

## **Food for Thought: The Social Impact of Community Gardens in the Greater Cleveland Area**

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### **Abstract**

While the benefits of healthy eating and green space development have been well documented, the social impact of urban and community gardens remain less studied. This paper explores the social and cultural effects of urban gardening in the greater Cleveland area. Gardening is shown to have a multitude of motivating factors, including economic, environmental, political, social, and nutritional. While analyzing the impact that gardens have on community building, identity, and food security, some authors claim that the gardeners themselves are preoccupied with the economic impact of their actions. Perversely, this leads readers to the conclusion that poor people or people of color are only interested in gardening for its dollar value. Following this argument, more affluent gardeners have the security to ignore the economic impact and focus only on furthering an environmentalist agenda. Such authors presume that utilitarian function and environmentalist ideology are mutually exclusive, but my own fieldwork showed that many gardeners actively combine these ideas. This paper intends to convey the complexity of use, function, and intent in these communal spaces, filling an existing gap in our understanding of their social impact.

### **Introduction**

Food and foodways are important keys to cultural identity. The way that parents feed their children reflects their ideology, their cultural heritage, and their economic means. Yet, a growing body of research shows that Americans, especially urban, low-income individuals, as well as people of color, have become disconnected from their food. Family dinners have been replaced by microwave dinners, home food with fast food, and markets with grocery store chains. The Centers for Disease Control (2009) reports that African Americans have a fifty-one percent higher prevalence of obesity than Caucasians, while Hispanics have a twenty-one percent higher prevalence. Recently, American consumers have discovered that much of the industrial and fast food production is not only unhealthy, but also socially and environmentally detrimental. However, this paper is not an indictment of food producers or eating habits. Rather, it investigates a method of combating this potentially destructive lifestyle: community and urban gardens.

Community gardens are especially interesting for anthropologists as they provide a space for social interaction. Gardeners belong to a community that often includes a diverse demographic of race, age, sex, religion, and tradition. Gardens often host community events, provide safe spaces for children, and, perhaps most importantly, simply provide an opportunity for people to socialize with each other. By providing communal space they encourage interaction and sustain a community's values. Older gardeners use the space to pass on farming techniques or recipes to younger members. This paper investigates community gardens through an anthropological lens. As such, it focuses on motivations and intents, the perception of the garden by the community it serves, the use of gardens as social spaces, and the effect of gardening on food politics. Here, food politics refers to the ethical, political, and ideological concerns that affect food decisions by consumers. By choosing to buy local or organic, individuals engage in food politics and support a system of farming that keeps money in the community, eschews chemicals, and promotes environmental sustainability. By choosing to buy industrial or fast food, they support a system with a very different ideology. Many food decisions are not so deliberate but are based on simple convenience or cost. Yet when people choose food to identify with an ideology, they politicize that decision. The diversity of community gardens demands that a diverse approach be taken to

understand them. Just as every gardener has an opinion on proper planting or harvesting, so too do they describe a myriad of reasons for taking part in community foodways.

### **Competing Discourses in Community Garden Research**

The structure of community garden sites is as diverse as the people who compose them. In this paper, I will focus on four types of community gardens although many more exist: individual-plot gardens, communal-plot gardens, Community Supported Agriculture, and outreach gardens. In individual-plot gardens, individuals rent plots from a central authority that owns land. The money buys communal seeds, mulch, soil, tools, and other garden necessities. Individuals grow their own food alongside other gardeners while the garden itself grows some communal products. In communal-plot gardens, all land products grown there are shared. Because there are no individual plots, plants are divided according to membership in the garden. Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) groups connect farmers with non-farming consumers. Individuals buy shares in the CSA and meet at a central location to pick up their weekly produce allotment. Produce is paid for in advance, and all of the food is recently harvested and locally grown. Although CSAs are not gardens per se, they do provide a communal space and expose consumers to fresh food. By fresh food, I refer to products sold within a few days of being harvested, which tends to sacrifice variety and choice at the expense of seasonal availability. To keep providing the diversity and quantity consumers expect, supermarkets must ship and truck seasonal food from its source, lengthening the time between harvest and consumption to maintain variety. The last garden type is outreach gardens, in which community organizations build open gardens on their premises. School, business, and church gardens can be seen as community outreach gardens.

