

Linking Emergency Food Providers to Community Gardening and Urban Agriculture in the City of Chicago



Figure 1: Image of Monarch Community Garden. Image retrieved from <http://www.flickr.com/photos/61548427@N03/9370430960/>.

About La Casa Norte:

La Casa Norte (LCN) is a non-profit organization based in Chicago. LCN's mission is "to serve youth and families confronting homelessness. We provide access to stable housing and deliver comprehensive services that act as a catalyst to transform lives and communities."¹ While based in Humboldt Park, the organization serves clients in over 43 Chicagoland zip codes. The organization provides an array of housing programs, including emergency, transitional and scattered site permanent supportive housing, as well as case management, advocacy, various support services, and engages in outreach to youth and families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Their vision statement is "La Casa Norte dreams of a world where all people have dignity, communities thrive and everyone belongs."²

About the Northwest Food Partners Network:

The Northwest Food Partners Network (NFPN) is a coalition of different emergency food providers and other organizations in the northwest Chicago neighborhoods of Humboldt Park, Logan Square, Hermosa, Avondale, West Town, and Belmont Cragin. The coalition works on three main levels: 1) coalition building between community organizations and residents, 2) policy research and advocacy, and 3) direct service programming.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report investigates different community gardening and urban agriculture models in the city of Chicago in an effort to better link La Casa Norte (LCN) clients to local food sources and to tackle the central problem of food insecurity and overall poverty. Based on in-depth research of 12 different models in the city of Chicago, this report discloses both the challenges and possibilities that come with partnering with community gardens and urban farms. This report is specifically tailored to LCN and other emergency food providers (EFPs) that want to link clients to local food sources. Furthermore, since LCN works specifically with youth and families confronting homelessness, this report takes into account the needs of people tackling housing insecurity.

Analysis of the different community gardening models provided the following recommendations for LCN and other EFPs: 1) Set up a clear volunteer coordination schedule, 2) Coordinate gleaned efforts, 3) Develop a clear mission, 4) Communicate client feedback to community gardens leaders, 5) Remember the educational potential of gardening, 6) Be honest and reflexive about limitations, and 7) Make gardening as easy as possible for clients to get involved. In-depth analysis in the body of this report goes into more detail.

Similarly, the analysis of six different urban agriculture models provided the following recommendations: 1) Recognize that the central emphasis of many urban farms is sales and jobs, 2) Develop a referral system with urban farms to better link clients to jobs, 3) Find untapped resources for food donations, 4) Develop farmers and maintain an anti-racism framework, 5) Lead by example when it comes to promoting healthy eating among youth, and 6) Make food access relevant to other social justice movements. Further analysis is found in the report.

Lastly, LCN staff and client input is included in this report to gauge both internal limitations and the interest level of potential participants for future food programming. Staff input reflected the challenges that food programming at LCN currently faces, including clients' busy schedules and transportation limitations. However, staff input also reflected how severe of a problem food insecurity is among some LCN clients. Therefore, food programming at LCN is still crucial to address this need. Client interviews reflected great interest in a youth cooking program, while gardening and agriculture was not as popular. Prior to investing time and resources into a gardening/agriculture program, LCN must first re-gauge youth interest before beginning a community or gardening program of its own.

INTRODUCTION

THE PROBLEM(S)

Food insecurity— essentially not knowing where your next meal is coming from— is an alarming problem in the United States. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), there are two distinctions within food insecurity. First there is low food security, which includes “[r]eports of reduced quality, variety, or desirability of diet [and] [l]ittle or no indication of reduced food intake.”³ More severely, very low food insecurity is characterized by “[r]eports of multiple indications of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake”.⁴ In total, 49 million Americans lived in food insecure households in 2012, and 12.4 million of those individuals live in households with very low food security.⁵

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the largest federal program that addresses food insecurity. Previously known as food stamps, SNAP is administered by the USDA and reaches around 48 million food insecure individuals⁶. However, only 57% of food insecure households are eligible for the program.⁷ Many Americans thus utilize different resources to meet their dietary needs, including emergency food providers (EFPs). EFPs include pantries and other sites where people can access canned goods, hot meals and sometimes even fresh produce.

In Illinois, a state where 15.2% of its population is food insecure, this problem clearly resonates.⁸ Many food insecure households utilize EFPs to supplement SNAP, or use it as their only source of food. In Cook County alone, estimates show that over 678,000 people in relied on EFPs.⁹ People from all kinds of backgrounds access at EFPs; not all clients are necessarily confronting homelessness. However, this population is definitely a large constituent of EFPs.

Emergency Food Providers, as their name implies, work with individuals who are in immediate need of food. The nature of EFP work is time-consuming, speedy, and under pressure. Furthermore, many EFPs rely greatly on non-perishable goods like canned food, sparking criticism for handing out “unsaleable” or unfavorable items.¹⁰ EFPs indeed deal with a variety of criticism, including the need to distribute more fresh produce.

A RESPONSE: GARDENING AND AGRICULTURE

Some EFPs, including La Casa Norte, are taking on the difficult task of linking their clients to local fresh food sources. Local food movements in the city of Chicago include the use of community gardening and urban farms to supply people with produce.

Beyond access to healthy food, community gardening and urban agriculture can serve as paths toward a more food sovereign community. Food sovereignty “implies particular rights of individuals and communities to define their own food system, to produce food in a safe manner, to regulate production, and to choose their own level of self-reliance, rather than these being set by larger national and international organizations.”¹¹ Food sovereignty is important to ensure that community members are the ones making decisions about the food they consume.

PURPOSE and RELEVANCE

Given that EFPs tackle food insecurity and more generally poverty, any efforts to link EFP clients to local food movements are important insofar as they address these problems. Simply being more involved in community gardens and urban farms isn't necessarily an end goal in itself. Linking LCN clients to community gardens/urban farms in Chicago is crucial for food security but also as a response to economic, environmental, and racial injustice—it's important to not lose sight of that. As Allen and Wilson (2008) argue, "Local food movements tend to move solutions without an analysis of cause, thus potentially landing them in the position of reinscribing or advancing privilege even though this is not their intention".¹²

Thus, EFPs involvement in community gardening and urban agriculture must not neglect the fact that these partnerships are developed to address greater systemic problems that clients face. Any effort to link to community gardens or urban farms is rooted in a deeper effort for justice and empowerment. Additionally, this is aligned with LCN's core values, including the belief that when people have access to resources and opportunities, they have the power to create change within themselves, their families, and their communities.

Furthermore, this report aims to find latent benefits in community gardening and urban agriculture beyond production of food. While community gardens and urban farms are mainly known for yielding produce, they also hold other possibilities for community development. For example, a community garden might serve as an educational tool for children, while an urban agriculture program can serve as a source of employment for previously incarcerated individuals. This report helps us rethink the benefits of partnerships with community gardens and urban farms beyond the collection of produce.

GOALS OF THIS REPORT

- Provide a comparison of six community gardening and six urban agriculture models in the city of Chicago and analyze what each program has to offer LCN and other EFPs.
- Make recommendations to LCN about how to move forward with its food security projects as the organization expands.
- Include the opinions of staff and clients to ensure that recommendations take into account these different perspectives.

