more subverted guerilla styles, has been an inherent part of city life for decades. Through backyard plots, vacant lots,

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<sup>90</sup> University of Buffalo, Food Systems Planning and Healthy Communities Lab, *Planning to Eat?: Innovative Local Government Plans and Policies to Build Healthy Food Systems in the United States*, by Kailee Neuner, Sylvia Kelly and Samina Raja, (Buffalo, NY, 2011), 3.

<sup>91</sup> Smit, *Urban Agriculture*, chap.2, 22.

window boxes or rooftop containers, citizens are finding ways to grow food within concrete jungles. And while difficult to measure, given the variety and form of these methods, the amount of food being grown is estimated to contribute to about 30 to 40 percent of family produce needs.<sup>92</sup> Community gardens are often recognized as the most common site for urban growing and most have built within them a certain level of institutional and social capacity with support from neighborhood organizations and community leaders. They have also been the focus of a significant number of research and data collection efforts- some of which have indicated that community gardeners and their families eat more vegetables and are a lot healthier than non-gardener counterparts.<sup>93</sup>

Fiscal incentives are also becoming recognized as a valuable approach to supporting healthy food systems and can come in the form of loans or grants provided at the local or state level. These include incentives for producers like tax breaks and technical assistance as well as incentives for low-income consumers, like double value coupon programs at farmers markets. These programs allow federal nutrition benefits customers to extend their spending by offering a match to the amount spent at participating markets. This helps to decrease barriers to healthy food access while still supporting local farmers and producers. When combined with other regulatory tools such as more favorable zoning ordinances and permits, these can significantly help decrease barriers some businesses face in making local food a viable option.

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<sup>92</sup> PolicyLink, *Growing Urban Agriculture: Equitable Strategies and Policies for Improving Access to Healthy Food*, by Allison Hagey, Solana Rice, Rebecca Flournoy, (PolicyLink, 2012), 8.

<sup>93</sup> Smit, *Urban Agriculture*, chap.4, 7.

While school gardens have been a part of the education system intermittently throughout the last century, there has recently been an increased level of interest in the establishment of complimentary activities that emphasize food, farming and nutrition. “This nationwide movement to enrich children’s bodies and minds while supporting local economies is often referred to as “farm to school.”<sup>94</sup> There are a variety of programs that support this work, including efforts to bring local food into cafeterias, farm visits, culinary class, and school gardens.

The USDA has a federal granting program that offers up to \$5 million in grants to help schools connect with local producers in order to teach kids about where their food comes from. In addition, there are a number of other philanthropic and non-profit organizations that have recognized the important linkages between classroom learning and agriculture. One of these was born out of a relationship between Martin Luther King, Jr. Middle School, a public school in Berkley, California and Alice Waters, founder of the Chez Panisse Foundation. This partnership pioneered the Edible Schoolyard project that is a model for integrated garden and school-based learning. An asphalt lot next to the school was transformed into a teaching garden and has since become an exemplar of edible education nationwide. This and other farm to school efforts offer a variety of opportunities for youth to learn hands-on about classroom based concepts. These programs also offer local farmers and producers an opportunity to become involved economically, socially and culturally in the education of young people.

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<sup>94</sup> USDA, Farm to School, <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/f2s/>.

Growing Power Farm is another example of innovative food system work. Ex-basketball player and corporate executive Will Allen decided in 1993 to return to his farming roots and began what is now Milwaukee's largest urban farm. Covering close to two acres, including hydroponic greenhouses, hoop houses, an extensive vermi-composting system, plus a variety of livestock and fish, Growing Power's headquarters is a full scale operation. Their mission is to provide communities from diverse backgrounds access to safe affordable and high-quality food. A true example of an urban, community based food center, Growing Power not only produces close to one million pounds of food annually for the surrounding neighborhoods, but also represents an environmentally and ecologically sustainable system of growing, livestock management and education that can be replicated anywhere.<sup>95</sup>

While these food system improvement strategies abound, the challenges to urban farming should be mentioned. Given the population concentration of cities, pollution and soil or water contamination can have a much more serious impact. Without due diligence and proper education, poor practices can impede the success and viability of urban agriculture. It is important then, that urban farmers are supported with good education about safe practices, and are even assisted by other agents that can regulate and help monitor safety and identify "dirty" zones where limits to farming must be imposed in those places. What remains important though, is that these best practices are derived from empowering local communities to create and apply them.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Growing Power Farm, <http://www.growingpower.org>.

<sup>96</sup> Smit, *Urban Agriculture*, chap.8, 17.

Traditionally, local governments have played a minimal role in the food system, and therefore few municipally supported institutions exist to oversee systemic food system transformation.<sup>97</sup> Community gardens and garden based education have emerged from a desire to address food system issues and together with the creation of food policy plans and councils, new mechanisms to support local food system work at the municipal, state, county and regional level have arisen in greater numbers.

*The increasing problem of food insecurity for the urban poor in many developing countries has led government and development agencies to address the problems of hunger and malnutrition by instituting a range of safety-net and coping strategies...Among these strategies to combat hunger, farming in poor urban neighborhoods is rarely promoted...yet it is the main coping strategy of the poor and is a self-help strategy. More cost-effective and more empowering than providing food aid, urban agriculture is thus more sustainable.*<sup>98</sup>

*e. Youth development and food*

As a society, we may be forever changed by the advent of television and new technologies. We may have allowed the dust to build up on our bowling league uniforms. We may not talk to our neighbors as much, but the threads of our social fabric still remain intact. They are being reinforced by communities who are coming together to support their assets in order to effect broad-based social change. They are being stitched together by backyard food production and community food policy efforts. They are tied together by the work of thousands of youth across the globe that are involved in youth development and youth organizing efforts that are dedicated to the fortification of the self through service to the community. This work is fueled by organizations that offer youth

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<sup>97</sup> University of Buffalo, *Innovative Local Government Plans*, 30.

<sup>98</sup> Smit, *Urban Agriculture*, chap. 7, 6.

the motivation, capacity and opportunity to become change makers and voices of power, but perhaps most importantly, it is fueled by the youth themselves.

We can recognize each in its own way as contributing to an element of community capital improvement. If we are seeking to achieve communities that constitute a healthy ecology, then we must recognize that all sectors of the system work equitably together within their natural limits. In this case, the focus on local food security and civic engagement is a vehicle for that change. Various activities produce beneficial outcomes, but to create lasting, systemic change in the food system and the social world, we must speak in the language of impact. Communities must nurture the young that will grow to feed everyone. A community development model that utilizes the two key elements of community, food and youth, can create comprehensive and holistic change that cross-sects economic, environmental, social, and cultural sectors.

Many of these outcomes, in fact, have overlapping impacts in more than one sector. The measures of economic impact can be seen in the number of jobs created, amount of local spending and business skill development. We can look at a community's access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food as measured by the number of retail food outlets, the percentage of food produced and distributed locally, and the ability to produce food locally. This local production also has health and environmental impacts, demonstrated by the number of miles traveled from producer to consumer. Food traveling fewer miles not only reduces that amount of pollution, but also determines the quality of nutrition being received.

We can also look at social impact, often more qualitative in nature, in the form of increased civic engagement. They can, however, be more concretely observed in the number of resident based organizations, youth participation in municipal government and meetings, and community led events. The social also carries over into the cultural sector. Many of these outcomes contribute to increased knowledge and sharing about diversity and different backgrounds. Activities like recipe sharing and community meals contribute to this multi-cultural community building akin to James Bau Graves' celebration of cultural democracy. To create true community impact, multiple community stakeholders must participate. In order to measure whether this impact is taking place, multiple community stakeholders must be considered. Youth development in urban agriculture offers more than the sum of its parts. Each of these areas contributes to one or multiple sectors of a healthy community, yet taken together community development hits on all cylinders.

These factors taken together, illustrated in the following original framework, all contribute to physical, social, and economic access to food and to the needs for an active, healthy and engaged life for community residents. This framework demonstrates the intersections of impact areas, as well as the activities found in youth development and urban agriculture that contribute to the holistic health and ecology of communities.



