

Gordon Neighbourhood House Project Proposal

Group 7 - Measuring the Impacts of Urban Farming

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Group 7 Proposal Report

“Measuring the Impacts of Urban Farms”

Introduction and Background

The goal of this project is to develop a way of measuring, and to better qualitatively understand, the impacts of the urban agriculture (UA) project carried out by the Gordon Neighbourhood House (GNH) in the West End of Vancouver. The data collected will better outline how UA provide benefits that go beyond access to locally grown produce, to provide evidence and demonstrate the value of the program, and allow better understanding of the community's needs which may help the implementation of future programs.

GNH is a member of the Association of Neighbourhood Houses BC. In alignment with other neighbourhood houses, GNH aims to help create “a vibrant and active community” (GNH n.d.a); but unlike the others, they place a strong emphasis on the significance of food as a way to “nourish” the community, and hold food related programs to provide access to healthy food (GNH, n.d.b).

There are currently four GNH community-managed UA farms in the West End. The food harvested from them is used in GNH programs, which themselves increase food security and community development. These programs all reflect their food philosophy ‘to provide fresh, nutritious, and locally-sourced food in a way that is dignifying for the community members’ (GNH, n.d.b).

Significance

UA has been recognised as a method of increasing community food security through improving access to local food; it can also be used as a platform to increase food justice and community food security when using the community-managed model. Community-managed UA is when the workload of growing, harvesting and distribution are shared with the community and has related programs for community members. The benefits of community-managed UA, such as community inclusion, are well documented in the USA as a viable and growing model, as described by Claire Napawan (2015). However, the same concept in BC is not well represented in literature. We aim to address this gap in current knowledge.

An important concept embraced by GNH is the idea of dignity and how it pertains to food, where each person, animal, culture, religion, race, age and gender are respected and honored in the food system. This is often not upheld by conventional models of food assistance which is done via food bank models where recipients usually wait in a degrading

line, have no autonomy over the food they receive and oftentimes the food is not respectful to their dietary choices or culture. In comparison, GNH provides a space where community members know where their food comes from and how it was grown, can make their own food choices, and engage with other members of the community. There are gaps in our knowledge on food dignity in community-managed UA which we aim to help close.

The Five Borough Farm (FBF) project in New York City has similar core values and ideas to GNH. FBF encapsulates every aspect of food justice by helping local members of the community in developing and providing a means to increase their physical, social, economical, ecological, and awareness of food (FBF, 2012). FBF's model is highly inspiring and not well represented in Canada, which is why GNH and our assistance during the term could add to the current body of literature by providing empirical and qualitative data to demonstrate and document the benefits of such an approach.

Objectives

To address the knowledge gaps in the current UA studies and literature previously mentioned under the significance section we have two objectives. The first objective is to determine, qualitatively, the social community-building aspect of UA in regards to community development and community food security using the lens of food dignity to guide us. The second, and equally as important, objective is to quantify the physical products of UA as a means of measuring food justice.

Methods

Data collection

The 2017 written coordinator log provided by the farm manager included detailed quantitative data sets including the name of volunteers, produce harvested, activities of volunteers, and total harvest weight each day. More information about harvest yields, volunteer participation and use of harvested crops will be gathered through visits to the GNH farms. Our group members will visit the GNH at least four times to attend some the community programs, as well as assisting with planting and harvesting fall crops.

We will qualitatively conduct interviews and surveys with volunteers, property managers, and end-users (food bank customers, community lunch attendants, mobile market buyers) collecting stories and reflections on GNH programs to better understand how well UA works in the community.

Data analysis

Quantitative data provided by the farmer and through group member's visits, such as produce yield and number of volunteers, will be analyzed using Microsoft Excel. This data will be summarized into tables and a monthly harvest yield chart. A compiled summary of the year will be completed and sent to the farmer.

After receiving survey feedback from stakeholders and end-users, a qualitative compilation will be assembled and analysed to summarize their views and reflections towards the urban farming program. The qualitative data will be used to evaluate whether the program is effective at improving community food security and how the program affects the social aspect of the West End community.

Ethical Considerations

We will protect the privacy of all participants by using anonymous, confidential gathering of data and survey responses. Survey questions will first be sent to a community partner and TA to receive feedback. We will be establishing consent from the participants prior to conducting the survey.

Outcomes

After analysis of quantitative and qualitative data sets the results will be summarized in our report. Quantitative data will be displayed in the form of tables and histograms.

We will produce an infographic that demonstrates the value of the urban farming program at GNH. This infographic will highlight key findings from data that show how the urban farming program impacts the community.

Finally, a final report will be produced that summarizes our findings which will show the value and importance of the UA program at GNH.

References

Claire Napawan, N. (2015). Production places: Evaluating communally-managed urban farms as public space. *Landscape Journal*, 34(1), 37-56. doi:10.3368/lj.34.1.37

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