ANTI-RACISM FRAMEWORK

As Slocum (2006) notes: "Preliminary evidence reveals that organizational leaders in community food identify corporate power as the object of struggle. Their comfort level, moreover, with the concepts of class and poverty is much higher than with racism".¹³ The 'food movement' indeed has received criticism, and fairly so, for a lack of engagement in questions of race. This disconnect becomes even more lucid when one takes into account that some of the most food insecure neighborhoods are largely communities of color. In the south and west sides of Chicago,

largely African-American and Latino communities, the rates of food insecurity are considerably higher.¹⁴

Furthermore, as Block (2011) argues: “[j]ust because food is locally produced does not mean it is ethically produced, and community control may simply reinforce existing class and racial divisions.”¹⁵ This criticism is especially relevant for urban farms that do not address race as a central issue for food insecurity in Chicago. An anti-racism framework is necessary to assure that community gardeners and urban farmers aren’t reinforcing systems of oppression, including racism.

METHODOLOGY

This report was informed primarily by interviews with different community gardening and urban agriculture leaders in the city of Chicago. Those interviewed were asked about the history and structure of their program, who participates in the manual work and who has primary access to the food produced, any donation efforts and, if applicable, their work with homeless populations. Whenever possible, interviews were conducted on-site to actually see the layout of the garden or farm.

Since LCN already has established relationships with some gardens, such as Glencoe Community Garden and Monarch Community Garden, those gardens were prioritized for this analysis. The remaining gardens were selected because they presented a variety of models. The urban agriculture programs were all south or west side Chicago programs, all in largely communities of color. They differ, however, in their approach to food production and community involvement. The following analysis of these different programs will demonstrate the variety that exists within urban agriculture and community gardening in the city of Chicago.

LCN staff and client feedback was solicited through an interview process. Staff members were asked questions during a personal interview about the intersection of their work and the food programming at LCN. Youth clients also gave feedback through interviews that were conducted focus group style. Every person interviewed, from gardening/agriculture leaders to staff to clients, signed a consent form in order to be interviewed.

PART I: COMMUNITY GARDENING AND URBAN AGRICULTURE ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION to COMMUNITY GARDENS and URBAN AGRICULTURE

According to the city of Chicago's Office of Housing and Economic Development, the difference between community gardens and urban agriculture is as follows:

“Community gardens are typically owned or managed by public entities, civic organizations or community-based organizations and maintained by volunteers. Plants grown on site are intended for person use, for charity, or for community beautification purposes. Urban farms grow food that is intended to be sold, either on a nonprofit or for-profit basis. Due to their commercial purpose, urban farms require a business license.”¹⁶

While there are considerable differences between the two models, the differences aren't always clear cut. The following research shows the variety of different community gardens and urban farms in the city of Chicago. While some may adhere to the strict definition of a community garden or an urban farm, others follow different combinations of models. In-depth analysis of six community gardens and six urban agriculture programs follows, as well as discussion and recommendations for LCN and other EFPs.

IN DEPTH: COMMUNITY GARDENING IN CHICAGO

SUMMARY: The community gardens represented in this report include: Monarch Community Garden, El Parquito, Glencoe Community Garden, McCormick-Tribune YMCA, WEFARM America, and Enlace Chicago. The following sections are based on interviews with community gardening leaders in Chicago who shared information about their respective gardens and their views on engaging with youth who are confronting homelessness, LCN's primary population. Community gardening models vary greatly in the following sample and attest to the fact that the definition of a 'community garden' isn't necessarily clear cut.

1. Monarch Community Garden

Monarch Community Garden is located at 1050 N. California Avenue. The garden is comprised of many different plots scattered throughout, while a children's garden full of sunflowers takes part in the center. According to garden member, Laura Oliver, Monarch began as a research project that aimed to look at "the impact of community gardens on low-income Hispanic populations at a high risk of metabolic disorders." Metabolic disorders include diabetes, a disorder that definitely resonates with Humboldt Park community members. Humboldt Park has one of the highest diabetes rates in Chicago and in the United States.¹⁷ While the garden no longer has this medical research mission, it nonetheless maintains its dedication to the Humboldt Park community. In order to lease a plot, applicants must live within a small radius of the garden. "You have to live in Humboldt Park; basically, you have to be able to either walk or bike here," Laura said. Additionally, Monarch has organized community give-aways of produce, which were made possible through the white rock gleaning program—a way to get salvage produce from plots into the hands of Humboldt Park community members. This idea was borrowed from Robert Nevel with KAM Isaiah Israel in Hyde Park.

Monarch Garden is held together by a very informal organizational structure. The garden is volunteer run and community run; no one person is in charge. When asked about how youth, particularly, could become involved with Monarch, Laura adds: "We'd like to get more youth involved in gardening...it is difficult though because we are volunteer based." A garden's ability to get youth involved in gardening becomes difficult when it is run by volunteers and there is no assigned role to volunteer coordination. With regards to working with youth who are homeless, specifically, Laura voiced some of the barriers that may arise when working with this group. "With a population that is homeless, there is a huge barrier to community gardens because of limited stability. You have to have some stability for a plot." Indeed, leasing a plot requires regular maintenance of it, in addition to the 2014 yearly contribution of \$70 for a large plot and \$35 for a smaller plot. Financial stability is needed to tend a community garden—something that comes into conflict with many of La Casa Norte's clients who deal with housing insecurity.

Laura did, however, suggest some strategies for engaging youth in gardening. "Sometimes people aren't aware that they're passionate about something," she tells. "You need to be repetitive." Connecting youth who are homeless to gardening comes with its challenges, but continuously exposing youth to gardening can serve as a way to engage them in this arena.

2. El Parquito

El Parquito is located at 1630 N. Richmond Street. This garden is unique from many other gardens in that there's no fence surrounding it; every plot is out in the open. The garden is currently on its fourth growing season. Currently, about 8-10 active gardeners do most of the gardening at El Parquito. The garden has a very loose organizational structure, which, according to Tanja Dshida, can be both positive and negative. "We are very organized when it comes to our beekeeping class," says Tanja. "But when it comes to organizing volunteers, it is difficult when you have no clear structure."

In terms of the food that's grown, most of it is for active members in the garden. "We don't want people to be passive and just take; we want people to take ownership of this space," Tanja explains. With respect to working with folks who are confronting homelessness, Tanja explained that El Parquito is definitely open to working with this population, as long as it's brought up to garden members. "We'd have to discuss it as a group. We've had organizations that wanted to partner with us but they wanted us to go to board meetings and we didn't have time for that." If organizations want to partner with El Parquito, then they need to be proactive about reaching out the garden, preferably on workdays (currently on Saturdays and Sundays).