<b>Measuring Outcomes Framework for Food, Youth &amp; Agriculture</b>			
<b>Activities</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>Measures</b>	<b>Impact</b>
Community needs assessment survey	Understanding of the landscape	Amount of feedback, diversity of respondents	Increased civic engagement, cultural sensitivity
Farm/gardening work	Job readiness, work ethic, motivation	Attendance	Increased civic engagement and economic development
Mobile markets and farm stands	Access to local food, local spending, increased jobs, decreased travel for distribution	Number of distribution outlets, pounds of produce sold, number of jobs, distance traveled from production to distribution	Increased food security, economic development, pollution reduction
Use of food vouchers	Ability to purchase healthy food	Number of customers, total federal nutrition benefits sales	Increased food security
Youth participation in community/resident based organizations	Respect and mutual understanding among youth and adults, opportunity	Number of youth involved, number of total community based organizations,	Increased civic engagement
Cultural recipe sharing	Knowledge about other cultures	Number of attendees, number of recipes shared	Cultural awareness, diversity, community connectedness

## **IV. Case Studies**

### *i. The Food Project*

#### *a. Overview*

*The Food Project showed us an interesting way to improve the situation. Focus on the environment, on food, on sustainable agriculture. Food is key! It's about culture, sustainability, improving life in an urban area, community building.<sup>99</sup>*

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<sup>99</sup> Roblyn Anderson Brigham and Jennifer Nahas, "The Food Project: A Follow-Up Study of Program Participants," (Brigham Nahas Research Associates, Cambridge, MA, March 2008), 22.

The Food Project (TFP), a Boston-based organization committed to food security and community building, involves youth in a variety of ways. The mission of TFP is:

*To create a thoughtful and productive community of youth and adults from diverse backgrounds who work together to build a sustainable food system. Our community produces healthy food for residents of the city and suburbs, provides youth leadership opportunities, and inspires and supports others to create change in their own communities.*<sup>100</sup>

Founded by Ward Cheney in 1991 with a vision that diverse young people from all across the state should work to feed their communities side by side, TFP became a place where youth and adults gather from all backgrounds to care for the land and purposefully contribute to society. The organization is intentional about leading a mission-based organization through a commitment to alignment, balance and connection in all of its activities. Through meaningful and demanding work, youth are encouraged to step outside of themselves, re-create themselves, and in turn have a chance to see the world differently.

At TFP, they use a Youth Action Model; the belief is that true learning is reciprocal and transparent, involving youth and adult partnerships. Strength comes from the diversity of these relationships, experiences and points of view, and is balanced by hard work and fun. TFP works off of an “intensely personal model” that strives to “expand each person’s recognition of himself or herself as an agent for social change”.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> The Food Project, “About Us,” <http://thefoodproject.org/about>.

<sup>101</sup> The Food Project, “Mission and Vision,” <http://thefoodproject.org/our-mission>.

TFP uses agriculture as a medium for youth development due to its striking ability to provide a metaphor for real life. Health on a farm is dependent on the diversity of crops, just as health of a community is dependent on diversity. Farming is new and different to most youth, but is something that is universally needed. Learning about our food system teaches them about how to be a healthier person and demonstrates the relevance of farming as true meaningful work. The unfamiliarity of it provides an environment whereby everyone is a little bit uncomfortable, a perfect place to begin to create a new community.

All of this comes together in the “flagship” Summer Youth Program that has become a model for other organizations nationwide.<sup>102</sup> Over the course of six and a half weeks during the summer, 100 young people come together to work on urban and suburban farms in Lincoln, Boston and the North Shore of Massachusetts. They spend mornings cultivating the fields and afternoons in workshops geared towards a variety of issues including diversity, sustainable agriculture and personal finance. They also spend one day a week preparing and serving produce they have grown to local hunger relief organizations. In addition, the youth have the opportunity to prepare food for community lunches and sell produce at a weekly farmers’ market, all the while working to sustainably grow and distribute thousands of pounds of produce to nourish themselves and the community.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> The Food Project, “What We Do,” <http://thefoodproject.org/what-we-do>.

<sup>103</sup> The Food Project, “Youth Programs,” <http://thefoodproject.org/youth-programs>.

The fact that TFP adheres to the three youth action core themes is what contributes to much of its success. Motivation comes not only in the form of a paycheck (for many this being their first), but also from the power of the rigorous standards that each participant is held accountable to.

*TFP brings with it the inherent blessings and curses of work that bestows concrete gratification when done well (the perfect ear of corn) and blunt reminders when neglected (peas choked by weeds). As crews deliver crates of fresh produce they have planted, harvested, washed and weighed to city food pantries, they hold in their hands the best of all motivators.<sup>104</sup>*

TFP is very much about capacity building. Young people commit themselves to daily work, workshops and discussions and learn important leadership, teamwork, diversity and civic participation skills. Key to this is the involvement and guidance of older youth in crafting goals, plans for meeting them, and ways to measure progress. Close attention to detail, interactive learning, and deliberate strategy enables TFP to grow and allows for participants to engage in a culture of honesty, learning, and personal development.

The “onion” of opportunity that TFP illustrates is what allows for continued participation in the organization. Those who join the Summer Youth Program have the opportunity to then travel along a continuum of development paths which include participation in a full year academic program, internships, staff positions and board membership. This enables young people to “grow within the program, able to return each year to tackle new challenges and roles.”<sup>105</sup> Much of this is achieved by the commitment on the part of the organization’s founders, to foster an inclusive and open management style, whereby

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<sup>104</sup> Tolman, *Youth Acts, Community Impacts*, 49.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

decisions come from regular discussions among staff, board of directors and youth alike. As staff member Pat Gray stated in an interview, “this is not a passenger ship. We are all rowing so we all determine where the boat is going”.<sup>106</sup>

TFP prescribes a basic outline for this recipe, the details of which are newly created each year by incoming groups. A safe space must be built up front in order to establish this new community as a place where youth/adult partnerships can be made and trust can be built. From here, goals are set and standards are established. A constant re-evaluation of meaningful work is imperative, for this is what motivates youth and is also an opportunity for youth input and control. Open and honest feedback must be given at all times to enable growth; something that is applied at all levels of engagement with the organization: youth, interns, staff. Finally comes reflection, celebration and evaluation, which combines the core aspect of learning and capacity building with recycling and re-visioning.

The reach of the youth programs is wide in that it not only broadens the horizons of young people but it helps improve intergroup relationships. TFP is “building a sense of what is possible on the land, tapping the agricultural pride in this immigrant neighborhood”, and in so doing it is changing perceptions and relationships there too.<sup>107</sup>

TFP has expanded its scope beyond the summer and afterschool programs to include a number of community programs as well. Their vision for universal access to nutritious

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<sup>106</sup> Tolman, *Youth Acts, Community Impacts*, 50.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid*, 46.

food as well as the skills and resources to create healthy food practices is encompassed in their Real Food Hub model. This is a partnership between TFP and other community institutions that links sustainable agriculture, youth development, and community based food systems to the community itself. Through programs like Build-a-Garden, Farm-to-Family, Grow Well, Eat Well Workshops, and others help to weave a stronger network of allies in the work toward building healthy communities.

*b. Impacts, Challenges, Implications*

TFP is highly intentional about the ways in which it engages youth, food and community. It operates in a variety of areas: economic development, physical development, basic services, health and human services and individual development. Since the first growing season, over 1,000 teens have participated in TFP's programs and at least 250 organizations, across the country, have been inspired by the model.<sup>108</sup> Success, for youth participants, has come in the form of increased communication and critical thinking skills, leadership opportunities, clear understanding of roles, expectations and boundaries, respect of diversity, openness and sharing, as well as intentional focus on modeling and building effective organizational culture. Success is found in these significant individual impacts, which have helped to contribute to a holistic cross-sector model of change. Short term evaluations are continually done in each program with outcomes based pre and post-tests, and a more longitudinal study was performed by the Brigham Nahas Research Associates in 2008.

