

## How Food Growing, Production, Preparation, and Sharing Can Power the Intergenerational Revolution.

**Concept:** This two-year project seeks to focus attention on the importance of food as a vehicle for intergenerational community building and programming. The project has three components: First, an environmental scan of intentionally intergenerational food growing, production, preparation or sharing programs; Second, a distillation of best practices in the creation and operation of those programs; Third, a tool kit for establishing an intergenerational food growing, production, preparation or sharing program.

Access to food and proper nutrition is central to the human experience. Food growing, production, preparation, and sharing is perhaps the oldest intergenerational activity. Families, small rural communities, and urban neighborhood alike have all brought together older adults and children, and the generations between to share labor and wisdom while building community. Generations United called attention to intergenerational hunger in its outstanding 2012 report Hunger and Nutrition in America: What's at Stake for Children, Families and Older Adults. This project seeks to focus on the flip side of the equation, how communities can come together to develop and support intergenerational programming focused on food, nutrition, growing, production, preparation, and sharing.

According to Quingchang Cao, Holly Debelko-Schoney, and Michelle L. Kaiser writing for the **Journal of Hunger and Environmental Nutrition**, July 19, 2019, Developing Intergenerational Interventions To Address Food Insecurity among Pre-School Children: A Community-based Participatory Approach, "...Intergenerational strategies intentionally connect youth and older adults for mutual benefit. Intergenerational methods prove particularly powerful for the voice they can give to age groups that are frequently marginalized. Although many food programs are open to all ages, none in the research literature have aimed to harness the synergy of uniting young and old to collaborate on mechanisms associated with greater food security. Intergenerational strategies are responsive to the demographics of many food-insecure families and build on decades of community-based efforts engaging young and old to support each other's development and needs."

**The Organization:** Founded in 1986 by leaders of organizations working with children and older adults, "...the mission of Generations United is to improve the lives of children, youth, and older people through intergenerational collaboration, public policies, and programs for the enduring benefit of all." To that end, GU has long advocated for, been involved with, and studied efforts related to access to food for low and moderate-income people. *Food & Nutrition Magazine* named Generations United among its 7 Top Hunger Organizations for championing the cause of food for all in GU's 2012 report, Hunger and Nutrition: What's at Stake for Children, Families, and Older Adults. The project outlined in this paper seeks to focus on the flip side of the equation, how communities can come together to develop and support intergenerational programming focused on food, nutrition, growing, production, preparation, and sharing.

**Background:** Intergenerational families and communities have worked the earth, produced, and prepared food together for millennia. Wild [grains](#) were collected and eaten from at least 20,000 BCE. According to the Israel Museum, beginning at least 9500 BCE, the eight [Neolithic founder crops](#) – [emmer wheat](#), [einkorn wheat](#), [hulled barley](#), [peas](#), [lentils](#), [bitter vetch](#), [chickpeas](#), and [flax](#) – were cultivated in the [Levant](#). There is evidence of deliberately planted food plots from at least 23,000 years ago. Sheep and goats were domesticated and raised for milk and meat from at least 9,000 BCE. From the beginning, farming, food production, and preparation were intergenerational activities, with each generation taking on a distinct role. Because it involved all family members, intergenerational food production and preparation were among the first and most fundamental human activities.

Ancient cities, such as Sumar, about 5000 BCE (Ibid), were organized for many purposes, among them were centralized food production and distribution. The notion of a city which was generally divorced from food production became the rule from the beginning of the Industrial Revolution in the late 18th century. Cities divorced from agriculture became further imbedded in American culture by the late 1910s when the balance of the US population became urban. At that time, most people became net purchasers of food rather than farmers of food.

Despite the urbanization of the American population, there have always been family and community gardens. Interestingly, and despite the assumption that people are less engaged in the production of their food, today, about 42 million (32%) US households grow some of their food, up from 36 million in 2008 (from the Oregonian 2013). That food is grown in backyards, community and school gardens, even urban farms. What is common to each is the intergenerational nature of these gardens, families from young children to older adults participate in many different roles.

