Poetry of the Real Food Revolution

It is easy to get caught up in the clichés of the local food movement. It is a hopeful, dirty and righteous subject. We wax poetic about long, hot days in the sun, about watching the light in a child’s eye when they pull up their first carrot, and about bountiful bins of cucumbers, kohlrabi, and kale. We paint pictures of our community in the color of vegetables. We mix splashes of yellow squash, purple eggplant, and deep shades of red tomato. We recite the pensive and promising poetry of the real food revolution.

At The Growing Project, the local food movement is different. Not only do we speak poetry though working with the earth and through the mud on our boots, but we get real. We can’t pretend that local food is just for the privileged. We can’t pretend that it is ok that our government subsidizes the production of commodity crops for the benefit of big corporations to turn unrecognizable cobs of corn into a sugary sludge of soda pop and Skittles. We can’t pretend our farmers aren’t forced to charge higher prices for their local luxuries due to these subsidies.

At The Growing Project, we get real food to real people. Regardless of age, race, income, gender, and everything else that makes us so similar and so different from each other, we know that all people have the right to REAL food.

And through our poetic desires to reconnect with the earth and each other, real things happen. As we finish our 7th growing season with an imaginative intensity that only a grassroots nonprofit can possess, we find ourselves wading through rows of squash at our community gardens, running through ten foot tall corn with kids from The Boys and Girls Club, and biking hundreds of pounds of produce to the food bank.

There is nothing more real than a garden. There is nothing more real than the taste of a sungold cherry tomato or the feeling of lugging yet another 10 pound zucchini out of its prickly prison. And we have realized that our community, particularly our youth, need something real.

There is nothing more real than seeing a teenager enjoy completing their community service in the garden. There is nothing more real than seeing a 6 year-old stuff his face full of snap peas. There is nothing more real than a family getting excited about the first hot peppers of the season.

We realize, as we gaze over the rows of rainbow roots and the contours of colorful cabbages, that the real local food movement we have created in Fort Collins is growing. We thank our community for supporting us in such a real way this season as we grow our programs, expand our growing space, and look towards next spring with eager eyes and hopeful hearts.

Peace, love, and produce,
Dana Guber
Executive Director
Garden Time

Garden Time integrates gardening, cooking, environmental and nutrition education with horticultural therapy to serve at-risk and disadvantaged youth ranging in age from 4 to 18. This program partners with organizations such as The Boys and Girls Club, The Family Center/La Familia, and CSU Campus Corps. Participants gain basic knowledge of horticulture and nutrition through teaching plant parts and their function on the plant and as food. Other activities include nature walks, plant and insect identification, integrating art in the garden, helping run free market stands for families, and pre-vocational skill training.

In 2015, The Growing Project held a total of 68 sessions with 96 unduplicated youth in the garden through our Garden Time program.

Program Highlights

- The youth at The Family Center all had the opportunity to adopt a garden bed at the onsite garden. All of them were very proud of taking care of their garden box and making decorative signs to label the vegetables.
- In 2015, we formed a partnership with The Boys and Girls Club to host Garden Time with youth from their center.
- Through Campus Corps, the at-risk teens had a lot of fun working with the student farmers at the CSU Student Sustainable Farm

Success Stories/Testimonials

From The Family Center: “While leading a station in the shade of our pea trellis and snacking on snow peas, one of our most challenging kids relaxed his body against my shoulder and said, "Gardener Sara, thanks for growing this garden so we can be here. It’s so important." -Sara Wevodau, Garden Director
Urban Foods Outreach installs community garden in low-income areas. The Growing Project (TGP) provides the materials, education, and volunteers to help interested residents learn to grow their own food. Some gardens are used for specific youth activities such as garden and nutrition education for disadvantaged youth with the nonprofit Sproutin’ Up. The Growing Project partners with mobile home parks, Fort Collins Housing Authority, and Habitat for Humanity to identify neighbors that would be interested in receiving a garden build scholarship. Over the past 7 years, TGP has built over 15 gardens and continues to expand with one garden build scholarship each year.

In 2015, The Growing Project worked closely with 8 gardens through the Urban Foods Outreach program. Each garden had between 2-10 resident gardeners and produce between 50-250 pounds of food each.

Program Highlights

- TGP interns and volunteers took a bike tour of all the gardens and had a great time meeting some of the residents and seeing all the neighborhoods we work in.
- One of the residents in the group home at our 1st Street garden got really interested in the compost pile and took it upon himself to do a lot of research and start worm composting!
- One of the residents at our Sunrays garden in Stone Crest Mobile Home Park was really excited about planting flowers, not just in the garden but around her mobile home as well. Some of her neighbors thought it looked really nice and starting planting around their home as well!