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<sup>108</sup> The Food Project, *The Food Project: A Project That Became a Movement*, (Lincoln, MA: The Food Project, 2012), 2.

After surveying and engaging a diverse group of 30 Food Project alumni, six main areas of perceived impact were determined from this follow-up study. The first of these was the notion of “becoming a worker”; the acquisition of basic job skills and work ethic.<sup>109</sup> This sets youth on “a positive trajectory into the workforce”, thus influencing career plans and perspective about how to work.<sup>110</sup> The experience at the food project is the first time many participants have a formal, paid job, and with this comes exposure to responsibility, accountability and feedback. And while not all go on to pursue professions directly related to TFP in terms of agriculture or social justice, many do correlate what they gained with what they want to do, in terms of skills learned or talents uncovered.

The second area of impact was the development of leadership skills. Here, alumni agreed that a leader is one who can clearly communicate ideas, listen, and bring together disparate groups toward a common goal; something that was nurtured by participation in TFP. Outcomes are broad, but include the ability to overcome shyness, to listen, and the development of facilitation and public speaking skill are demonstrated.

Experiencing and valuing diversity was the third area of impact revealed in the study. Work at TFP deepened participants understanding of “what it means to work together in diverse groups” and “was said to make a considerable impact on who they are, what they think, and their comfort in a diverse world.”<sup>111</sup> This was particularly more profound for those surveyed who grew up in homogeneous settings.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Brigham, “The Food Project: A Follow-Up Study,” iii.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid, 20.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, 20.

The fourth area of impact was a deepening in participant understanding of social issues that resulted from workshops and community-work experiences in various social and community service agencies. Work in these organizations helped bring to light, for many, the complexities of social issues regarding homelessness and hunger; giving a more realistic and comprehensive face to these services and the people who rely on them.

Fifth was an appreciation for food. Interviewees described changes in eating habits and a greater awareness of the effect food has on the body, as well as learning new ways to eat, shop and cook. For those who entered into the program with a base knowledge and understanding of the value of healthy eating, TFP experience created less of a change and served merely to substantiate their previous beliefs. While the emphasis of the program is not specifically geared towards diet and healthy eating, it is perhaps the informal exchanges amongst peers and staff that helped to develop these notions.<sup>113</sup>

The last perceived area of impact was in sustainable agriculture. While much smaller in degree of impact, this area was demonstrated by a shift in awareness of how far food travels to get to local markets and the importance of buying local. For many, actual knowledge about sustainable agriculture did not extend beyond their participation in the program, except for those who went on to pursue this field as a career, but it “made them more receptive to information related to sustainable agriculture that they hear now”.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Brigham, “The Food Project: A Follow-Up Study,” 24.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.



While these core themes illustrate the impact TFP has on developing individual youth, there are some other important impacts it has had on the community. Thousands of pounds of produce are grown and distributed to the city's less fortunate and a reclamation of unused city land has enabled residents to become involved in growing healthy food of their own. According to the 2011-12 Annual Report, nearly half of the 282,004 pounds of produce were distributed to low-income neighborhoods.<sup>115</sup> "Increased community knowledge about gardening, soil contamination and pollution are lasting program benefits" due to the outreach and the assistance that TFP youth provide.<sup>116</sup> These programs draw increasing neighborhood interest, as well as "changed perceptions and relationships" which include shared gardening tips, to a group effort to increase the amount of organic growing aids available at neighborhood stores.<sup>117</sup>

The farmers market where the produce is sold demonstrates other tangible impacts for it offers produce (that is otherwise unavailable) at affordable prices and enables the use of federal nutrition benefits. Customers who are eligible for State Nutritional Assistance Programs (SNAP), Women with Infant Children (WIC), or Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Programs (FMNP) can redeem their vouchers for purchase of fruit and vegetables at the farmers market. Like the monthly meals put on by youth themselves, the farmers market is yet another meeting place for these youth and adult interactions to take place, in "a much anticipated community ritual".<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> The Food Project. *Annual Report 2012*, accessed March, 2013, <http://thefoodproject.org/sites/default/files/AnnualReport2012.pdf>.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Tolman, *Youth Acts, Community Impacts*, 45.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 44.

All of TFP's successes are not without challenges. As with any non-profit, funding is always a constant struggle regardless of organizational longevity or renown. In fact, it is often more difficult to substantiate, to some, the continued need for funding given the fact of how well established TFP has become. While over a quarter of total revenue (\$3,790,554 in 2012) comes from income generation, the majority of funds come from individual and private contributions, as well as government grants.<sup>119</sup>

There is also a struggle between the desire to uphold and increase the capacity for the organization to produce food for the community with the need to maintain a healthy and sustainable ecosystem. In order to harvest over 250,000 pounds of food annually, TFP must also work toward building the long-term fertility of the land, something that often pits farmers against program and administrative staff.<sup>120</sup> Farmers want to ensure that the land is not being exhausted and stripped of fertility, while the administration wants to ensure that they are increasingly growing as much food as possible each year. For the farmers, this sometimes means slightly decreasing yield one year to ensure the recovery and viability of the soil in following years.

One challenge that TFP initially faced was the importance they placed on agriculture as the message. It became apparent that that same level of import and understanding was not being fully absorbed by participants. While understanding where food comes from and how it supports our bodies and our communities from a theoretical and educational standpoint is important, TFP realized it was about the medium more than anything.

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<sup>119</sup> The Food Project, *Annual Report 2012*.

<sup>120</sup> The Food Project, *The Food Project: A Project*, 6.

Through agricultural work, not agriculture in and of itself, they were able to build healthy, young leaders. This process was also what enabled the development and support of communities, and ultimately demonstrates the importance of flexibility and adaptability that TFP has written into their model; something that has enabled them to sustain such a powerful project and movement.

As with any true community development approach, flexibility is key. This is something that TFP demonstrates continually from each year's program design, to each year's crop plan. Much of the initial success of TFP concept came from its roots in the community. In working with the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI) on both recruiting youth for the program, as well as starting up the urban farming portion of the project, TFP was able to secure land in the city, and develop ties with community members, turning it into a resource that was supported and identifiable among neighborhood residents.

*“Beyond helping us secure the Langdon lot, DSNI’s standing in the community facilitated acceptance of TFP – then an unknown entity to local residents.”<sup>121</sup>*

The importance of this partnership has driven the ABCD approach and has allowed for continued expansion into the community; including the opening of new urban sites and the addition of a greenhouse. It has also been what has created a new sense of community as residents banded together to protect the space. TFP has used urban agriculture as a means to shape and reinforce community while strengthening the local food system. Through continued dialogue, TFP was able to tap into the agricultural heritage of an

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<sup>121</sup> The Food Project, *Annual Report 2012*.

immigrant neighborhood and get a pulse on the community's food preferences, thus encouraging the production of specialty and culturally resonant crop varieties.<sup>122</sup>

It is clear that TFP places a great deal of importance on the experience for youth participants. It utilizes the three types of action that ground the Youth Action approach: motivation, capacity building, and opportunity. Constantly reflecting and reevaluating successes and setbacks, the organization seeks to refine the program so as to reinforce the integrity of the mission and its continued benefit to youth. It is purposeful about each activity from morning meetings, to workshops to fieldwork. It is also purposeful about its tight organizational alignment. This tight alignment is what makes the work meaningful for the participants and what contributes to success.

The fact that TFP has also served as a nationally recognized model for agricultural youth development work is testament to its reach. Not only has it served as inspiration to others, it has developed a number of resources that can be used by others in support of this work. It offers manuals, books, curricula, consulting, and more, so that others may continue to share the type of work being done. Each summer and winter, TFP also holds a three-day, intensive seminar where participants learn about the youth programs, organizational structure, mission based management, and have an opportunity to work alongside youth in the program.