3. Glencoe Community Garden

Glencoe Community Garden is located in Glencoe Illinois, along the Green Bay Trail. The garden is very neat and picturesque with different plots, including a lowered plot for people who are disabled to garden. Glencoe Community Garden began as an initiative of the Am Shalom temple, also in Glencoe, for its 40th year anniversary. Through a partnership with the Glencoe Union Church, the Glencoe Community Garden is now up and running. "Most of the people involved are involved with the temple or the church," Rebecca Anderson notes. Rebecca is a farm manager for the garden, as well as a minister with the Glencoe Union Church.

The Glencoe Community Garden's model differs from that of other gardens in that all of the produce is donated to organizations. No plots are leased and no produce is kept by individual members. Produce gets distributed to EFPs like The Ark and A Just Harvest, making partnerships crucial for this distribution process. "What's ongoing in our work is the partnerships that we need to develop," Rebecca notes. These are necessary to ensure that there is no waste of produce once it's harvested.

For a garden that donates to EFPs, conflicts with crop selection are not uncommon. "We are also working on getting input from people on what they like," Rebecca adds. "For example, not everyone likes greens." Community gardens, like Glencoe, have the task of assessing what their recipients enjoy to eat. Rebecca continued: "We are also trying to grow more 'regular' vegetables. Of course, this is subjective. We also want a good quantity for the amount of space that we have."

Crop distribution is another concern. According to Rebecca, "[to donate produce] for an organization like GCFD [the Greater Chicago Food Depository], what we give is too little. For a pantry, we might drop off too much and folks aren't able to take it." The 'in-between' size of the garden makes it difficult to partner with either too large or too small of an organization.

4. McCormick Tribune YMCA

The McCormick Tribune YMCA of Metro Chicago is located at 1834 N. Lawndale Avenue. The “Y” also serves as a community center. Adriana Stanovici, Health and Wellness Manager of the Y, shares that “it is not just a space for folks to work out; it’s also there to give people a sense of community.” The YMCA has recently invested in green space, in the form of a community garden located in the back of the facility— a project was made possible by a grant from BlueCross/BlueShield. The YMCA garden differs from many others in that it is used primarily as an educational tool. As Adriana notes: “We want for the garden to be tactile and very open.” Its primary function isn’t to yield produce for individual plot leasers, but to teach visiting groups about gardening.

In terms of accommodations for garden visitors, Adriana voiced that the YMCA wants to be accessible for folks who are new to gardening and are possibly in the beginning stages. “We also like to plant things that you can eat raw and/or require little preparation,” she adds. This fits in with the garden’s mission of being an educational tool, rather than a site of production beds.

Adriana expressed that the YMCA is very open to working with youth: “We do put on workshops for the community and we are very open to input to help shape these.” In terms of working with youth who are homeless, specifically, Adriana noted that “this is a new intersection; homeless youth and community gardening.” She suggested that, as a means to get youth involved, staff members can ask youth for their feedback so that they can be part of the planning process and leadership. With respect to partnering, Adriana said that “partnerships are definitely a possibility with the YMCA. “We could partner with LCN to help us with our planting. We also have an outdoor stage that we can use for events.” Therefore, the Y offers both a venue for events and a space to learn about gardening.

5. WEFARM America

WEFARM is a community gardening model with a strong commitment to stakeholder input and involvement. The project was started around 6 years ago. It’s different from other gardens in that its function is to build infrastructure and provide support systems for community gardens. One of the WEFARM leaders, Margaret Catania, shares that “it is neither a non-profit nor a cooperative; it runs on more of a business model.” WEFARM’s office is located at the Green Exchange on 2545 W. Diversey Avenue and also has a lease on land at Monticello Garden, which is located at 2227 N. Monticello Avenue.

WEFARM has a strong commitment to improving soil quality, especially in areas where the soil is heavily polluted. “At the Monticello site, we did a lot of clean up,” Maggie shares. This remediation process is lengthy but very important to ensure that crops are growing in good soil. WEFARM has a strong commitment to develop gardening infrastructure that will yield healthy food for community members.

Margaret Catania of WEFARM indicated it doesn’t have a primary focus on donating food to non-profit organizations. However, WEFARM has donated to Black Oats in the past, an organization “dedicated to transforming the way people eat,” according to Maggie. Furthermore, the folks who are homeless are not necessarily a target population, though WEFARM does

partner with organizations that address such needs. “That is a central problem,” she adds. “How do we address those needs? We need partnerships to address those needs because that’s not what we do,” Margaret explains. WEFARM has developed partnerships with organizations like Eerie Family Health Center that provide different social services for those involved with WEFARM.

6. Enlace Chicago

Enlace is a community organization in Little Village, located at 2756 S. Harding Avenue. Little Village is a predominately a working-class Latino neighborhood in southwest Chicago. Enlace provides support through a variety of avenues, one of which is its Community and Economic Development division. Maria Herrera, who works under this division with their community gardening project, notes that gardeners don’t need to pay to be part of the program: “Gardeners have access to the food and they don’t have to rent the plots.” This differs from traditional community gardening models where gardeners have their assigned plot, for which they have to pay a yearly fee.

In terms of outreach to the Little Village community, Maria adds: “We promote our gardens and try to donate to people. We’re also planning on using the food for a nutrition education program.” Since Enlace has a strong commitment to community development, it’s no coincidence that their new community gardening program is focused on empowering Little Village residents.

DISCUSSION: COMMUNITY GARDENING IN CHICAGO

SUMMARY: Analysis of each community gardening model reveals the different challenges and benefits that come with potential partnerships. Overall, the fact that many gardens are volunteered may inhibit participation from LCN clients or other populations confronting homelessness. Furthermore, most gardens do not have the capacity to offer compensation for work. However, this does not mean that community gardens should be overlooked for future LCN programming. They still have the potential to offer other benefits, including educational opportunities and produce donations.

1. Monarch

One of the Monarch Community Garden's greatest strengths is its dedication to work with residents of the Humboldt Park community. As Laura Oliver noted, interested members must be able to walk or bike to the garden in order to lease a plot. This dedication to the local community is crucial because it allows for resources to remain in Humboldt Park, among residents who are some of the most food insecure folks of Chicago. In terms of limitations, the fact that Monarch is primarily volunteer run inhibits a formal volunteer coordination schedule. If LCN and other EFPs would like to get more youth involved in gardening by partnering with local gardens, then this capacity limitation of Monarch (and most community gardens) must be taken into consideration. Furthermore, the 'stability' component that Laura mentioned is needed for the care and maintenance of a plot comes into conflict with many LCN clients. Given the varying schedule of many folks who are confronting homeless, this regular time requirement is a hindrance to leasing a plot.

2. El Parquito

Similar to Monarch Community Garden, the informal organizational structure of El Parquito makes it difficult to coordinate any volunteer schedules with LCN clients. Given the limited capacity of gardens with a loose organization, potential partners like LCN would have to be proactive about developing ties. The planning would have to come from LCN staff and be accommodating to the schedules of El Parquito volunteers. However, Tanja Deshida did express openness to work with LCN youth, something that indicates the possibility of working together in the future.

3. Glencoe Community Garden

The Glencoe Community Garden already has an established partnership with LCN. During harvest season, the garden gives weekly donations to LCN—a huge benefit to the organization and its clients. The fact that Glencoe donates all of its produce makes this model differ from that of other community gardens, where produce is for those who leased a plot. This difference is especially beneficial to EFPs and organizations that work with homeless populations that rely heavily on donations.

