



Community Gardens Mitigate Hunger and Malnutrition

Community Gardens already combat hunger in several unique ways by providing land for people to grow their own food in community with others.

- 1) Growing one's own produce means that there is more cash on hand to purchase food or other household necessities without compromising nutritional intake.
- 2) Growing produce in a community garden mean that the lessons of fresh produce are not limited to an individual's backyard but are available to the neighborhood. Children are curious about gardening and often learn by watching, asking questions, and becoming involved. Studies show that children who participate in growing their food are more likely to eat the vegetables they grow and thus begin to develop healthy food habits. Many adults also benefit from growing within a community garden, often learning how to do it for the first time, or picking up growing and preparing tips from others. The community garden is an informal schoolroom for gardeners and visitors to learn about fresh produce from the seed to the table.
- 3) Low-income elders are at high risk of malnutrition or under-nutrition not only due to severely limited household incomes that limit access to fresh produce, which is a key diet component, particularly for elders. As we grow older, our bodies require fewer calories but still require the same amount of nutrition – fresh produce, being highly-nutritious yet low in calories, is a vital component of an elderly diet, reducing the risk of and impact of chronic illness and symptoms. Equally important for maintaining good nutrition for elders, is being connected to a community. Many studies show that social alienation leads to loss of appetite or poor food choices. The community garden provides elders with a community of people with whom to socialize and often with multiple generations.
- 4) Often gardeners feed more people than themselves, informally distributing food to neighbors, friends and families in need. The anecdotal evidence is overwhelming. The Redeemer Arms community garden grows food and distributes it to the entire housing facility, but the gardeners do not track the amount.
- 5) Community gardens give high-rise residents an opportunity to garden. Many immigrant and low-income families live in subsidized multiple-housing units and have no nearby access to land to garden. Gardening Matters supports the development of community gardens and last year, worked with Minneapolis public housing to create and sustain community gardens on their land. Increasingly, we find that public housing and schools are interested in creating sustainable community gardens for the social and health benefits of gardening.
- 6) Thirteen community gardens in Minneapolis and St. Paul already formally distribute fresh produce to a local foodshelf. Foodshelves are not likely to purchase fresh produce, despite its health benefits, due to its relatively high cost and the fact that it is prone to spoilage. Fresh produce is a welcome donation, giving diabetic foodshelf clients a real choice among all the other highly-processed options (highly-processed foods are relatively cheaper to stock in both cost and shelf-life, but they are typically high in fat, sugar, and/or salt).