TFP has firmly planted the seeds for youth development in urban agriculture as a viable model for building youth and for building community. It has become a leader in this field

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<sup>122</sup> Tolman, *Youth Acts, Community Impacts*, 46.

based on its successes, and continues to support other organizations interested in continuing to develop this work. By motivating, developing capacity and opportunity, TFP continues to mobilize an army of diverse, young people in communities across Massachusetts who are bringing local food into these communities, thus supporting their economy, culture and social fabric.

## *ii. Massachusetts Avenue Project*

*“Stop teaching my kid that stuff about organic because all he wants to do is buy organic!” – Growing Green Project parent.<sup>123</sup>*

### *a. Overview*

The Massachusetts Avenue Project (MAP), in Buffalo, NY, is a community development organization whose mission is “to nurture the growth of a diverse and equitable local food system and promote local economic opportunities, access to affordable, nutritious food and social change education”.<sup>124</sup> The organization seeks to create an economically just world where all people have access to local food, and are engaged in transforming their communities into productive and restored green spaces.

The impetus for the MAP grew out of a West End neighborhood Block Club in 1992 that wanted to develop opportunities and alternatives for young people. They saw great possibility in the high number of vacant lots around the city. The group started with small projects and completed a community needs assessment. By 2000 it had been incorporated

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<sup>123</sup> Diane Picard, telephone interview, March, 25, 2013.

<sup>124</sup> Massachusetts Avenue Project, “About Us,” [http://mass-ave.org/?page\\_id=2](http://mass-ave.org/?page_id=2).

as a 501(c)3. At this point, there was still a great need for opportunities for youth given that close to 40 percent of the population was under the age of 24; nearly 5% higher than the national average.<sup>125</sup> From here, the Growing Green Project emerged in 2003, at a time when little else was being done in the urban food system world in Buffalo.

*In Growing Green, we learn where our food comes from, how to eat healthy and how to take care of the environment and community. At MAP, I've increased my ability to speak in public. At MAP I am treated with respect and care, as if I were a part of their family. Having a job has meant a lot to me. I will not forget this project because it has impacted my life in a positive way. This job kept me busy and out of trouble. They have helped me with homework and getting scholarships for college. – Patience<sup>126</sup>*

The Growing Green project focuses its work in five key program areas: farm education, a mobile market farm stand, youth enterprise, community education, and policy and outreach. The Growing Green project includes the Growing Green Youth Program, focused on youth development, and the Growing Green Urban Farm an urban agriculture program that focuses on improving communities and increasing access to healthy food. The goal of the GGP program is to make the food system more local and inclusive, and do so by employing youth to work in areas of urban farming and social enterprise.<sup>127</sup>

The farm itself is close to an acre and produced close to 6,000 pounds of food in 2011, nearly a 50% increase from the previous year thanks to an aquaponic greenhouse.<sup>128</sup>

Youth spend time working on most aspects of farm operation from composting to

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<sup>125</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, “New York”, 2000, <http://censtats.census.gov/data/NY/1603611000.pdf>.

<sup>126</sup> Massachusetts Avenue Project, *Annual Report 2011*, accessed March 23, 2013, <http://mass-ave.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/2011-MAP-annual-report.pdf>.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

aquaponics, farm planning to seedling care. This serves as a valuable relationship for the farm; youth contribute significant labor energy, while at the same time gain valuable job experience-, which, for many is their first job.

The primary summer youth employment program takes on about 35 youth for six weeks each summer, starting in July. About one third to one half of these are returning youth members and are overseen by local college student summer interns and MAP staff. Over the course of the program, the youth spend twenty hours per week learning about all components of a food system and experiencing each of the five program components. Part of the program also involves a community meal, which requires youth to develop a recipe, plan, cook and present the meal to the group.

During the academic year, returning students select a track (enterprise, farm, community education) that they are interested in pursuing more rigorously and then work on these efforts in smaller groups. The program also allows time for larger group activities and joint engagement. During this time the group shares updates on individual projects, receives and gives lessons through interactive learning opportunities, and learns group facilitation skills. While staff members are there to act as resources and facilitators, this part of the program relies heavily on veteran youth to lead.

Youth also participate in the Mobile Market, which is a healthy and local food distribution vehicle that provides affordable produce to different low-income neighborhoods around the city where access is otherwise limited. The market is open

seasonally and in addition to accepting EBT/Foodstamp benefits, it provides local produce at discounted prices. In their 2011 Annual Report, there were 1,244 “individuals who have greater access to locally grown, affordable produce” through the Mobile Market.<sup>129</sup>

Growing Green Works, is one of the Growing Green Youth Program’s flagship program components. This locally owned economic education venture is managed and run by youth who develop and market value-added, processed products. First, youth create a recipe prototype and perform a survey to determine which version was the best. From there they perform a Scheduled Process that verifies that the product is made “in a safe and sanitary way as well as assures that [their] ingredients and production method will pass governmental inspections required for sale to the public.”<sup>130</sup> When their product gets cleared for approval, they move on to label design, bottling, inventory and distribution. Throughout, the program facilitates training in business planning, marketing, sales, accounting and learning how to interact with farmers and other retail owners in a business setting. Income generated from the sale of products goes back to the program to support further youth employment.

While MAP staff offer a variety of training for youth and other groups regarding organic urban agriculture, social enterprise development, advocacy and food systems development, the youth themselves are instrumental to this as well. Together, youth and staff have facilitated urban agriculture trainings for other New York State regions, hosted

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Massachusetts Avenue Project, “Youth Enterprise”, <http://mass-ave.org/>.



workshops and used the annual Pancake Breakfast as an opportunity to educate community members and keep them abreast of the work MAP is doing while reinforcing the importance of eating local.

All of this work is made meaningful for participants through programs that utilize hands on learning models to address and incorporate teen identity issues. The strength of the program comes from the interaction and relationship development of the participants with one another, as well as the mentorship roles formed and cultivated by the staff. “The development of trust by West Side youth is a significant accomplishment in this area and is a great indicator of the potential that the Growing Green program has to spur greater community organization and participation.”<sup>131</sup> Youth are equipped with the knowledge that they are integral to their community and are given the tools to shape this, thus building trust and opportunity.

#### *b. Impacts, Challenges, Implications*

According to Executive Director, Diane Picard, meaningful impact is seen after at least a year of participation. While youth knowledge of food, food systems and personal development increases radically after one program session, it takes a little bit longer to see true behavioral changes. These come in the form of increased confidence and ability to articulate, as well as broader engagement.

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<sup>131</sup> Massachusetts Avenue Project and University of Buffalo, Department of Urban and Regional Planning, *Food For Growth*, by Samina Raja and Diane Picard (Fall 2003), 62.

To assess specific subject area learning outcomes, MAP staff and instructors evaluate youth learning in 12 different areas. This system is used for all youth who go through the program and is modified slightly for returning veterans- for which there is a project-based focus to the learning outcomes. When in the program, youth are offered access to tutoring and mentorship support. They are also given the opportunity to go on college tours and to receive financial aid application support. For the fourth year in a row in 2011, 100% of MAP's graduating seniors went on to college in the fall, compared to the citywide public school graduation rate of 47%.<sup>132</sup>

For many, this program is not just a great job opportunity, it is a means of financial support for families. With increased access to food through distribution channels like the Mobile Mart and Farm Stand, MAP is also creating more opportunities for residents to purchase locally. The fact that these programs are supported by governmental food assistance programs like SNAP and WIC, enables a much deeper and inclusive level of access for low-income families in the community.

Participation in the Growing Green program has kept youth away from dangerous environments and surrounded by support and positive engagement. Youth have not only helped beautify their neighborhood through their urban agriculture efforts, but are able to cultivate academic performance and social skills that empowers them with a political voice.<sup>133</sup> In addition, their exposure to business development and manual labor has

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<sup>132</sup> Massachusetts Avenue Project, *Annual Report 2011*.

<sup>133</sup> Massachusetts Avenue Project, *Food for Growth*, 66.