Although the environmental movement has given community (and especially urban) gardening new publicity as a sustainable and environmentally friendly alternative to petroleum intensive, large scale commercial food processing facilities, such gardens have existed in various forms throughout America's history. Subsistence gardening, in which farmers grow cash crops and produce, has survived since the country's founding. In many instances, community gardening is less a 'return to the land' than a revitalization of a well-established process. However, the intentions and ideologies guiding community gardens have changed significantly over time.

The most consistent gardening rationale given to contemporary researchers has become more pressing in the current financial climate: gardening saves money. As shown in the current and historical literature the economic benefits of community gardens and CSAs underlie the vast majority of garden initiatives. In the Cleveland area gardens that I studied, gardeners saw their efforts as supplementing their income in the recession. From a city planning perspective, gardens can offer many of the same economic benefits as parks. Not only can they transform a vacant lot into a community space and statistically reduce social costs, but evidence points to a positive relationship between proximity to community gardens and property value (Mikolajewski 2002). A recent study by Vicki Been and Ioan Voicu (2006) found that New York City gardens had a statistically significant positive impact on residential property within 1000 feet of the garden, an impact that increased over time. More importantly, this impact was highest in the lowest income neighborhoods studied.

Gardens are economically advantageous for private use as well. With a relatively small input, gardeners can make large returns. A 1991 survey of Newark gardens saw that vegetable gardens produced an average of \$504 worth of produce with a \$25 investment (Patel 1991). In low-income areas, particularly cities, gardens have filled a necessary gap in fresh, healthy, and affordable food (Pena 2005). Even though food insecurity continues among these communities, gardens help to make food available, sometimes generating literally tons of food (Mikolajewski 2002). Gardens enable communities to produce their own food at a fraction of the cost of produce in a supermarket (Ferris, Norman, and Sempik 2002). Because CSAs deliver fresh, local, and often organic food at relatively low prices, consumers save money on comparable produce. New studies appreciate the benefits in social service costs as well: by staying active in the garden and practicing better nutrition with fresh produce, gardeners reduce their heart disease, type two diabetes, and obesity, saving on medical care (Bellows 2003). While most use gardens to supplement their food purchases, some have created small economies by selling to neighbors and community members (McMillian 2008).

By reading about community garden projects, one senses that money is the chief motivator for undertaking an agriculture program. For many gardeners, saving money is an important underlying reason for gardening. In addition, this factor is easily quantifiable, and because of the impressive numbers it can generate positive publicity for community gardens. However, the economy is only part of their complex social impact. While analyzing the impact that gardens have on community building, identity, and food security, some authors claim that the gardeners themselves are preoccupied with the economic impact of their actions. Several scholars (Schmelzkopf 1995, Von Hassell 2002, Pena 2005, O'Neal 2009) describe the existing tensions between gardeners and the greater environmental movement. Much of this tension can be class and racially motivated, as low-income gardeners tend to be people of color or poorer while environmental leaders tend to be Caucasian or wealthier. Some research notes that gardeners feel marginalized by environmental leaders, and often exist on the periphery of this 'white movement'.

By casting people of color or low-income gardeners as wise investors, researchers imply that those demographics are uninterested in the non-economic aspects of gardening. Perversely, this leads readers to the conclusion that poor people are only interested in gardening for its dollar value. On the other end of the spectrum, more affluent gardeners have the security to ignore the economic impact and focus only on furthering an environmentalist agenda (O'Neal 2009). Such authors presume that utilitarian function and environmentalist ideology are mutually exclusive. These were not the dynamics I encountered in my own fieldwork. The idea of saving money is pervasive across socioeconomic lines, especially in the wake of the 2008-9 recession. At the same time, gardeners, especially urban gardeners, are acutely aware of their environmental and social impact. Gardens keep money within the community, beautify community space, and contrast the urban blight that characterizes low-income urban areas. Many gardens use organic and environmentally safe techniques, so that food can be eaten fresh from the soil. By creating a dichotomy between socially and environmentally aware activists and community gardeners, scholars make the unfair presumption that low-income gardeners cannot think beyond their wallets.