**Community Gardens:** Community gardens are among the most common intergenerational activities in urban, suburban, and even rural settings. According to Smithsonian Gardens, "...the first community gardens in the United States were vacant lot gardens started during the economic recession of the 1890s. Detroit was the first city in the United States to create an extensive municipally sponsored urban gardening program using vacant lots in the city. Known as 'Pingree's Potato Patches,' the program provided unemployed workers with plots of land on vacant city lots, seeds, and tools, and instructions (printed in three languages) on how to cultivate gardens." Other cities, for example, Boston, Philadelphia, and San Francisco, also developed programs. Detroit's vacant lot gardening program came to an end by 1900 once the economy began to improve, but Philadelphia's program lasted into the 1920s. (Smithsonian Garden) Around that time, many urban reformers began to create school gardens for children, particularly those of immigrants and lower-income residents. Educators feared that urban life would have an adverse effect on children. Gardens, they hoped, would be a way to connect youth to nature, teach them responsibility, and improve their physical health.

Community gardens and local food preparation were hallmarks of settlements houses, which focused on the whole family, like Hull House, Erie Neighborhood House and Chicago Commons in Chicago, University and Henry Street Settlement Houses on New York's Lower East Side;

Central Community House in Columbus, Ohio, whose Black communities hold hundreds of neighborhood gardens; Andover, South Cove, and the Elizabeth Peabody House in Boston, where gardens have historically been tended by both older adults and youth working together. Each had their own take on local food cultivation both to integrate new immigrants to their communities and to fill the need for food.

**School Gardens:** During the early twentieth century, one of the most well-known advocates of children's gardening was Fannie Griscom Parsons. She created a sizeable educational garden at DeWitt Clinton Park in New York City. Parsons wrote that she did not start her children's garden, "simply to grow a few vegetables and flowers." Instead, Ms. Griscom wanted the garden to be "used as a means to show how willing and anxious children are to work and to teach them in their work some necessary civic virtues; private care of public property, economy, honesty, application concentration, self-government, civic pride, justice, the dignity of labor, and the love of nature by opening to their minds the little we know of her mysteries, more wonderful than any fairy tale."

Today, teachers also embrace gardens as a learning tool, although their motivations are different. In schoolyards across the country, teachers have made gardens an essential part of the curriculum to promote nutrition, environmental stewardship, and teach topics in many subjects such as science art, literature, and history. The school garden continues to be a tool for engaging students with hands-on experience.

**Liberty, War, or Victory Gardens:** When the United States entered World War I in 1917, a need for food, rather than education, became the primary motivation for cultivating community gardens. Europe was amid a food shortage. To increase exports, the National War Garden Commission called on citizens to become "soldiers of the soil" by planting "liberty gardens" or "war gardens" to meet some of their domestic need for food. Gardening became a patriotic act. The War Garden Commission reported there were 3,500,000 war gardens in 1917, which produced some 350 million dollars' worth of crops.

Many of these gardening projects continued after the war. In Detroit, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and other cities, for example, African American residents, young and old, often participated in civic horticulture campaigns by holding gardening contests to improve the appearance of their neighborhoods, which were often neglected by city leaders because of racial prejudice.

The nature of community gardening changed with the onslaught of the Great Depression. Like vacant lot cultivation during the 1890s, the subsistence gardens in American cities during the 1930s were created in response to an economic crisis and intended to help meet residents' immediate need for food. Funding for the gardens came through partnerships between the municipal government and community organizations.

When the United States entered World War II after the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, many Americans who participated in a grassroots effort began to rekindle the patriotic liberty gardens

of WWI. Reports estimate that by 1944, between 18-20 million families with victory gardens were providing 40 percent of the vegetables in America.

While many of these Victory gardens faded away after World War II, many continued as hallmarks of intergenerational neighborhood projects. The Glover Park Community Garden has existed since at least 1941, possibly longer. During spring, summer and fall weekends, an observer can see multiple generations out working on their plots.

Community Gardens continue to be developed as intergenerational projects. For example, DC's Marion Street Intergenerational Garden was established in 2009 by City Blossoms, a 501 (c)(3), which "...fosters healthy communities through innovative, community-engaging programming and green spaces."