Success Stories/Testimonials

Our garden build scholarship was awarded to the nonprofit Sproutin’ Up to run youth programming out of Poudre Valley Mobile Home Park. After 5 years of asking to put a garden in at the mobile home park, the management agreed to provide a small space of asphalt next to the office. After removing the asphalt and installing the garden, the neighborhood has expressed a lot of excitement. Ten kids work in the garden regularly and host a weekly free market for their families and neighbors with produce from the garden and produce donated by The Growing Project. Sproutin’ Up is a great community partner!
Food Finders

Food Finders is a network of volunteers that pick up unwanted or excess produce from local growers and distributes it to nonprofits that feed the hungry. Additionally, Food Finders help farmers glean (pick) unwanted produce from the field for donation. Nonprofits that receive the produce include Sproutin’ Up (youth ran free markets in low-income neighborhoods), The Family Center/La Familia (free market stand in early childcare center), Food Bank for Larimer County, and Fort Collins Rescue Mission.

In 2015, Food Finders had 6 regular pick ups with local growers each week and donated 11,935 pounds of food to hungry people! In addition, Food Finders was 80% bike powered.

Program Highlights

- Native Hill Farm called upon Food Finders this year to help glean beets from their fields. After 2 days of about 20 volunteers pulling and packing beets, we donated over 5,000 lbs. of beets to the Food Bank for Larimer County! They are able to store them for up to 6 months in the walk in fridge.

- From a collaborative grant between The Growing Project and Sproutin’ Up, a mobile market cart was built for the youth at Pourde Valley Mobile Home Park to distribute produce in their neighborhood. Not only were the kids really proud of the market, but more people had access to the produce!

Success Stories/Testimonials

Sproutin’ Up Free Farmers Market:

“Near the end of the season, I had a boy come to me and bring pictures he and his dad had taken. They had set up all the food they received one week at our markets and took pictures of them because they were so thankful. They’re on a limited income and told me they couldn’t have eaten fresh produce had it not been for our program.”

-Anne Genson, Sproutin’ Up
Teens for Food Justice

Teens for Food Justice works with teens ages 13-17 referred from the diversion program from The Center for Family Outreach. For 8 weeks in the summer, teens work at our educational garden, take cooking classes, go on field trips to other farms, learn about local food insecurity, receive horticultural therapy, and design and implement their own food related community service project. Upon completion of the program, in addition to other requirements through the diversion program, the teen’s record is cleared and they receive a small stipend.

In 2015, our pilot of Teens for Food Justice hosted 8 teens for 8 hours a week for 8 weeks! 75% of the participants agreed they are excited about gardening in the future. 63% plan on volunteering to address the issue of food insecurity in the future. 100% agree that their knowledge about plants, gardening, cooking, and nutrition have increased because of the program.

Program Highlights

- Developing and implementing the service project was a highlight. The teens were passionate about working with the homeless and set up a free food stand with samples and information about healthy foods in front of the Fort Collins Rescue Mission. They also set up a donation-based farm stand in old town and gave the money to the food bank.

- We took field trips every Wednesday with the group to places such as FoCo Café (donation-based café), Harvest Farm (Denver Rescue Missions rehab farm), Whole Foods kitchen for a cooking class, and the CSU student farm.

Success Stories/Testimonials

“From the 8 weeks I was here, I have learned more that I could have at school sitting at a desk. I had a lot of different feeling and a lot of judgements towards the gardens at first but I have notice that I had an amazing experience. This was the one summer I didn't get to decide what I was going to do but not know what I was going to do was fun. I have learned more about the homeless and that was amazing. I am hoping to come back and volunteer when our program is over.” -Dani, Teens for Food Justice participant
The Growing Project University provides low-cost or donation-based classes on topics such as foraging for native/edible plants, natural building, food preservation, gardening, seed saving, and more. Classes are open to the public and no one is turned away if they are unable to pay.

In 2015, The Growing Project University held 12 classes with 124 unduplicated participants.

Program Highlights

- The Eating Bugs 101 class was a huge success and was completely sold out with a waitlist!
- The Food Bank for Larimer County shares their kitchen with The Growing Project for food preservation classes. The Growing Project, in addition to its public classes, annually holds 2 food preservation workshops for food bank clients.
- The mushroom foraging class was a great day up the Poudre Canyon!

Success Stories/Testimonials

At the Bug Eating 101 class, everyone was adventurous and tried the cricket fondue and fried mealworms. But the highlight of the class was a 2-year-old girl who was popping the bugs into her mouth without a second thought!
Educational Garden

For the past 3 years, The Growing Project has maintained a 1/4 acre educational garden at Shire CSA. Not only are some of the youth programs hosted at this garden but 3 weekly volunteer sessions are held. Volunteers have the opportunity to learn about growing food and take home produce in exchange for their help in the garden. All produce (that is not taken by volunteers) is donated through our Food Finders program to nonprofits that feed the hungry. The educational garden is also a space for events, workshops, and volunteer potlucks!