The crop selection question was especially important to ask to Rebecca Anderson, the garden's farm manager. The garden has donated plenty of vegetables, some of which are popular with LCN clients and some of which are not. As Rebecca noted, they have a goal to grow more 'regular vegetables', yet this is hard to define. Assessing what is 'regular' and well-liked is a

difficult task for farm managers, yet it is crucial to ensure that recipients of the food will be receptive to it. LCN should engage in conversations with partners about clients' feedback regarding food donations to ensure that there is less of a disconnect. So far, Glencoe Community Garden has been very receptive to input and has solicited LCN's feedback about their produce donations.

4. McCormick Tribune YMCA

The model of the YMCA garden varies greatly from that of most community gardens. Given that it's used as an educational tool, the garden isn't necessarily focused on producing food or donating to EFPs. While this is a limitation for EFPs, the educational aspect of the Y's garden brings a new purpose to partnering with community gardens. The fact that plenty of youth eat processed foods and are disconnected from their food sources necessitates more education about agriculture. Therefore, a partnership with an educational garden like the Y's would be rooted in the intent to foster education, rather than to collect food for clients.

5. WEFARM America

Margaret Catania was transparent about the fact that WEFARM isn't focused primarily on donating food to other organizations, given that its greater mission is to provide people with the infrastructure to produce their own food. Furthermore, Margaret also shared that people who are homeless aren't necessarily a target population, though they partner with organizations that address those needs. She was very honest about the fact that WEFARM doesn't have the capacity to tackle housing insecurity issues. For a gardening program as grassroots as WEFARM, being this self-reflexive is important. Being aware of one's limitations as an organization is important to ensure the sustainability of the work. Furthermore, the organization serves as a mirror to organizations that are starting up and want to do work around gardening.

6. Enlace Chicago

Enlace is a community-based organization located in Chicago's Little Village neighborhood and with strong ties to the Latino community. The organization's community gardening efforts are exemplary in that the organization does not require that members pay for a plot. This ability allows for more inclusion of community members to get involved with gardening. This is something that LCN can learn from, since the plot fee is potentially a large hindrance for client involvement.

RECOMMENDATIONS: COMMUNITY GARDENING

When linking to community gardens:

- **Develop a program with a clear volunteer coordination schedule.** Given that many community gardens are run by volunteers themselves, setting up a system for outside volunteers is difficult. If LCN wants to link clients to community gardens, then it is up to LCN to work out a volunteer schedule with leaders of the community garden.
- **Coordinate gleaning efforts with gardening leaders.** Gleaning is a means to get salvage produce donations from different plots. If plot owners give consent, EFPs can possibly receive donations this way.
- **Have a clear mission.** Having a clear mission helps foster cohesion. Given that community gardens deal with a variety of barriers for unity, not being clear about one's intentions makes cohesion even more difficult.
- **Communicate client feedback to community gardens leaders.** Community gardening leaders have the power of deciding which crops to grow each season. If organizations like LCN serve as an intermediary between the garden and recipients of the food, then the preferences for produce can be communicated to those doing the growing.
- **Remember the educational potential of gardening.** While EFPs are in great need of food donations, partnerships with community gardens can sometimes offer other benefits. The educational aspect of some community gardens should not be overlooked.
- **Be honest and reflexive about limitations.** While partnering with community gardens is something to look forward to, it can also lead to an organization's resources being spread thin. Being honest about the time and financial commitments that come with partnerships is crucial.
- **Make gardening as easy as possible for clients to get involved.** There are many hindrances to get youth who are homeless involved in gardening, including but not limited to financial instability and lack of a constant schedule. Therefore, a program to get youth involved in gardening should address financial constraints, like the plot fee and transportation, so that youth can be more easily involved.

IN DEPTH: URBAN AGRICULTURE IN CHICAGO

SUMMARY: The urban agriculture models represented in this report include: City Farm, Growing Home, Heartland Alliance- Chicago FarmWorks, Growing Power, Chicago Botanic Gardens (specifically its Windy City Harvest Program), and Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos High School’s greenhouse program. Each section is based on interviews with urban agriculture leaders who shared information about their respective programs and their views on engaging with youth who are homeless. Most of the models focus on job training, crop production, and some also focus on education.

1. City Farm

City Farm runs under the Resource Center, a non-profit environmental education organization in Chicago. The organization has a few urban farms in city, one of which is located at the corner of 57th Street and Perry Avenue in the Washington Park neighborhood. According to David Durstewitz with City Farm, Washington Park is about 50% uninhabited and has limited fresh food sources: “You can’t really get fresh vegetables around here, and if you do, they’re not organic.” David advocates for what City Farm calls a “square mile sustainability model”, a way at looking at sustainability issues locally— within a square mile.

When asked about what vegetables are most famous in the area, David responded: “We sort of keep an informal tally of what people like. Collards, turnips, and mustard are big. This year, it’s been mainly tomatoes and okra.” While some produce remains in the Washington Park community, the majority gets distributed to businesses for sale. “We do sell about 75% of our produce to restaurants and what they usually want is onions, kale, and beets,” David notes. The crops that get sent off to restaurants tend to be different than those that remain in the Washington Park community, indicating somewhat of a disconnect between what gets sold and what local community members want.

In terms of donations, David voiced that, “if people come to us with no money, we give them seconds for free. It isn’t the best, but it’s still good quality.” With respect to offering more sustainable solutions to the Washington Park community, David added that City Farm “would like to be a job resource; anyone who is willing and able to work is someone that we would want here regularly.” Offering people part-time employment is one of the various ways in which City Farm is contributing to Washington Park.

2. Growing Home

Growing Home has its administrative office located at 2732 N. Clark Street, while its two urban farms are at 5814 S. Wood Street, in Chicago’s Englewood neighborhood. Growing Home also produces food for the city, though it is through a different model. “We’re a transitional jobs program that works with people who have barriers to employment,” Timothy Murakami said. Timothy, the farm manager for the Wood Street farm, noted that many of the folks working with them deal with a variety of issues, including housing insecurity, past incarceration, and substance abuse. Growing Home offers the opportunity of a transitional job that will allow participants to transition back into the workforce.

From the beginning, Timothy identified Growing Home as a transitional jobs program rather than an urban farm. “I think we really can’t talk about food and work separately,” Timothy noted, when speaking about Growing Home’s distinct take on urban farming. “Workers are held to the same standards as future jobs; they have to meet deadlines, be on time, have good attendance, and have a good work attitude.”

Growing Home began its relationship with the Englewood community in late 2006, when Team Englewood drafted a “Quality of Life” plan. This plan indicated that Englewood would be an urban agriculture district. Timothy notes: “There were two goals of production and education, and we’re different from many community gardens in that we’re focused on production.”