Food security is one intersection between social or environmental justice and community gardening. According to Mark Winne, author of *Closing the Food Gap* (2008), over ten percent of the American population is food insecure. This population has no reliable source of food, their food is detrimental to their long-term health, and they cannot be sure when or where their next meal will come. Winne claims that the problem results from government cuts in social spending, and the migration of supermarkets from the cities to the suburbs. As grocery stores followed 'white flight' out of cities, they left small shops with few competitors with little room to expand to the retail size of their suburban counterparts. As a result of low competition, higher food prices, and the inefficiency of shipping fresh food into the city, prices increased but quality diminished. Inner city supermarkets have become inadequate for meeting the needs of low-income families. Small and poorly stocked, they offer few fresh vegetables and even fewer nutritional options. Cheap or fast food options abound, in part because of the low cost and convenience. Because large supermarkets can make more money in the suburbs than cities, most city groceries remain relatively small while the food production system favors economies of scale. As city groceries closed or raised prices, the resulting gap created so-called food desert where nutritious food became either too expensive for residents or too difficult to seek out. The physical difficulty of shopping where the food is fresh and inexpensive perpetuates food insecurity.

Winne suggests that gardens can be part of the solution to this societal problem. The principle problem of food insecurity is one of access; supermarkets believe that suburban shopping centers are safer investments than low-income communities, so more expensive and lower quality stores prevail in the suburbs. Winne describes a general trend in which organic, local, and fresh food is perceived as 'white' or, more accurately, upper class. Not only is nutritious and fresh food expensive and difficult to obtain in urban areas, but some view eating these foods as 'acting white' and denying one's own cultural food traditions. Gardens and CSAs create access in food deserts, supporting diverse and atypical diets. This conscious societal restructuring shows the depth of food politics. In this framework eating, growing, and buying food can all be political acts. Buying industrially produced food is a vote of support for the current system, along with the unsustainable and potentially dangerous consequences of American food

production. On the other hand, each purchase of local and 'responsibly' produced food supports local business, the organic movement, personal health, and sustainable development.

Authors including Winne and Michael Pollan, author of several popular works on food including *The Botany of Desire* (2002) and *The Omnivore's Dilemma* (2002), have suggested that gardening and farming affect food politics. Gardening and working to produce one's own food create a tangible connection to produce. Through this connection, people become more invested in their food choices. Studies have shown that gardeners are more likely to choose fresh and healthy food over fast and non-nutritious food. This stems in part from a more personal engagement with one's nourishment: after growing one's own potatoes, one finds it more difficult to eat factory made potato chips. This difficulty stems from a dislike of corporate policies from their environmental impact to their effect on social injustice, but also from a dislike of corporate food itself. Many gardeners report that the food simply tastes better when it is grown local and served fresh. A growing body of research suggests that non-industrial food is also healthier and more nutritious (Bellows 2003).

Environmentalism manifests itself differently in varying communities. For some, community gardens are one facet of the movement toward sustainable development. By replacing oil intensive industrial food with organic, local food, they are helping combat climate change and environmental degradation. But for others, the gardens offer an opportunity to spend time outdoors working with soil, plants, and animals. This can be especially important for urban gardeners who feel disconnected from the natural world (Smith 2009). As beautification projects, gardens transform public spaces into green sanctuaries where participants can enhance their spiritual and physiological well being (Von Hassell 2002). Gardens expose people to a natural environment surrounding them with green rather than urban blight. Through sensible farming techniques like composting, gardens reduce waste and encourage creative recycling. The very desire to engage in gardening and spend time growing food or flowers reflects a deeper connection to the greenspace. Despite a feeling of alienation from the greater environmental movement, many small community and urban gardens share its ideological tenets.