“empowered them to set goals for the future...and to envision an improved community to live in.”<sup>134</sup>

Youth are also heavily involved in outreach and policy work, using social media, creativity, and face time to get the word out about the local food revolution.<sup>135</sup> They have conducted neighborhood evaluation surveys that assess the built environment and active living opportunities of neighborhoods. Working in partnership with other local organizations like Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities, the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus and city planning committees, youth have helped identify key issues pertaining to food access, recreational opportunities, and public safety that have resulted in citywide policy improvements. Over the past two years, the city has been leading a new land use and zoning code effort as part of its Green Code. Youth have been involved in these city Green Code Community Planning meetings, championing and advocating for urban agriculture, community gardening and marketing of food allowances in the city.

With these newly developed skills, youth have been instrumental in highlighting the importance of food and food policy as relevant to the discussion of economic development and community health. Growing Green youth helped to design and implement a Food Policy Summit, are involved in the city’s new zoning and land use coding effort, and help to conduct evaluations and assessments of the neighborhood environments so as to help mobilize further policy efforts. Having these youth engaged in

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>135</sup> Massachusetts Avenue Project, “Outreach & Policy,” <http://mass-ave.org/>.

policy and justice issues demonstrates a moving trend toward high impact multigenerational community engagement.

Through opportunities for real world work, youth are built into confident and self-aware young leaders, with the skills to engage with their peers and their community. While a full community impact assessment has not been done, MAP has anecdotally been measuring things like parental perceptions and the effect the program is having on behavior and awareness.

Like The Food Project, one of the most formidable challenges for MAP is finding sustaining funding. Particularly in a city where little attention has been paid to local food system work, MAP must focus a lot of its energy on securing funding sources so that it may continue to carry out its work. This attention deficit also comes in the form of a lack of political support for youth programs. It is only more recently, thanks to the continued effort of programs like MAP, that policy makers are beginning to take note of the importance of young people's interaction with food.

Buffalo has a significant amount of land in both the inner city limits and the surrounding perimeter. The rich agricultural history of the city as a hub for the grain industry has well positioned it as a food processing center and source for economic development.

According to a study called "Strengthening Buffalo's Food System", "there is a significant opportunity to promote food-based economic development in the city by promoting additional food processing businesses in the city - especially small scale food

processing - and link it to local and regional food producers.”<sup>136</sup> The city’s food distribution channels, however, are concentrated in both restaurants and convenience stores (69.6 and 11.1 percent respectively).<sup>137</sup> Recognizing the value and helping to bridge this gap between local producer and local consumer is critical. Strengthening the distribution sector such that it reconnects local and regional farmers and local processors with local retailers (and consumers) has the potential to further promote economic development, as well as increase availability of healthful produce within the city of Buffalo.<sup>138</sup>

Programs like MAP are able to capitalize on this capacity for local food production and demonstrate how this can be a viable model for other cities as well, particularly those rooted in agricultural history. And while the landscape and composition of the city has changed, MAP has been able to embrace this diversity to further its work; connecting individuals within communities, as well as communities to one another.

Much of the work and community assessments that have helped shape MAP programs have been done in collaboration with Dr. Samina Raja and the University of Buffalo. Dr. Raja, a professor of urban and regional planning, directs the Food Systems Planning and Healthy Communities Lab, and is currently conducting a five year community based investigation into food system planning and the ways in which local governments can support capacity to alleviate food deserts. She has done extensive research on the impact

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<sup>136</sup> University of Buffalo. Food Systems Planning and Healthy Communities Lab, *Strengthening Buffalo’s Food System: To Promote Healthy Eating Among Children*, by Kailee Neune and Samina Raja (Buffalo, NY, 2011), 4.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

of urban agriculture on the health of children and continues to assess how food influences healthy communities and built environments.

The work of MAP and the receptiveness of the city to making room for these changes has also helped to bring the food system dialogue to the fore. This demonstrates both a desire from those involved to engage in effective strategies for change, and a need among the community to address significant barriers, limitations, and gaps. Now nearly 10 years later “the number of community gardens and urban farm initiatives across the City has exploded and food system development is beginning to be recognized as a critical part of successful community development...Urban food production is here to stay and has real implications for impacting the health, social capital and economic development of our [West End] community”.<sup>139</sup>

### *iii. Youth Farm*

#### *a. Overview*

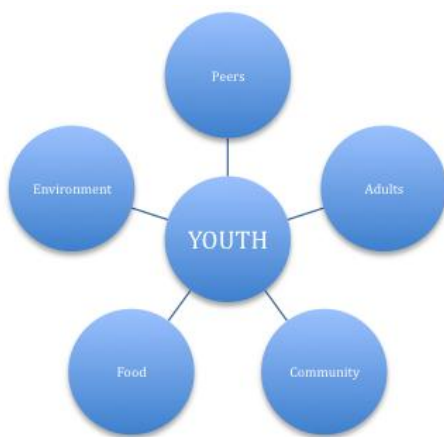
The Youth Farm, originally called the Youth Farm and Market Project, was born out of a neighborhood-based effort in 1995 to address certain needs pertaining to youth and to vacant city lots in the Lyndale neighborhood of south Minneapolis, MN. It has since grown to include four more neighborhoods and a 501(c)3 status. Work has grown from a small upstart community garden to a youth development organization that works to advance cultural expression, environmental stewardship, youth empowerment and local food access.

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<sup>139</sup> Massachusetts Avenue Project, *Annual Report 2011*.

*Building on a variety of traditions in working the land and growing and preparing food, our Youth Farmers build cross-cultural and intergenerational relationships, cultivate youth leadership, engage in micro-enterprise development, and organize neighbors to envision, realize and activate neighborhood public space.<sup>140</sup>*

While the overarching mission of Youth Farm is to grow food in order to develop youth, each of their programs outcomes build in the outcomes of the previous set. Goals are consistent throughout; to build young leaders, promote healthy bodies and minds, contribute to the positive identity of children and youth, create neighborhood connectiveness and opportunities for contribution, develop and nurture healthy relationships.<sup>141</sup>



Their philosophy is one rooted in the importance of food and youth to community. Strong youth are an essential element to a strong community, and the belief in the importance of local empowerment motivates Youth Farm to develop engaged citizens, grow local leaders and provide local food. Honoring diversity of communities is an important factor to building meaningful, long-term

connections, which include “connections between young people and their peers; youth and caring adults; youth and food; youth and community; youth and the earth”.<sup>142</sup>

Overall, Youth Farm values a sustainable and holistic approach to life and food, which is

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<sup>140</sup> Youth Farm, “History,” Youth Farm, <http://youthfarmmn.org/>.

<sup>141</sup> Youth Farm, “About Us,” <http://youthfarmmn.org/>.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

modeled by engaging youth in physical activity, relationships, growing and distributing healthy food.

*Our work results in youth who have demonstrated strong work skills and are engaged in real and meaningful community work, who eat and appreciate a variety of healthy foods, who understand and can teach the processes of growing produce, who are physically active, and who are surrounded by supportive adults and a more engaged community.<sup>143</sup>*

This work is carried out through four, free, year-round education and employment programs on nine different garden sites covering two acres of land in the city of Minneapolis. During each eight-week session, between 50-70 youth spend close to 20 hours a week growing, cooking, and participation in community based activities. A unique aspect of the program is the year-round age-appropriate programming. The youngest group of Youth Farmers, ranging from 9-11 years old, develops interpersonal skills while learning about gardening, cooking, and the impact food has on their lives. This program then leads into the All Stars, which adds skill development through leadership development, role modeling and cultural competency skills. It is also during this program that knowledge about food systems is introduced. Project LEAD is geared toward 14-18 year olds and offers employment opportunities while continuing to build on leadership, community organizing and mentorships skills. This program explores work skills and career options through community based projects, and involvement in developing food distribution plans for the food grown on the farm. The newest Youth Farm program is Farm Stewards group, which is geared towards 19-24 year olds. Here, previous program graduates are afforded post-high school employment and professional

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid.



development opportunities through work in the farm's greenhouses and hoop houses, managing year round crop production. They also engage with other youth by teaching classes and are involved in weekly youth development trainings so that they can eventually assume the place of seasonal adult staff hires for summer programming.<sup>144</sup>

Each year, Youth Farm grows over 11,000 pounds of produce. Much of this is grown with specific attention to cultural relevance, and distributed through a CSA, neighborhood market, and wholesale to retailers and restaurants.<sup>145</sup> Youth initiated food assessments have helped to create the Food from the Roots distribution program, which focuses on the local food system by engaging low-income residents through a neighborhood buying club that pools community resources. It also sells ethnically specific items to restaurants and grocery stores.