Growing Home has always had a strong commitment to people facing barriers, including housing insecurity. Timothy shares: “At one point, this program was geared toward people who were dealing with [homelessness]. Now, we say that we work with people with barriers. Homeless can be one of those, but it can also be previous incarceration, poverty, etc.” While the organization has moved beyond a mission of solely working with folks who are homeless to a broader mission of working with people with ‘barriers to employment’, it maintains its dedication to individuals who are marginalized.

Timothy also shared that most of their workers are referred from other agencies. “Most people are referred from partner agencies, usually social services agencies,” Timothy says. This potential for partnerships serves as a resource for La Casa Norte to connect our clients to jobs in the local food economy.

3. Heartland Alliance- Chicago FarmWorks

Heartland Alliance is an anti-poverty organization with headquarters in Chicago. The organization has been around for over 100 years. “We grew out of Traveler’s Aid, an organization that assisted travelers because back in those times, traveling was much harder,” Dave Schneider of Heartland Alliance explains. Dave shared that the organization has different programs throughout Chicago and in the world. One of its many local programs is Chicago FarmWorks. “Specifically for Chicago Farmworks, this is our first urban agriculture project,” Dave notes. “It is our first growing season, though we have been building the program for about two years.”

People who work at Farmworks are part of a transitional jobs program. “We have cohorts of ten people who are here for ten weeks,” Dave shares. “Everyone needs to be referred by an agency. We emphasize referrals because we want people who have an interest in this work. It’s not the most glamorous work; some people are drawn to it and some people aren’t.”

With respect to the decision-making behind crop selection, practicality is huge. Dave notes: “We grow a lot of shelf-stable crops. A lot of onions, potatoes, cabbage, beans, radishes, sweet potatoes, cucumber, and zucchini— as well as kale, spinach, and turnips.” Having shelf-stable crops is convenient for distribution to other organizations. “To distribute our food, we have a partnership with GCFD and the food goes to the Marillac House.” The ability to provide emergency food providers with shelf-stable crops is crucial to prevent waste of produce.

When asked about homelessness and whether or not it's an issue with Farmworks participants, Dave notes that they "try to not ask personal questions, but we know that we work with people with barriers to employment." In order to address homelessness in the East Garfield Park community, Dave adds that "it would be great to partner with organizations that work on these issues." Furthermore, "it would be great to have partners to donate to, and also partners that would refer clients to work with us."

In all, Farmworks is dedicated to working with members of the East Garfield Park community to get back into the workforce. As Dave candidly shared: "Our goal is to have those in our programs find full-time employment. Sometimes they quit because they found a job, and we love that." Enough said.

4. Growing Power

Growing Power's Chicago office is located at 3333 S. Iron Street, in the city's Bridgeport neighborhood. The organization was started in Milwaukee, Wisconsin by Will Allen in the early 1990's. The organization has a clear focus on youth empowerment and dismantling racism through the food system—an intent that the Growing Power is very clear about, according to Lauralyn Clawson, their youth education coordinator. She adds that with the organization "there's always been a great emphasis on dismantling racism, which is pretty unique of Growing Power. We're led by people of color and we're clear about our intent."

The program is also well known for its business edge. According to Lauralyn, "we're interested in developing new farmers; we're more entrepreneurial". She also shared that "the direction that we're interested in going is an entrepreneurial model that would allow for self-empowerment". The self-empowerment of participants is crucial for Growing Power.

In addition to its entrepreneurial focus, Growing Power also has a central commitment to youth. The Youth Corps program and Farm Internship program serve as pipelines to the organization and bring in about 220 students. Lauralyn shares: "In terms of the recruitment process, teens do a lot of self-recruitment; word of mouth is very important. Fostering a warm environment that is welcoming is paramount for the organization." Past participants serve as their best recruiters for youth.

Transportation is probably the biggest barrier for youth to participate in the different programs that Growing Power offers, though housing insecurity is also a concern. Because of this, Lauralyn expressed that it's crucial to compensate participants for their work: "A stipend is super important; it shows that we value their work." She adds: "I think it's also important to be transparent about your gains."

In terms of growth, Growing Power expressed an interest in developing more relationships with pantries. The organization doesn't have the greatest involvement in the realm of emergency food providers and can be better linked to such organizations.

5. Chicago Botanic Gardens

The Chicago Botanic Garden is located 1000 Lake Cook Road, in Glencoe. Its location 23 miles north of the Loop has been one of the primary reasons behind the organization's strong

commitment to community outreach. Patsy Benveniste, Vice President of Education and Community Programs, shared: “As you can tell, we are in a rich suburb that is far away; you need to make Metra or a car or bike here. Because of this reason, we have a big community outreach aspect, which started in 1978 with our horticulture program.”

With respect to her department, she shared: “Our primary focus is education; we’re educators. We think it’s important for our well-being. We also care strongly about youth leadership development.” The focus on youth led to a program called Green Youth Farm, which works with high school students. “The food industry tends to be more lenient with hiring people who have been to prison, so sometimes people in our programs end up getting jobs with our business partners,” Patsy adds. Another program in the department is Windy City Harvest, which works in partnership with the City Colleges of Chicago.

Windy City Harvest

Windy City Harvest began as a coalition of organizations in 2006, primarily as a way to give training opportunities for formerly incarcerated individuals. Angela Mason, who works for the Chicago Botanic Gardens, worked on the Windy City Harvest program for accreditation with the City Colleges of Chicago. The program now offers a six-month course/training, followed by a three-month fulltime internship. Most participants are qualified under the Workforce Reinvestment Act (WIA) for covered tuition.

In terms of the geographic location that most Windy City Harvest participants come from, Kelly Larsen, manager of the program, shared: “It’s a mix. I say that we’re in the middle of Pilsen and Little Village and only about 20% of those involved are from this area. Most of our participants are from the west and south side, though,” Kelly added. She also voiced some of the conflicts that their participants endure: “Housing and childcare are some of the biggest needs of our participants.” With respect to whether or not homelessness was an issue for participants, she shared: “For our transitional jobs component, yes. With our participants, there’s a lot of moving around.”

Given La Casa Norte’s needs as an EFP, Windy City Harvest was asked whether or not they donate produce to other organizations. “We change the amount; this year, a little less than 20% was given away,” Kelly shares. “We partner primarily with the Pilsen Wellness Center, a food pantry, with whom we’ve had a relationship since 2008, and in addition to giving food, we also pass on recipes,” Kelly adds.

With respect to working with youth, Kelly shared that they’ve picked up from different youth agriculture programs. WCH uses “straight talk”— a communications model used by the Food Project, an urban farm model in Boston. “Especially with our age group, we work on public speaking with them. We really work on their communication skills.” Communication with the youth is crucial to ensure stronger relationships.