As social spaces, gardens perform many of the same functions as parks. Garden parties and workdays serve as socializing opportunities. As community spaces, people feel comfortable meeting and interacting there. Because these areas are well staffed with adults, parents see gardens as safe spaces for children (Von Hassell 2002, Schmelzkopf 1995). Most gardens explicitly ban drug use allowing adults to keep their children busy, outside, safe, and out of trouble. In lieu of or in addition to other public spaces and parks gardens provide space for parades and ceremonies that support and 'bless' the space. Some people report that they would not be able to eat traditional foods or herbs without gardens. Urban gardening is especially important to maintaining transnational ties despite assimilation. Members of the Los Angeles South Central garden, claimed by a number of Hispanic groups, reported that the garden provides a tangible link to food and growing practices while filling a need for spices and vegetables not found in typical American stores (Pena 2005). Because gardening appeals to people across demographic lines, community gardens can increase the interactions between people who would not normally meet or socialize. Older members of the community work alongside younger members, and all members can be welcoming to people across racial, religious, or ethnic boundaries (Bellows 2003, Winne 2008). Finally, gardening can be a simple hobby. Overwhelmingly respondents tell social scientists that they simply enjoy gardening. These benefits have proven to be pervasive through time. A 1933 report on Cleveland public gardens names many of the health, social, and environmental benefits mentioned by researchers and gardeners today (Patterson 1933). Despite spasmodic support from city officials and policymakers, dedicated groups of people worked together to provide lasting social and economic relief during the Great Depression.

### **Primary Fieldwork in the Greater Cleveland Area**

Each author has their own agenda in promoting one of the above theories in urban and community garden research. Economists focus on the property values and the emerging markets, sociologists may focus on gardens' effects on crime or community building, nutritionists on the food produced, urban scientists on the regenerative effects, and the list continues. As an anthropologist, I will try to apply my findings at each field site within this cross-disciplinary milieu focusing on the motivations behind

gardening and general perceptions of the space. My fieldwork consisted of day trips and meetings with gardeners over eight weeks. I worked in several gardens including community and urban locations to observe the diversity and complexity of these sites. In gardening at various sites in and around Cleveland, Ohio, I observed general trends of the cultural importance placed on these spaces by the people working in them. Owing partly to necessity and to my own wishes, I conducted research as a volunteer gardener. Not surprisingly I found that most gardeners were happy to talk with me after I promised them a free day's labor. The ethnographic sketches below are based on interviews and fieldwork from June 1<sup>st</sup> to July 26<sup>th</sup> 2009.

### **The Kentucky Garden**

One of Cleveland's oldest urban gardens, the Kentucky Garden, lies at West 38<sup>th</sup> street and Franklin Boulevard. The garden encompasses about a quarter of a city block and provides for almost one hundred members. Gardeners pay for their plots, maintain them, and claim exclusive ownership over the plants produced there. The plots vary in size, location, and cost depending on personal commitment. Plots can measure from ten feet by five feet to twenty feet by ten feet, with a few areas devoted to even larger projects. The nominal fee, between five and twenty dollars a year, helps maintain the property. Plot ownership entitles members to a variety of free plant starts, garden tools, water, dirt, mulch, and compost. In return shareholders must pay the rental fee, contribute a few hours of volunteer work over the season, and abide by the garden rules. These rules stipulate some common courtesies like cleanliness and proper care of children, ban items like alcohol, drugs, and firearms, and promote organic gardening techniques.