Understanding that place is an important component for both effective youth and food programming, Youth Farm is intentional about this neighborhood-based programming model. This means that youth who live in or go to school in the neighborhoods in which programs operate, receive priority registration and that these same youth are the ones who are helping to craft the food distribution plan that fits the needs of their neighborhood the most.

*Food from the Roots seeks to knit these two experiences (youth driven community food assessments and locally focused urban produce growing and distribution) together to improve access of culturally appropriate food to low-income*

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<sup>144</sup> Youth Farm, "Current Programs," <http://youthfarmmn.org/>.

<sup>145</sup> Why Hunger, Grassroots Action Network, *Growing Leaders, Growing Change: Youth and Urban Agriculture* (New York: Why Hunger, October 18, 2011), 5.

*communities, build youth entrepreneurial capacity, and prototype a new model for providing food to cultural communities.*<sup>146</sup>

This also means that Youth Farm is intentional about connecting with and maintaining community cultural traditions. Recognizing that the sweeping obesity and food insecurity epidemic affects minority and immigrant populations the hardest, Youth Farm aims to connect youth (many of whom fall within these populations) with fresh produce and a variety of cultural traditions by growing ingredients that play an important role in ethnic cuisine and teach the youth how to prepare a variety of ethnic dishes.

While the youth are the ambassadors of this new information, much of the process is aided by families and other community members who act as “hubs of neighborhood social networks”.<sup>147</sup> In this way, food serves as a vehicle for community building across racial, ethnic, and religious lines and fosters empowerment and relationship building across cultures and generations.

#### *b. Impacts, Challenges, Implications*

In 2008, researchers at University of Minnesota’s Healthy Youth Development/Prevention Research Center (PRC) began to evaluate Youth Farm as to whether its programs promoted the concept of youth “connectedness”.<sup>148</sup> Much of the research done at PRC explores adolescent health and the degree to which they have access to role models who help them develop a sense of resilience and the ability to make

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<sup>146</sup> Youth Farm, “Local Food Distribution,” <http://youthfarmmn.org/>.

<sup>147</sup> Why Hunger, *Growing Leaders, Growing Change*, 5.

<sup>148</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Cultivating Healthy Connections,” July 2010. <http://www.cdc.gov/prc/stories-prevention-research/stories/cultivating-healthy-connections.htm>.

positive changes in their community. Youth Farm leaders had always expressed the belief that their programs offered these connections to good nutrition and community, but there had never been a comprehensive study of whether the “ripple effects of how gardening can make a community healthier”.<sup>149</sup>

PRC initially developed a pre- and post- survey for participants, which then helped craft a follow up comparison survey that was delivered the following year. This was distributed to both a control group of youth who were not involved as well as those who were participating in Youth Farm.

*After the summer programs had ended, the PRC evaluators found the gardening skills of Youth Farm participants were greater –a statistically significant difference—than those in the comparison group...Youth Farm participants aged 12 to 14 years old showed statistically significant improvements in cooking skills, and after completing the program, first-time Youth Farm participants got more moderate exercise than they did before they started farming.<sup>150</sup>*

While survey demonstrated significant improvements in gardening and cooking knowledge areas, it demonstrated the difficulty in determining softer, more subtle gains like connectedness to adults and community.

There were good indications, however, that increases in connectedness did occur. Participants reported a change in perception about food and that growing food for one’s neighbors was important. Youth who learned to cook often went home to share this knowledge with families and prepare meals together.

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

As with most youth driven non-profit organizations, Youth Farm has its share of daily challenges, from funding to water management to physical space. The organization doesn't own any of its own space, so relies on partnerships for this. As a result, they are at the behest of those who donate these resources to them. Fortunately, the quality of these community partnerships is stable and supportive, thus allowing them to continue their work each year. These partnerships are also effective in helping Youth Farm to integrate into the community, and to afford youth the opportunity to develop best practices with organizations engaged in particular food and community building work. Youth Farm works extensively with neighborhood associations in each of their areas of operation, as well as a variety of local businesses, institutions, agencies, and non-profits to involve a robust array of stakeholders.

Assessing the impact of Youth Farm programs, particularly as it pertains to community connectedness, is challenging due to breadth of program's age range, as was revealed in the PRC study. Funding was only available to design a single survey to be used across all sectors of the program, thus needing to encompass youth aged 9-18. As a result, some of the developmental questions were often out of reach for the younger participants, and therefore did not yield adequate or sufficient responses.

Impact assessment is in fact something that Youth Farm aspires to tackle in a deeper more quantitative way, however, they are limited by cost and capacity. Taking on a broad based community assessment requires a great deal of time, manpower, and relationship

building, as Associate Director Amanda Stoecker explains. While this is best suited for someone within the organization to conduct, Youth Farm does not have the internal capacity to do this at the present time.

The close attention Youth Farm pays to community building through the lens of culture is also key to the success of this work. “The importance of their ‘place’ in the community and the sense of ‘place’ for the community itself is stressed within our model and is a key component of effective youth development and food distribution work.”<sup>151</sup> It is important that youth come from the neighborhoods in which Youth Farm work is being done so that they can help shape the distribution plan that fits their neighborhood needs most. By marrying the experience of youth driven community food assessments with culturally appropriate urban food production, Youth Farm demonstrates the importance of place in ABCD.

During the time in which the University of Minnesota was exploring youth connectedness, PRC also worked with Youth Farm youth to develop a youth action research project to assess food consumption patterns of parents in participating neighborhoods so as to develop appropriate crop plans and strategies to more effectively distribute fresh, local food to low-income neighborhoods. While the long-term assessment of these strategies and impact has not yet been done, this demonstrates a valuable tool for Youth Farm and the impact of its programs on the community. It also illustrates one of the ways in which they develop capacity and opportunities for young people.

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<sup>151</sup> Youth Farm, “Neighborhood Development,” <http://youthfarmmn.org/>.

This project demonstrates how similar types of youth action research projects, in partnership, can help to leverage resources that organizations do not have alone. It is a way for them to utilize internal capacity for relationship building to measure broader impact in a way that doesn't tax all of their own organizational resources. In this case, the youth themselves are the ones helping to drive the research.

## **V. Implications and Recommendations**

The change seen in these examples comes, not from one single sector, but rather from a diverse pattern of relationships. Borrowing the concept of a multiplier effect from the field of economics, we can break down the total impact of a particular program or relationship into three different categories:

- 1) Direct effects- the value of new production, outputs, additional jobs and labor income generated
- 2) Indirect effects- the measure of the total value of locally supplied inputs and services to the direct effects
- 3) Induced effects- accrued when workers in the direct and indirect sectors spend their earnings in the region

Utilized by the USDA in assessing the impact of local food on the economy, this input-output modeling "is one of the most accepted means of estimating economic impacts"

because it “provides a concise way of articulating interrelationships among industries and regions”.<sup>152</sup>

If we apply this similar framework to the discussion of impact in other sectors we can demonstrate the key element of interrelationships as integral to the input-output model. Effects of activities (economic, social, environmental, cultural) extend not only to that which is directly involved, but rather a chain reaction of activities that generate a larger effect than the original. Starting a farmers market in a community, for example, is not just about creating an access point to obtain food. It is also creating economic development opportunities for farmers, lowering the carbon footprint, increasing food security, and creating a space for social and cultural exchange. The direct effect is the local revenue generated, the indirect effects are the increased health of the families and the environment, and induced effects are represented by increased local spending and the prevalence of culturally relevant products at the market. Understanding that a healthy community is the sum of all of its parts- parts that don't operate in isolation from one another- we must also understand the broader impact many of these individual activities and outcomes share in determining impact.