In conclusion, Kelly’s colleague, Rosario Maldonado, shared some of her experiences of working with youth, specifically to get youth engaged in healthy eating:

Rosario’s suggestions:

- Make “healthy foods” natural in your cooking; don’t “make a big deal out of it”
- Add vegetables to foods that youth already know, like pasta
- Make dinners as nice as you can
- Take the cooking process into consideration before you grow crops
- Lead by example—and it’s important for these leaders to be in the age group of participants and someone from the local community
- Develop a food mentorship program where youth have a “food role model”

6. Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos High School

Campos High School is located at 2739 W. Division Street, right in the heart of Paseo Boricua, a corridor that is home to a vibrant Puerto Rican community. The high school engages in urban agriculture by having a greenhouse, located on the cafeteria’s roof. The produce gets used for both educational and production uses. “We spent the entire quarter on environmental justice,” Yamini Bala shared. Yamini is a science teacher at Campos High School and is one of the staff members in charge of the greenhouse. In terms of production, Yamini noted: “We have a part CSA, part co-op program called “canasta básica” that was started last year and is open to students and community members. We also have a goal to sell sofrito [a base for Puerto Rican cooking] and some of our produce gets sold at farmers’ markets.”

With respect to getting students interested in the work, Yamini notes that “some like the hands on work, and then there are some that don’t want to get their nails dirty.” Interest levels vary among the youth. Yamini points out: “I’ve noticed that ownership makes a big difference. For example, if the whole class plants a bed, they don’t really care—but if it’s their plant, it helps a lot.” This sense of ownership might serve as an engagement strategy for youth.

Certainly, having a greenhouse at a high school comes across some barriers. “A conflict we deal with is the fact that, since it’s mainly students and teachers doing the work, it becomes difficult when students change every four months.” This turn-over is a barrier for long term projects. However, the school is still working on teaching its students science through the greenhouse and in engaging with the broader community. “In terms of work with the community, sometimes the Boys and Girls Club visits the greenhouse afterschool,” Yamini tells. With respect to partnerships with organizations like La Casa Norte, she adds: “It would be great to partner, but security issues are something that would need to be figured out. It would be a lot easier to do something after hours.”

DISCUSSION: URBAN AGRICULTURE IN CHICAGO

SUMMARY: Like with the community gardening research, analysis of each urban agriculture model reveals the different challenges and benefits that come with potential partnerships. Overall, the fact that many urban farms focus on sales and job training has potential to link LCN clients to employment and entrepreneurial opportunities. At the same time, many urban farms do not necessarily have a donations model that would benefit EFPs that rely strongly on donations. However, many of the urban agriculture models in the city have a strong commitment to social justice and provide youth the opportunity to learn more about food production as it relates to greater movements for social justice.

1. City Farm

City Farm has a business model that aims to sell produce to restaurants. The farm does not have a strong emphasis on donating to EFPs, given that it runs on a “square mile sustainability model”, as David mentioned. However, the organization does hire temporary employees to work in farming. For any interested LCN clients, City Farm can serve as a source for part-time employment, though the distance from the northwest side to Washington Park is a potential barrier if accommodations for transportation are not provided. Furthermore, City Farm has the capacity to hire few employees at this time.

2. Growing Home

Growing Home has a clear intent about being a job training program. While the ‘food’ aspect of urban agriculture is definitely still present, the organization has a strong focus on getting folks back into the workforce, particularly folks facing different barriers rooted in poverty. The referral system that Growing Home utilizes to link to social services organizations is already established, something extremely beneficial to LCN. Furthermore, the work culture of Growing Home—being on time, having a positive work attitude, and so forth—serves as a model for job training programs that LCN might start up with youth. On another note, the organization doesn’t have the strongest emphasis on donating, so that may not be the direction in which to go with Growing Home.

3. Heartland Alliance- Chicago FarmWorks

While Heartland Alliance is a very large organization, its FarmWorks program is located in East Garfield Park, a location that is not very far for LCN clients who are staying in the northwest side. Like Growing Home, the organization is focused on providing transitional jobs for folks with barriers to employment. Furthermore, FarmWorks also has a strong emphasis on donating produce to organizations, primarily through a partnership with the Greater Chicago Food Depository (GCFD). Their dedication to grow shelf-stable crops also greatly benefits EFPs who struggle with refrigeration space for produce that wilts quickly. Therefore, LCN and other EFPs can benefit from potential donations (if partnerships are established), and from a job training program for clients who are in need of employment.

4. Growing Power

Growing Power’s intent of “dismantling racism through the food system” as Lauralyn Clawson described, is distinct from that of other urban agriculture models. The program is more

entrepreneurial than a job training program, as Growing Home and Heartland Alliance's Chicago Farmworks are. Additionally, Growing Home has a strong emphasis on recruiting youth to be part of their programs. Youth development is crucial to get a next generation of farmers up and running, and Growing Power is doing exactly that. On another note, while the organization does some donating, that's not its primary focus. For EFPs that want partnerships solely for food donations, Growing Power might not be the most fitting partner. However, if the intent is to get more youth interested in the food system and to utilize an anti-racism framework, then Growing Power would be a great fit.

5. Chicago Botanic Gardens

The Chicago Botanic Gardens deal with the central conflict of being geographically detached from much of the Chicago community. Because of this reason, the Chicago Botanic Gardens have a strong outreach component and a variety of programs located in different Chicago areas. Windy City Harvest, particularly, is a program that can benefit LCN and other organizations that want to link clients to urban agriculture. Additionally, the strong educational component is crucial for Windy City Harvest. The program is accredited through the City Colleges of Chicago and offers an internship component, in addition to the instruction received. This educational and professional opportunity is available for LCN clients and others who are interested in urban agriculture. On another note, Rosario Maldonado's recommendations to engage with youth by integrating healthy food into cooked meals, without making a "big deal out of it" is something to learn from. Her other suggestion to lead by example for healthy eating is essential, as is the need for these leaders to be folks that our clients can relate to. Given that so many of LCN's youth clients are men of color, this is really important to take into consideration.

6. Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos High School

The science curriculum of Campos High School, with a strong emphasis on urban agriculture and environmental justice, is distinct from many traditional curricula. The high school engages youth in a program that is both focused on education and production of food. A "canasta básica" program like that of Campos High School could be a way to get youth involved in distributing food for the Humboldt Park community on a local scale. Furthermore, the school is open to working with La Casa Norte youth, insofar as Campos High School receives a notice in advance and security measures are considered.

RECOMMENDATIONS: URBAN AGRICULTURE

When linking to urban farms:

- **Keep in mind that the central emphasis of many urban farms is sales and jobs.** The intent behind partnerships with urban farms is different from that of community gardens. Many urban agriculture models focus on production for sale, rather than a donations model. Furthermore, the work component is equally as important for urban farms, especially for those that identify as job training programs.
- **Developing a referral system with urban farms can better link clients to jobs.** Connections between LCN's employment specialist and those of different urban agriculture programs can help get LCN clients back on the job market.
- **While many urban farms focus on selling food, there is still potential for donations.** If EFPs do not have the capacity to link clients to job employment opportunities, most urban farms still expressed an interest in donating to pantries. There still may be some untapped potential to link EFPs to urban farms, especially to get salvage produce donations.
- **Developing farmers and having an anti-racism framework shouldn't be overlooked.** The leadership development aspect of agriculture programs, especially among youth, is essential to get a next generation of urban farmers. Furthermore, anti-racist practice is essential in any movement toward social justice. For an organization like LCN that works with many youth of color, an anti-racism lens can help better contextualize food insecurity and greater questions about poverty.
- **To get youth involved in 'healthy' eating, it's important to lead by example.** When 'teaching' about nutrition, there is clearly a power dynamic. It's important to acknowledge that communities already have knowledge about food and that we are not the experts. Furthermore, when getting youth interested in eating certain foods, it's important that staff be engaging and reflect the backgrounds of our clients.
- **Make food access relevant to other social justice movements.** An emphasis solely on food neglects greater discourse about the environment, economy, and other central issues related to food insecurity and poverty. While getting food donations are crucial, this should be separated from activism that tackles other forms of injustice.