The garden provides a space for socialization and nurtures personal development. Gardening is highly creative in that each year the conditions for growth are completely different and the gardener must adapt to their new surroundings. More experienced gardeners maintain their status in this community because their knowledge can help the newer members have successful yields. The skill and chance in gardening is a shared experience creating a bond between the members of this group. The urban development group in the area used the garden as a way to help children stay active, eat well, and keep out of trouble. Parents and adult leaders noted that the garden provides supervision and instruction in a nurturing and pleasant environment.

Within the greater community of Cleveland, these garden hosts a smaller but equally diverse community based on individual hard work, community building, and food. It provides an opportunity for different kinds of people to interact by creating a hierarchy stripped of socioeconomic status; in the garden experience is key. Everyone recognizes the economic and health benefits from planting and harvesting. The garden also provides a relief from the surrounding city as a space where the community can feel comfortable and productive outside. By bringing fresh food to the middle of the city, gardens like this greatly improve access to fresh food. Vacant lots are becoming more common in Cleveland because of the housing crisis. Rather than seeing these lots become sites of urban blight or sites for drug dealers, gardeners like Mrs. Smith argue "every vacant lot they need to put a garden because the people need the food. This is the time that people need the food."

### **The City Fresh CSA**

CityFresh is a nonprofit CSA that services the greater Cleveland area. Founded as part of the New Agrarian Center, which seeks to promote environmental sustainability and reduce food insecurity in Northeast Ohio, CityFresh connects small rural farmers directly with urban and suburban consumers. CityFresh offers a family share for twenty four dollars, a single share for twelve dollars, and a senior share for five dollars. In addition, customers who meet income guidelines can receive half price shares. The organization was designed to bring food to those in needs, and thus depends on middle and upper class consumers to keep running. Volunteers' staff pickup sites called Fresh Stops, take money, keep the books, count and display the vegetables, and clean each site.

After each visit to the CSA I compared the prices of the vegetables against their generic counterparts in the local IGA supermarket. Without fail the CSA prices beat that of the grocery store. Had I compared

the relative costs of the store's local and organic vegetables, the gap would have increased. Furthermore, the grocery store did not even offer many of the vegetables available through CityFresh including kholarabi, garlic scape, and fresh herbs. Initiatives like CityFresh increase access to fresh and organic produce while simultaneously lowering the cost of these services to their customers. This CSA increases urban access and lowers costs for Cleveland's consumers.

The consistent workers are mostly women of color representing a wide range of ethnicity, religion, and income level while the shareholders tended to be Caucasian, middle class women. Each week, women outnumbered men almost two to one. Many carried Whole Foods shopping bags to hold their vegetables and they treated the stop like any other supermarket. Across demographics shareholders seemed genuinely interested in the story behind their food, a definite break from the patterns described by food authors like Michael Pollan (2006) or Mark Winne (2008). By buying through the CSA the shareholders support organic and local farmers while lowering the average cost of these products and increasing their availability to people in need. As CityFresh continues to grow in popularity, the staff hopes to expand their outreach and continue to unite farmers with eaters.

### **The George Jones Memorial Farm**

The George Jones Memorial Farm in Oberlin stands as a testament to the success and potential of sustainable agriculture. This community farm covers seventy acres, although only three of those are intensively farmed. The farm hosts a few full time employees but relies heavily on volunteers and student interns. Because it is as much a learning environment and experiment as a commercial enterprise, students, camps, farming projects, and workshops all pass through regularly.

Although the farm staff is mostly white the farm serves a much larger and more diverse community. Visitors, volunteers, and consumers vary across demographics. The farm is not a purely commercial enterprise and most workers and interns are paid minimum wage and supplement their income with farm food and a practical education in sustainable farming methods. As an organic farm using permaculture methods the Jones Farm offers these people the chance to completely reject large-scale commercial food operations and encourage others to do so in the process. The Jones Farm is an attempt to create and encourage a new way of living – a sort of utopian agrarianism in which food is both environmentally sustainable and readily available to those who will work for it. I must emphasize that these undercurrents do not affect their productivity, as the farm's output is real and effective.