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<sup>152</sup> USDA, *Local Food Systems*, 44.

Measuring Outcomes Framework for Food, Youth & Agriculture							
Activities	Outcomes	Measures	Impact	Effect	TFP	MAP	YF
Community needs assessment survey	Understanding of the landscape	Amount of feedback, diversity of respondents	Increased civic engagement, cultural sensitivity	Direct: understanding the landscape Indirect: relationship building Induced: civic engagement		X	
Farm/garden work	Job readiness, work ethic, motivation	Attendance	Increased civic engagement and economic development	Direct: build work ethic, food production Indirect: job readiness Induced: create strong workforce	X	X	X
Mobile markets and farm stands	Access to local food, local spending, increased jobs, decreased travel for distribution	Number of distribution outlets, pounds of produce sold, number of jobs, distance traveled from production to distribution	Increased food security, economic development, pollution reduction	Direct: food access Indirect: decreased pollution Induced: increased food security	X	X	X
Use of food vouchers	Ability to purchase healthy food	Number of customers, total federal nutrition benefits sales	Increased food security	Direct: food access Indirect: healthier eating Induced: increased food security	X	X	X
Youth participation in community/ resident based organizations	Respect and mutual understanding among youth and adults, opportunity	Number of youth involved, number of total community based organizations,	Increased civic engagement	Direct: youth involvement Indirect: support for organizations Induced: increased civic engagement	X	X	X
Cultural recipe sharing	Knowledge about other cultures	Number of attendees, number of recipes shared	Cultural awareness, diversity, community connectedness	Direct: increased cultural knowledge Indirect: family exposure Induced: community connectedness		X	X



Youth mentorship	College and job readiness, capacity building	Number of youth who graduate high school, number of youth who attend college, number of youth employed after high school	Increased civic engagement, increased economic development	Direct: personal and professional development Indirect: job/college placement Induced: workforce development	X	X	
Youth workshops: food systems, diversity, healthy eating	Knowledge about other cultures, knowledge about healthy nutrition and lifestyles, leadership skills	Number of youth who participate in workshops, number of youth-led workshops	Cultural awareness, diversity, community connectedness, increased health, change in eating habits	Direct: awareness Indirect: sharing with family Induced: community connectedness	X	X	X
Youth added value product development	Business and management skills, capacity building, opportunity	Number of products produced	Increased civic engagement and economic development	Direct: market products Indirect: skill development Induced: economic development		X	
Community meals	Relationship building between youth and community members	Number of people attending meals, number of conversations	Increased civic engagement	Direct: meal sharing Indirect: relationship building Induced: community connectedness	X	X	X
Training manuals, seminars, consulting work	Shared knowledge and best practices about youth development and urban agriculture work	Number of seminar participants, number of training manuals distributed, number of consulting projects	National recognition of youth development in urban agriculture as a viable model	Direct: knowledge sharing Indirect: Capacity building for other organizations Induced: creating national model	X	X	
Collaboration with community institutions and organizations	Broader program reach, capacity building, access to resources	Number of partnerships, number of new programs developed	Increased civic engagement, increased economic development	Direct: capacity and infrastructure support Indirect: broader reach Induced: increased civic engagement and economic development	X	X	X

Crop rotation, cover cropping	Increased land fertility	Annual produce yield	Environmental preservation and land stewardship	Direct: more production Indirect: increased food access Induced: improved fertility, increased food security	X		
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*i) Economic, Social, Environmental*

The Food Project, the Massachusetts Avenue Project, and Youth Farm have all made positive economic contributions to their respective communities. Through increased food production and distribution, support of federal nutrition assistance benefits, and job creation, each of these organizations has managed to tip the scale toward economic improvement in these local communities. Importantly, these organizations understand the importance of place, and determine distribution plans based upon the communities' needs. In some cases, like in the neighborhoods of Boston, that means farmers' markets, restaurants, hunger organizations, and affordable "farm to family" shares-, which are akin to low income, community supported agriculture shares. For MAP neighborhoods, the best way to increase food access comes in the form of farmers markets and a mobile mart. In Minneapolis, distribution is entirely differentiated by neighborhood, ranging from farmers markets, sales to supermarkets and restaurants, and varieties of food shares.

Socially, these organizations have exposed and developed young people to one another and to others in the community, with an emphasis across all three organizations on youth development as cornerstone. And while perhaps one of the more difficult areas to measure impact, TFP and MAP have been able to demonstrate individual participant

success as youth leave the program more confident, aware, and able to accept feedback, and are able to translate these skills beyond time in the program to other aspects of their lives. MAP also fosters a culture where youth are instrumental; giving them meaningful roles that enable them to feel empowered to carry out work. Youth Farm, as well as the others, drives this social impact through the motivation, capacity building, and development of opportunities for youth. These impacts taken together are a powerful combination for youth development and social change.

The environment is also an important component to the equation, given the nature of the type of work that is being done. These organizations are each seeking to effect change on the food system, and are doing so in ways that help to ameliorate aspects of the environment of these urban neighborhoods. Repurposing vacant lots, reducing pollution through local sales and distribution channels, increasing the fertility of the land; all are practices shared by these three organizations to decrease the harmful impact we are having on the environment. Developing a sense of land stewardship amongst these young people is helping to strengthen a core of conscientious leaders of the next generation. Even if only a fraction of them go on to continue this work directly, the vast majority will still maintain a level of stewardship beyond that of the average citizen, simply due to their increased awareness and understanding.

## *ii) Cultural*

Each of these organizations approaches culture and diversity in a different way. TFP is intentional about bringing together incredibly disparate groups of youth (socio-

economically, geographically, and culturally) in an intensive work period. Here, youth interact in meaningful and authentic ways, with the farm as the level playing field, and workshops and trainings the continuous hurdles. The program encourages growth by learning to cope with the tensions this diversity can cause. And while all of these activities and experiences are instrumental in developing new perspectives and attitude changes over the course of a summer, it is often difficult for many of these youth to sustain that level of interaction over the long-term once they return to their respective communities, many of which are far apart. While the experience itself helps shape how many of these young people view themselves and the world, it is often difficult for them to know what to do with this new found knowledge and comfort once the program is over. Once youth return to their communities and are no longer surrounded or supported by those who share these views, it is often easier to return to the status quo.

MAP youth come primarily from the city of Buffalo, most of whom live in the West Side neighborhood. While still an incredibly diverse population, youth here do not necessarily encounter the same geographic barriers to maintaining and continuing to engage with diversity as youth who attend TFP do. Diversity training is woven into the program and participants are also exposed to cultural differences through community meals. Bringing culinary traditions from home allows for youth and the broader community of parents and others, to interact and share in the cultural learning; something that can continue beyond the scope of the program.

Youth Farm taps into this broader community for cultural learning and diversity awareness as well. Their emphasis on relationship development through the sharing of food and recipes invites family members in as guest chefs and encourages in the sharing of various culinary traditions. Youth Farm is also committed to developing the youth from the each of its five neighborhoods, which maintains a culture whereby the youth are working amongst their very own neighbors, something easier to maintain and foster once participation in the program has ended.

### *iii) Partnerships*

As is evidenced in each case study example, partnerships are key to success as well as to measuring impact. For many organizations, capacity and funding is limited, so effective, long-term and system wide evaluations are not feasible. Instead, programs measure individual outcomes and lower hanging fruit. Pre- and post- tests can evaluate knowledge and skills gained, food production data indicates increased availability of local food in a neighborhood, but they examine individual outcomes and not the overall program goal of community impact. To do this requires more resources- financial and personnel-, which can be accessed more easily through partnerships.