PART II: STAFF AND CLIENT FEEDBACK

1. LCN STAFF INPUT: FOOD PROGRAMMING

SUMMARY: Staff members were interviewed to find out more about the intersection of LCN's current food programming and their respective programs. Responses to questions varied depending on their clients' distinct needs, but overall reflected the different conflicts that arise for emergency food distribution. Notwithstanding, most staff shared that food insecurity is a central problem for their clients, which underscores the importance of food programming at LCN. Furthermore, staff shared their thoughts on future food programming and offered suggestions for engagement. It is crucial to get staff input about their clients' relationship to current LCN efforts around food, given that this serves as a mirror for future efforts to link clients to community gardens and urban farms.

Shanavia Stevens- Emergency Beds

The Emergency Beds program at LCN is an overnight shelter for youth ages 18-24, based in the Logan Square neighborhood and located at 1940 W. California Avenue. The program coordinator, Shanavia Stevens, shared some of challenges with providing food for the youth: "Sometimes we bring food that the youth don't like, like falafel; they wouldn't even try it." In terms of youth interest in food programming, she adds that "some of them always talk about having a cook-off," but that LCN would have to offer some sort of incentive for a food program. "I understand the reward system," Shanavia adds. "It's necessary to encourage something."

Beatriz Albelo- Scattered Site

The Scattered Site program at LCN provides permanent supportive housing for families across Chicago and surrounding suburbs. The program coordinator, Beatriz Albelo, shared that clients come from many backgrounds and thus culturally appropriate food is crucial: "Ethnic food is very important. For example, many clients prefer the dried beans over the canned beans." Furthermore, "sometimes we give them [clients] the food and they don't know how to use it." In terms of challenges, Beatriz shared that "our clients are very scattered [as the name implies]. Most of our clients never come to the office." This presents a challenge for food programming that would require a visit to LCN. For a nutrition event on-site: "Transportation would be necessary, as well as a stipend."

Steve Zupin- Rapid Re-Housing

The Rapid Re-Housing program at LCN connects people who are currently homeless to rental assistance and housing locating services. Coordinator Steve Zupin shares: "You have to keep in mind that many of our clients work full-time jobs. In order to qualify for this program, they need to have some source of income. Many are really busy." This presents a challenge for food

programming with these clients. Nonetheless, food programming with Rapid Re-Housing is still important. “Clients have been complaining about the lack of food,” Steve adds. “We think a food basket would be great for folks as they’re getting settled into their new homes.”

Alex Diaz- Housing Department

The Housing Department works on delegating which housing locator any LCN client will use. With respect to food, coordinator Alex Diaz (known as Diaz) shared that clients are most interested in finding easy ways to access food: “They just want to know where the food banks are and about reasonable prices to buy food.” This is the central concern; any effort to bring out clients for other events would need accommodations. “People are not likely to come if there is no money,” Diaz shares. “Something like a gift card would be essential.” This suggestion is helpful for future programming, and Diaz also shared something else useful, with regard to his program: “Before we house any of our clients, we debrief them about the program that they’re in, as well as their rights and responsibilities as a tenant.” Given that some clients have been unsure about how to use the food that is distributed to them, explaining to clients what food they’re getting and how to cook it is important. This model of ‘debriefing’ can facilitate clients’ use of food.

Jodi Knafelc- Casa Corazon West Drop-In Center

The Casa Corazon West Drop-In Center is a safe space for youth ages 16-24 to spend time throughout the day. With regard to programming around food and nutrition, former coordinator Jodi Knafelc shared the following: “Many of our youth are used to patterns of eating unhealthy food. It also becomes habit. Therefore, I think nutrition would have to be subtly brought in.” With respect to participation in a future food program for youth, Jodi adds: “It really depends on the youth. I think some may have walls and guards up, but I think some will be willing to participate.” Youth would need to receive some kind of compensation for their participation. Jodi adds that “for our program, we offer youth bus cards in exchange for completing chores; maybe something like this could happen for your program.” Jodi also shared a poignant story about hunger and youth at the drop-in center. As a fun activity, staff had recently taken some youth to enjoy a baseball game. However, the ‘fun’ activity was not enjoyable for the youth; as Jodi shares, “[they] weren’t able to enjoy a Cubs game because they were so hungry.” This story points to the reality that hunger is for many youth who confront homelessness.

Jessica Jeremiah- Housing Advocacy

The Housing Advocacy team works on the case management for families and youth experiencing homelessness that are referred by the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). Coordinator Jessica Jeremiah shares: “Our clients need not just housing stability, but stability overall.” With respect to future food programming with her clients, Jessica noted that “we’ve given clients access to the garden before and I know there wasn’t a lot of turn out.” In order for a program to work, “both transportation and childcare would be necessary; we serve all of Chicago and neighboring Cook County suburbs, so many of our clients live far away.” While

transportation is a struggle, she does think that clients would participate if some sort of compensation was offered. “Our clients do anything for gift cards,” Jessica adds. Furthermore: “Many clients talk to us about how LINK [SNAP in Illinois] does not meet their needs; food is still more expensive.”

Kayla Cormier- Technology and Employment Specialist

LCN’s commitment to providing resources to clients is exemplified by providing employment opportunities and technology training. Technology and Employment Specialist, Kayla Cormier, works directly with clients who need help with resumes, computer skills, and practice with interviewing. When asked if she thought food jobs would be popular among clients, either in food preparation or in agriculture, she shared that “people come to us because they want any job available; they don’t come here asking for specific jobs, *per se*.” Kayla gave suggestions for starting up an LCN youth and food job program: “We should be background friendly and know that not everyone speaks English. It would also be great to not be super technology heavy.” Furthermore, she envisions that “even if it was something like a 3-6 month internship for them to get experience and have it be something to put on your resume,” that would already be great to get clients back on the job market. When asked about whether or not clients talk about food, Kayla shares: “Sometimes our clients can’t focus because they haven’t eaten.” Similar to Jodi’s story, this reflects the harsh reality that hunger is for some of LCN’s clients.

DISCUSSION: STAFF INPUT ABOUT FOOD PROGRAMMING

Staff’s input on food programming at LCN is essential to gauge the perception of current programs and to inform future programming that may include community gardening and urban agriculture. Furthermore, interviewing coordinators from different departments is beneficial because the needs and concerns of clients vary by program. While all LCN clients overwhelmingly deal with housing insecurity, some folks (like Rapid Re-Housing clients) already have employment and aren’t necessarily looking to be referred to food jobs. Furthermore, the schedule of these clients, and of clients with children, usually doesn’t offer much flexibility for participation in a food program. Thus, future food programming should look distinct for each program. For example, a food move-in basket is very helpful for folks getting settled into Scattered Site or Rapid Re-Housing, but not as much for some youth at Casa Corazon who may not currently have a place to stay.