Despite their utopian agrarianism they remain highly practical enjoying gardening, being outside, supporting the social and environmental justice aspects of the farm, and benefiting from the food grown there. There is no conflict between environmental idealism, and functional food collection and education. The farm has a thriving CSA and boasts a few highly productive acres that allow it to serve an increasing community in and outside Oberlin. As a practical classroom the farm offers a number of camps, courses, and classes justifying Oberlin College's subsidies. Because the interns and volunteers are not directly tied to the financial success of the site, economy is considered mostly in terms of helping others and keeping the embodiment of their food politics running. Many firmly believe that organic and permaculture farming can be a tool to stave off the threats of climate change and global food insecurity. Some of the workers even criticize the farm as not 'green' enough. While conventional farms give one the sensation of controlled nature, the Jones farm staff embraces a different relationship. The adjacent forest and wetlands stand as a constant reminder that the farmers only borrow land from the wilderness.

### **The Garden at the 2100 Lakeside Men's Shelter**

The 2100 Lakeside Men's Shelter is Ohio's largest homeless shelter. Only three blocks from the highway, the shelter lies on a poorly paved street among vacant lots. Broken glass and trash cover the streets while the asphalt barely covers the brick below it. The shelter offers classes, medical consultation, employment and housing placement, and addiction assistance. Although it is associated with the Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry and scripture adorns the wall, the directors do not proselytize aggressively. Rather, they emphasize self improvement and a quick socioeconomic recovery. The

recent economic downturn has made this difficult for many residents. Many of these men are laborers, cooks, construction workers, and others near the bottom of the work hierarchy with jobs that lack security. Although many had well-paying jobs before the recession a decline in consumption new building projects has left these men economically stranded.

Many of the volunteers enjoy gardening and landscaping as a passion or a hobby. Although the environment does not allow them to forget the urban landscape, it does provide a brief escape. When asked, the men did not seem particularly interested in the environmental ramifications of their actions, at least not in terms of sustainability or permaculture design. However, their desire to work outside and experience greenspace shows a commitment to the basic tenets of environmentalism.

The garden allows these men to fulfill their work requirements and keep busy. In some cases the men may even earn some money by working in the garden. This money helps the men to be more self-sufficient and provides valuable job experience for a demographic that has particularly difficulty with finding employment. The garden serves a similar function to prison gardens (Sneed 1997). Through this work the men can keep busy, feel valuable, and assume leadership positions. The work provides a job, a purpose, and allows them to keep active. This sense of purpose is important as one man told me “when we sit around here, we feel like bums”. The garden work improves this self-perception.

This garden creates an outlet for personal involvement and control in a repressive environment. In addition, it facilitates job training, a chance for activity, and even monetary compensation. By providing greenspace it transforms quintessential urban blight into a self-made symbol of beauty and purpose. By working in the garden the men of 2100 Lakeside contribute to their society and become leaders. Most importantly, the shelter organizers and residents use this space to prove their worth to a city that has failed and overlooked them.

### **Conclusion**

Community gardens are astounding in their complexity and diversity. The comments, emotions, and interactions I witnessed speak to the multiplicity of uses in each garden. Simultaneously they can be functional money-savers and food producers, spaces for exercise and fresh air, centers for socializing or networking, and the physical embodiment of one's food politics. They foster personal and communal growth by providing a framework within which a community can participate in a shared experience, interact in an atypical environment, and contribute to a body of shared knowledge. While I found a few trends that linked the sites, each trend was expressed within the unique framework of a specific garden and gardeners.