Butler Township "Human Nature" Community Garden in Drum, PA, north of Hazelton, PA, was established in 2009 by The Center for Landscape Design & Stewardship, a 501(c)(3). Adjacent to the local Little League fields and the senior center specifically to draw in both younger and older gardeners. It includes an extensive "teaching garden" where older adults frequently work with children on gardening projects.

With this long history of community gardens in the US, there is a tradition of intergeneration cooperation with food production and food preparation.

**Need:** While there are many guides to combating hunger or poor nutrition, most are sector or provider-specific. For example, the excellent projects associated with public parks and recreation organizations as represented by the National Recreation and Parks Association's Combating Hunger Among Older Adults and Youth: An Intergenerational Approach; or "Today's Dietitian's" articles such as Intergenerational Programs — Uniting Young and Old for Good Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Wellness, there is, to the best of our knowledge, no comprehensive guide to such efforts.

**The Project:** This project, planned as a two-year effort, will have three components:

First, an environmental scan/asset map of intentionally intergenerational food growing, production, preparation, and/or sharing programs. The environmental scan/map will include several approaches.

- o Develop an initial list -- Beginning with programs already recognized programs by Generations United like JEWEL, described below, GU will seek to identify programs that bring together the bookend generations in growing, production, preparation, and sharing of food. The work of identifying programs could be the focus of a student intern or a program assistant. That list of programs would, in turn, become a database for future reference.

- o Develop a taxonomy -- This effort, working with the advisory council of intergenerational programming and food security experts, will seek to define and categorize the various programs in each area, for example, growing, shared site, other activities, etc.

o Identify programs that warrant further attention through interviews with trusted informants, among other sources. Some of the project descriptions will be written as case-studies in step two.

o Develop an Advisory Council including:

- Matt Kaplan, Ph.D., Penn State, Dept. of Agricultural Economics, Sociology, and Education;
- Tom Spaulding, former CEO CSA Learning Center at Angelic Organics;
- Kate Maehr President and CEO of Chicago Food Depository, Board member Feeding America (or her designee);
- Ellen Parker, President/CEO Project Bread/Walk for Hunger, Boston (Former Director of Aging City of Boston);
- James Weil, President/CEO FRAC
- The Young Farmers Alliance (which is currently operating a Young Farmer/Older Farmer Mentoring Project);
- National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs (Bob Blancato is the ED, Meredith is the Policy Director, and Mary Beals Luedtka from Flagstaff AAA is Chair, Jeff Klein from Utah is Vice-Chair);
- Michael Sands, Senior Associate Liberty Prairie Foundation (the foundation focuses on community agriculture programs);
- Erika Allen (Urban Farmers Collective, daughter of Will Allen, founder of Growing Power);
- The National Park Recreation Association (Emily may have a suggestion);
- The National Community Gardening Association; How about someone from the (National) School Nutrition Association?

Second, a distillation of best practices in the creation and operation of those programs.

o Using a "gifts survey form," a technique used in asset-based engagement to identify elements which individuals, associations, institutions, and others bring to the community, tease out the essential elements of what appear to be "exemplary" programs.

o Using the taxonomy identifies one application in each major category, or categories, growing, production, preparation, and sharing, in each jurisdiction, to research further, probably through interviews, either in person or by telephone.

o Author a brief description of each program, listing the successful elements, which will include the database noted above.

Third, a tool kit for establishing an intergenerational food growing, production, preparation, and/or sharing program.

o Using the information above, GU will develop a tool-kit for creating food based intergenerational programming.

o The tool-kit will be distributed online and in hard copy.

o GU will offer tool-kit training by webinar, at conferences, and, on a few select occasions, in person by GU Fellow Michael Marcus and, potentially, by intergenerational food program experts identified during the project.