In 2015, the educational garden hosted 110 unduplicated volunteers and interns who worked over 3,400 hours. The garden produce roughly 4,390 pounds of produce for the community!

Program Highlights

- We held numerous potlucks at the educational garden and really formed a great community.
- Hosting kids from the Sproutin’ Up program was always so much fun! They loved shelling peas and wouldn’t stop eating them!
- Hosting mini workshops during volunteer hours on different gardening techniques was a great way to spread more information. We talked about companion planting, tomato pruning, worm composting, and more!

Success Stories/Testimonials

“Thanks for providing this opportunity in the area! I loved that we had access to produce after volunteering, especially as I don’t have space to grow much. It was very fun!” - Volunteer

“So impressed with TGP -- mission and programming. Thank you for what you are doing and ALL the hard work, seen and unseen. Looking forward to being involved from the beginning of the season next year.” - Volunteer
The Growing Project
PARTNERSHIPS
2015

The Murphy Center

In 2015, The Growing Project provided technical assistance and volunteer management for the community garden at the Sister Mary Alice Murphy Center for Hope. The Murphy Center for Hope provides support for people who are either on the brink of homelessness or currently without a permanent place to live. The Growing Project enjoyed building a standing garden bed for guests who are unable to bend down easily as well as enjoyed hearing some great stories from guests while working in the garden.

Sproutin’ Up Youth Program

The Growing Project works with the nonprofit Sproutin’ Up to host an 8 week session with at-risk middle school youth at our educational garden. Youth come out to the garden once a week to partake in an hour of educational work in the garden, they receive a 15 minute nutrition lesson, and then they harvest produce from the garden to bring back to their neighborhood (Collins Aire Mobile Home Park) where they set up a free market stand for their families and neighbors. Youth participants receive a $10 stipend each time they are in the garden.

The Family Center / La Familia

The Family Center / La Familia is an affordable, high quality family and early childhood center that strengthens all families and has a great working relationship with The Growing Project. Not only does Food Finders donate weekly for a free farmers’ market stand at their center but TGP is assisting with maintenance, running volunteer hours, workshops and food distribution.

Intern Thank You

The Growing Project would like to say a big THANK YOU to our interns this season. With only one full-time and one part-time staff member, TGP relies on passionate people to help our programs run smoothly! In 2015, our interns worked 2,095 hours!
The Growing Project

HIGHLIGHTS

Moving to Hope Farms

The Growing Project is excited to announce that in 2016 we will be moving our educational garden to Hope Farms! Not only will we have an entire acre to grow on but the garden will be closer to the organizations and neighborhoods we currently work with. We are excited for all the amazing possibilities in this space and to get more people involved in The Growing Project community!

Hope Farms is located at 1601 N. Shields St., Fort Collins, CO 80524

First Fridays on the Farm

In partnership with The Goodness Food Truck, TGP hosted 5 food truck events at our educational garden. Each event consisted of three food trucks, live music, and great beer! Not only was it a free/inexpensive event for Fort Collins folks but The Growing Project got to showcase our educational garden to the public. Each event hosted over 450 individuals. It was a great event for families and beer profits went to benefit The Growing Project.

Bounty and Brews

The 4th annual Bounty and Brews farm and beer dinner was hosted by Fortified Collaborations to benefit The Growing Project. At Jordan’s Floral Gardens, 6 delicious courses were paired with 6 tasty beers. A great evening was had by all with food, drink, live music, a silent auction, and great community building. Over $4,500 was raised for The Growing Project!

Other Events

- **CSU Student Farm Plant Rescue:** Since the CSU Student Farm was relocated because of the new football stadium, numerous perennial plants were going to be destroyed. The Growing Project rallied volunteers to dig up the plants and relocate them at our new home at Hope Farms!

- **Seed Swap:** In partnership with Home Grown Food, we host an annual seed swap to provide anyone with the desire to garden with seeds for free!
The Growing Project
CORPORATE AND FOUNDATION SUPPORT

Allegretti Foundation
Anschutz Family Foundation
Apple Gate Farms
Bohemian Foundation
Fort Collins Breakfast Rotary
Chipotle
Clif Bar Family Foundation
CoBiz Cares Foundation
Community Foundation of Northern Colorado
Fort Collins Brewery
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Fortified Collaborations
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Gannett Foundation
Girls Gone Derby
Group Publishing
Jeff Lebesch and Zia Zybko Fund
Lake Valley Seed
Larimer County
Motherlove Herbal Company
New Belgium Brewery
Odell Brewing Co.
OtterCares Foundation
Patagonia Foundation
Pateros Creek Brewing
Pioneer Seed Company
Pour Brothers
Pringles
Roots Real Estate
Rotary Fort Collins
Rotary Thompson Valley
Simply Organic
The Mainline
Wells Fargo
Whole Foods Fort Collins
Wolcott Family Foundation
Youth Help Association

THANK YOU!