First, I observed that the desire for functional output and environmentalism are not mutually exclusive. While the literature may suggest that more affluent gardeners use the space to show support for manifestations of the permaculture movement, I found that the utilitarian desire for saving money and producing good food prevailed across demographics. In addition, low-income gardeners recognize the social and political ramifications of their actions. At each site gardeners identified both the benefits of food production and of additional greenspace. At the 2100 Lakeside Men's Shelter, the least affluent demographic group I studied, the residents saw gardening as a way to keep busy, fill volunteer hours, and get job experience. But they also recognized that their efforts beautified their environment and transformed the litter, pollution, and blight that surround them. The members of the Kentucky Garden accept organic farming rules because they make sense for this small-scale production. Not only do the participants enjoy the economic benefit of buying fewer groceries, but they also like the idea of eating healthily straight from the garden plot. As one man in the suggested, if the gardeners wanted to eat chemical-laden food from far away, they would simply go to the store. Shoppers at the Urban Community School CSA can benefit from substantial savings on organic produce, but they choose to shop at CityFresh to support local farmers. Even at the Jones Farm where the staff embraces the idea of living an alternative lifestyle, the farmers go to work each morning to provide for their families, housemates, and the local community. Based on my fieldwork, none of these communities saw a dichotomy between upper class environmentalism and low-income thrift. Environmentalism need not refer to the group of activists committed to utopian agrarianism. Anyone who dedicates their time to creating life and

communal greenspace in cities, chooses to spend their time outside out of a desire to feel closer to the natural world, or gains a serious understanding of plants and growing methods should be considered an environmentalist.

Second, gardening reflects and helps shape personal identity. Like the art and ritual Malve Von Hassell (2002) describes in New York's Lower East Side, I observed that art and garden design figured heavily into the Kentucky Garden in Cleveland. In this community one's plot reflects their commitment to the garden and shows their personality and creativity. At the George Jones Farm the staff and volunteers take pride in a communal identity – one of sustainable living, group values, and social and environmental outreach. At the 2100 Lakeside Garden the men could reflect on their efforts and recognize that despite their socioeconomic status, they had a positive impact on their community. By making this contribution they could improve their self-image and challenge their internalized social stigmas against the homeless or unemployed. I observed that gardeners cement their food politics through these sites and the CSA. Working in a garden that requires organic methods makes the participants aware of their food choices. When they shop elsewhere they carry these values with them, raising a skeptical eye both to the questionable quality of non-organic food and to the high cost of industrially produced organic food. Through the CityFresh CSA people interested in supporting local and organic farmers can purchase their produce without having to leave the city and seek them out directly. In this way CSA programs make food politics accessible and practical. Through its subsidies and coupon programs CityFresh takes the extra step of mitigating the high cost of local and organic food, making food politics themselves accessible.

Third, by linking organizers with socially conscious people garden initiatives provide a social space that fosters networking and activism. As participants learn more about the greater effect of urban and community gardens, from decreasing food insecurity to helping keep money within their community, they become increasingly willing to devote their time to environmental and social justice efforts. Garden volunteers at the men's shelter were recruited for other landscaping projects giving them more time outside, more autonomy and respect in the community, and more job experience. Some of the Kentucky gardeners used the site to experiment with permaculture techniques. Because of the community's willingness to help fellow gardeners and share their knowledge these methods can be constantly refined and improved. Along the way farmers swap manuals, literature, suggestions, and experience increasing the community's shared knowledge. The CityFresh volunteers were recruited as consumers, and they now hand out flyers advertising local farmers and farmers markets, donate food to food banks, offer courses on nutrition and cooking, and encourage volunteering at many of the areas humanitarian groups in the area. Additionally, the conversational environment of the Fresh Stop ensures that the community stays well aware of any opportunities for activism. The Jones farm functions similarly giving Oberlin's activists a welcoming place to meet and interact and allowing burgeoning volunteers to connect with organizers.

While these spaces could be examined through a variety of disciplines anthropology is well suited to examine the effects of urban and community gardens, because it allows researchers to examine the holistic effect of these spaces. Part sociology, economics, and environmental science, community and urban gardens cannot be understood without examining their use and purpose for real people. Rather than focus on one of these at the exclusion of others, anthropologists can use ethnography to convey the complexity of use in these communal spaces, filling an existing gap in our understanding of their social impact, views on their functional purpose, and the layers of meaning that connect them.

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