TFP was able to leverage its analysis of individual impacts through the work of Brigham Nahas Associates, MAP continues to make significant inroads in neighborhood assessments in order to inform programming through the partnership with the University of Buffalo's Dr. Samina Raja, and Youth Farm was able to begin preliminary explorations of the measure of connectivity due to evaluations by the University of

Minnesota's Healthy Youth Development/Prevention Research Center. In each case, these youth and urban agriculture organizations were able to tap into a broader network of resources and expertise offered by these institutions, something that proved essential to this level of data gathering.

*iv) Outcome Measurement*

And yet, even here, the need for more research extends beyond these specific studies. Each of them revealed significant limitations to the findings. TFP was able to assess individual outcomes, but a longitudinal study that looks at other sources for perspectives could add more dimensions that would capture changes over time. This might involve adding a control comparison group, similar to what PRC used in their evaluation of Youth Farm programs. This could include youth not involved in farming programs, as well as, parents, siblings, teachers and future employers. By using these groups as a counterpoint for TFP participants, a more representative sampling would help to determine the ripple effect of impacts as a result of TFP.

MAP has been embarking upon a nine-year community assessment with Dr. Samina Raja of the University of Buffalo. Dr. Raja's work focuses heavily on community food systems and policy; particularly in how public health is affected by built and food environments. Dr. Raja has performed a comprehensive community needs assessment of the Buffalo food system called the Food for Growth Study, which has helped to bring food security to light as a social and economic issue. With this work forthcoming, MAP

demonstrates its commitment to working in partnership with other community resources and institutions in order to make improvements to programs and the food system.

The Prevention Research Center's evaluation of the Youth Farm was more closely aligned to the goal of determining the broader community impact, but it still wasn't able to fully measure the soft outcomes of connectivity. The scope of the assessment revealed the need for a differentiated and age appropriate survey to be used with participating youth, which would better reflect developmental outcomes. This means that a broader pool of participants must be included in the survey- parents, teachers, other community members,- in order to more accurately reflect the levels of impact.

Many of these engagements with institutions have enabled these organizations to achieve national recognition for their work. The ripple effects of their impact vary in degree, but each demonstrates how the case for youth development in urban agriculture needs to be made. TFP has often been touted as one of the pioneering models for youth development in urban agriculture. It has served as an inspiration and has helped launch countless other programs across the country, MAP included. TFP also helped start the Rooted in Community Network in 1997, which was born out of a national conference focused on empowering young people in urban agriculture and food security. This grassroots network of over 75 organizations, engages in information exchange and conferences that allow for youth to gain skills and knowledge to advocate for themselves and their communities.

Additionally, TFP was one of the inspirations for the creation of the USDA Community Food Projects granting program and has since been the recipient of federal funding over the course of the grant program's inception in 1996. More recently, following a visit to The Food Project in 2010 by the Secretary of Health and Human Services, Kathleen Sibelius, the Obama administration selected TFP to receive \$600,000 in additional grant funding, further demonstrating it as a nationally recognized model and leader in this field.

MAP has found national acclaim as well, having been named one of nine organizations to receive the Harry Chapin Self Reliance Award from the World Hunger Year Organization and the Harry Chapin Foundation. It was also recognized as one of the most innovative food systems development models by the 11<sup>th</sup> Hour Project and Good Food Movement in 2011, whose Ecological Agriculture granting program seeks to reform agriculture by building local food systems through long-term movement building.

Like TFP, and the MAP, Youth Farm has also made waves beyond its immediate community. WhyHunger is a leading organization that seeks to build the movement "to end hunger and poverty by connecting people to nutritious, affordable food and by supporting grassroots solutions that inspire self-reliance and community empowerment."<sup>153</sup> In 2011, they recognized Youth Farm as one of four model programs for youth and urban agriculture in *Growing Leaders, Growing Change: Youth and Urban Agriculture*.

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<sup>153</sup> WhyHunger, "About Us," <http://www.whyhunger.org/about/whatWeDo>.



While further exploration needs to be had to support empirical impact data, there are a number of important and relevant relationships and processes found in each of these examples that can offer insight to shaping successful urban agriculture youth development programs.

- 1) **The Farm:** In each of these cases, food serves as the common denominator and the medium through which this work is carried out; the farm levels the playing field and allows entry for all those participating regardless of background or experience. Urban agriculture programs must feed the local community and well as the local economy.
- 2) **Motivation, Capacity, Opportunity:** Applying the three principles of effective Youth Action is what allows for meaningful youth participation in each of these programs. Programs that incorporate these aspects allow for youth to engage more deeply, responsibly, and strategically in practical and concrete ways.
- 3) **Partnerships:** The success of any urban agriculture youth development program is contingent upon its ability to leverage resources. This means developing relationships with the community and other institutions that can offer access and capacity in ways a single organization cannot otherwise support. Partnerships can help to gain entry, trust, and ultimately a strong infrastructure to support the work being done.
- 4) **Understanding of place:** Tied into partnerships, understanding the landscape is perhaps the first and arguably the most important step in any community development effort. Programs that position culture and environment as paramount

serve a better chance of success and sustainability. This means rooting program efforts in the community; allowing for the community itself to steer the direction and shape.

To create and measure true community impact, multiple community stakeholders must participate and be considered. Youth development in urban agriculture offers more than the sum of its parts. Civically engaged youth who are connected with community institutions build strong individuals as well as strong communities. Urban agriculture improves the economic and environmental viability of cities. Food invites social and cultural sharing, awareness and growth. Each of these areas contributes to one or multiple sectors of a healthy community, yet taken together community development hits on all cylinders.

## **VI. Conclusion**

Over the course of the last half-century and more, we have been on a path towards exhaustion. The world we live in is one that has limits and must deal with inputs and outputs in equal measure in order to survive. Yet a breakdown in social capital, a reliance on an industrial food system, and a lack of opportunities for youth have contributed to a climate of insustainability; our social, economic, environmental and cultural sectors are out of whack- desperately in need of repair. Should we continue on this path, we are destined for Wendell Berry's "tyranny" of human nature and limitlessness.<sup>154</sup>

A variety of efforts are being made to reset community equilibrium; some of the most innovative are exploring the notion that community is built upon two centerpieces: youth

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<sup>154</sup> Wendell Berry, *Art of the Commonplace*, 202.

and food. While these case studies, The Food Project, Massachusetts Avenue Project, and Youth Farm, demonstrate success on the ground in three major urban areas, they are not a comprehensive list. Nor do they enlist all of the strategies found in this field of community development. But they represent a starting point.

In order to change the conversation about food and community, we must look to the models that are working. Exploring the effect of youth development in urban agriculture on community change, we can see the powerful individual impact these programs have from a youth development standpoint. Urban agriculture has also been explored as a positive indicator for community change, and has demonstrated to be an effective medium from which to apply these youth development principles. Strong correlations suggest that there is merit to the notion that taken together specifically, youth development and urban agriculture create a recipe for positive community change. What is required to determine this causal linkage is a longitudinal study of based community impact.

Youth development in urban agriculture is not merely another part in the solution; it is a missing link to fully ecologically sound communities. It both builds young people into engaged, knowledgeable, and conscientious citizens while building communities through relationships and food security.

We must think big, and loud, and bold. Leveraging our resources and recognizing that the health of a community relies on the health of all of its sectors is imperative. Ours is a

broken food system and a sense of community that is falling by the wayside. Across culture and generations, food brings people together. Nurturing and growing these two elements of food and community requires participation from multiple stakeholders, as well as an understanding that context is so important. Strategies, activities, success and impact are in large part determined by place. We must understand the cultural landscape in order to affect change in any sector, and giving communities the tools and resources to develop this for themselves is essential. As facilitators and solution seekers, we must not attempt to provide all of the answers, but rather ask the right questions so that people can discover the answers themselves. The guiding principle should be the solutions horizon; not a specific end, but something we are constantly moving towards.