TAKE-AWAYS: STAFF INPUT

From Staff Interviews:

- Offering compensation or some sort of incentive would be necessary for client participation in a food program.
- All food donations should be culturally appropriate.
- Offering food welcome baskets can help clients become situated in their new homes.
- Explaining to clients the food that they're receiving and how to prepare it is important to ensure that produce gets used.
- Clients are busy people, so make any food programming as easy as possible for successful participation.
- Subtly bring up nutrition to youth; do not be too overbearing with it.
- Accommodations for transportation and childcare are necessary for nutrition events at LCN.
- Linking clients to food jobs, either in growing or preparation, is great but clients also have other interests and are often interested in any job that's available.

2. CLIENT INPUT: INTEREST IN FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

SUMMARY: In order to gauge youth interest, clients utilizing the Casa Corazon Drop-In and Emergency Beds services (at 3543 W. North Avenue and 1940 N. California Avenue, respectively) were surveyed about the likelihood of their participation in a cooking and/or agriculture program at LCN. The surveys were administered through focus group interviews on-site, at both locations. Overall, youth shared a strong interest in cooking food over the production of food, which is aligned with LCN's current expansion plans. However, this does not mean that agriculture should be overlooked; LCN can foster interest by linking youth to different agriculture programs throughout Chicago before one day starting its own. Youth were also asked about what fruits and vegetables they enjoy eating, in order to communicate these preferences to current growers.

Casa Corazon West Drop-In Center (3543 W. North Avenue)

Interest in cooking food: 12 out of 13 participants said yes

Interest in growing food (gardening or agriculture): 5 out of 13 participants said yes

Lack of stipend would be a barrier for participation: 8 out of 13 participants said yes

Likes fresh fruits and vegetables: 13 out of 13 participants said yes

Favorite fruits: Strawberries, pineapple, bananas, apples, and grapes.

Favorite vegetables: Carrots, tomatoes, and broccoli.

Casa Corazon Emergency Beds (1940 N. California Avenue)

Interest in cooking food: 9 out of 11 participants said yes

Interest in growing food (gardening or agriculture): 4 out of 11 participants said yes

Lack of a stipend would be a barrier for participation: 2 out of 11 participants said yes

Likes fresh fruits and vegetables: 11 out of 11 participants said yes

Favorite fruits: Pineapple, watermelon, apples, grapes, and mangoes.

Favorite vegetables: Broccoli, carrots, and greens.

DISCUSSION: CLIENT INTEREST IN FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

Youth interviewed at both the Casa Corazon Drop-In Center and the Casa Corazon Emergency Beds Program expressed a stronger interest in cooking food rather than growing it. While some youth said that they'd be interested in a youth gardening program (5 out 13 for drop-in and 4 out of 11 for emergency beds), the majority were not interested. However, when it came to cooking, nearly everyone interviewed (12 out of 13 for drop-in and 9 out of 11 for emergency beds) said they would participate in a youth cooking program. These varying interests have implications for LCN's future programming around food security. Youth currently are not very interested in

growing food, which means that LCN would have to foster a greater interest in gardening and agriculture before moving in this direction.

The youth's clear interest in cooking is aligned with LCN's architectural plans for a future community center and housing development project. Currently, the plans show that LCN will have a café/teaching kitchen that allows for clients to cook on-site at LCN. Additionally, cooking demonstrations will be a possibility for LCN clients to learn new recipes but also share their knowledge and expertise about cooking. It is crucial to remember and honor the wisdom that community members already have with regard to the preparation of food. The café/teaching kitchen will thus be a site for growth and collaboration.

IMAGES: COMMUNITY CENTER AND HOUSING DEVELOPMENT PROJECT



Figure 2: Image of LCN's future teaching kitchen. This space would allow LCN clients to be agents in their food security by preparing their own meals and learning/sharing knowledge about cooking.

CAFE / TEACHING KITCHEN



Figure 3: Image of LCN's future food pantry. LCN clients will be able to choose the different foods that they want for their home. If better linked to community gardening and urban agriculture, LCN's pantry will also be able to offer fresh produce.



FOOD PANTRY



TAKE-AWAYS: CLIENT INPUT

From Client Interviews:

- Youth overwhelmingly enjoy eating fresh fruits and vegetables. Specifically, the youth listed many fruits that they enjoyed. While many gardens and farms grow vegetables, it would be nice to also grow some fruits that do not take that much space, or to get donations of fresh fruit from other urban farms/orchards in the Chicago.
- Given that cooking is very popular among the youth interviewed, LCN can capitalize on this interest by developing a youth cooking program, if the infrastructure and other sources of funding were guaranteed. This looks like a possibility with the current plans for their future community center and housing development.
- Developing interest in gardening among LCN youth isn't an overnight process, but current infrastructure like the garden at the Crisis Center (3533 W. North Avenue) can serve as a way to expose youth to food production before starting a larger program.
- LCN can also build interest around urban agriculture by referring youth to programs like Growing Power, Windy City Harvest, and others already doing this work.
- Before channeling resources into a gardening or agriculture program, LCN must take into account that youth surveyed currently greatly preferred a cooking program. Any efforts to start a gardening/agriculture program must be subsequent to a greater interest in growing food. Re-administering the survey developed by the Hunger Fellow can help gauge interest in agriculture before starting a program.

CONCLUSION

The need to link emergency food providers to community gardening and urban agriculture programs in the city of Chicago is rooted in a deeper purpose to empower communities that are tackling food insecurity and overall poverty. Community gardening and urban agriculture, while different models of food production, provide a combination of fresh produce and employment/educational opportunities for LCN clients and those of other EFPs. Particularly for youth, involvement in such programs can foster interest in local food systems and in the greater issues of social justice, anti-racism, and community empowerment.

In-depth research of different community and urban agriculture models in the city of Chicago revealed both the benefits and challenges that would come with potential partnerships. Furthermore, interviews with LCN staff disclosed the barriers for linking clients to current food programming, while interviews with clients showed that a greater interest in agriculture must be further developed. Nonetheless, this report and plenty of other data attests to the fact that food insecurity is a huge problem in Humboldt Park and in many Chicago communities. While linking LCN clients to fresh food sources is not going to be an overnight task, it is imperative that all people have access to healthy food, regardless of their housing status.

LCN and other EFPs interested in linking to community gardens and urban farms in the city of Chicago should first take into account their own internal limitations, the limitations of gardening/agriculture programs to address their specific needs, and client interest/capabilities. That being said, this report also underscores the various benefits that partnerships with gardening and agriculture programs can offer. Beyond access to food, such programs offer Chicago stakeholders, particularly folks on the west and south sides, opportunities to be agents in their own food security. Such opportunities should not be overlooked.

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