## Example Projects:

- **Landed Learning** -- In 2002, the University of British Columbia (UBC) launched Landed Learning on the Farm for the Environment Project. Landed Learning originally included a class of 18 seventh grade students and seven community elders with farming and gardening backgrounds who became "Farm Friends." Each elder partnered with three students to form six "Farm Friend teams." In six months, between January and June, the eighteen students visited a UBC Farm thirteen times to work with their elder Farm Friends. The teams grew plants, discussed environmental and scientific issues associated with farming and gardening. The students kept a journal, and at the end of the semester, gave presentations to their colleagues and elders.

The following summer, 2003, Landed Learning launched a two-session, one week per session summer camp with 21 children, which continues to this day as a self-sustaining farm. Building on the above, in 2004, it grew the Intergenerational program to work with three classes of students, roughly 54 kids, from three different Vancouver schools, with 21 elders replicating its original project. Also, in 2006 the Intergenerational project became multigenerational, adding an undergraduate/graduate student component, with teams of one undergraduate or graduate student, an older volunteer, and three seventh grade students.

- **JEWEL** (Joining Elders With Early Learners).-- A Generations United/MetLife Shared Site Best Practice Award Winner, New York's Mount Kisco Child Care Center (MKCCC) and its neighbor, My Second Home) formed a model intergenerational nutrition program, even though it was created mostly by accident a decade ago, 1999, but it agreed to share space with My Second Home, an adult day center for seniors. Members of both groups became interested in knowing more about each other, and an intergenerational program director was appointed to design activities and events.[\[DB2\]](#) Despite losing funding for its initial "intergenerational coordinator," the program has become part of both the organization's "DNA" and remains an active part of both.

Every day MKCCC's children and the "grandmas" and "grandpas" from MSH come together in small groups. Whether they are drumming, dancing, creating great works of art, reading stories, or just sharing breakfast, these daily interactions between the two age groups are filled with fun, acceptance, and mutual respect. The result is a meal program that serves mostly local, organic produce and other healthful foods daily. The seniors and kids plant, care for, and harvest a garden that they jointly create. The two generations also come together to prepare and eat the vegetables they grow. Additionally, the group participates in physical activity by playing games and taking trips. The program directly meets seniors' needs to nurture, teach, and leave a legacy, as well as the corresponding needs of their "adoptive grandchildren."

Program coordinators believe that the intergenerational model at MKCCC works because, in the words of one program coordinator, "When people get older, others tend to expect much less from them. When the seniors know that the kids are depending on them and looking to them to set an example, the older people will try new food, even if they don't like it. They'll tell the

kids why certain fruits or vegetables are good for them and then eat them to encourage the kids." Such caring and sharing make for a comfortable, "safe" environment in which kids can experiment with new foods, try new types of movement, and gain confidence in good decision making.

- **The Ethan Allen Residence's Intergenerational Farmers Market** -- "This program is a collaboration of residents and local children from the [Boys & Girls Club of Burlington](#), with help from the [Vermont Community Garden Network](#) and [HANDS](#) (Helping and Nurturing Diverse Seniors)."

Beginning in the Spring 2019 children from the Boys & Girls Club have been joining the Ethan Allen residents to harvest vegetables grown in the Residence's backyard, package baked goods made by the Residence's head chef, and sell it all at a booth at the Tuesday evening market in Dewey Park. Also, once a week, representatives from the Vermont Community Garden Network arrive with recipes for the kids and the older adults to prepare together.

### **Additional Opportunities:**

Phase two of the work is a study tour of other countries' intergenerational food programs.

- The neighborhood gardens established in Cuba after the collapse of the Soviet Union, which grow critical vegetables for the neighborhood.
- The resurgence of the Kibbutz movement in Israel, which sees young people returning, joining veteran kibbutzniks to resume agricultural production.
- In October 2019 the UN's Committee on World Food Security met in Rome, among the sessions featured at the meeting was An intergenerational knowledge exchange: indigenous forest management and food security in the context of climate change. Organizers included:
  - Government of Norway
  - Government of Panama
  - UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) (Invited to join as Organizer)
  - Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)
  - Global Indigenous Youth Caucus (GIYC)
  - Fund for the Development of Indigenous Peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean (FILAC)
  - International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA)
  - United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) - UNREDD

To facilitate this work, GU would work with its UN representatives to work with these organizers to identify possible sites for a study tour.