

## **Justice Studies 310 – Food, Hunger and Social Justice**

### **Problem-Based Learning Case #1**

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Submitted to

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**PBL Case - “We have come to understand that gardening is done by a diversity of people across Canada, but it’s not clear to us, who these different types of people are – especially whether there are any socio-economic differences among them. We do know some people have backyard gardens while others participate in community gardens and yet others have nothing to do with growing their own vegetables.” (This assignment was co-created by Gloria, Anna and Leonel during the summer of 2016.)**

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## The Green Patch Case Study

### Introduction

Community gardens appear to be growing in popularity. With this growing population there has been an increase in the diversity of individuals utilizing community gardens. This growing popularity in growing your own vegetables is slowly moving communities towards a food sovereignty model whether they are aware of it or not. Many benefits aside from a food sovereignty model occur from the use of community gardens. For instance, positive environmental benefits through interactions occur when people utilize community gardens. Throughout this paper an overview of how the green patch relates to food sovereignty will be given, communities gardening, and recommendations for RPIRG will be given.

### Food Sovereignty

A food sovereignty model gives communities a radical alternative to the current food system by putting people in control of the food system as well as markets, production, food cultures and environments (Wiebe & Wipf, 2011). This model is a shift away from the current state controlled food system that is displayed today in part through community gardens. The Green Patch at the University of Regina is an example of a community garden that fits well into the food sovereignty framework. This garden hits the key criteria of the framework with with active participation of community members, and allowing people to have control over their food through the right to produce (Hansen, 2011). By allowing community members to participate in the Green Patch, individuals are gaining access to the food system (Hansen, 2011). This access is currently not granted in the dominating neoliberal food system model. Community supported agriculture can help to go against the neoliberal model (Roff, 2006). In allowing the communities

participation the Green Patch is physically resisting the dominant methods of producing and distributing food by creating an alternative space to produce local food (Hansen, 2011). Another way the Green Patch fits into the food sovereignty model is through the encouragement of local food production and consumption as well as the opportunity for community building (Hansen, 2011). With majority of the produce being donated back to the community through Carmichael Outreach, individuals who are partaking in gardening are giving a heightened sense of purpose through the positive impacts their food donation will make in less fortunate peoples lives. Community gardens have a variety of benefits aside from growing your own organic vegetables, they allow people to reconnect to their food and the world around them (Hansen, 2011). Although the Green Patch does not rent out plots, through other community gardens in Regina having the ability to own a plot of land and the produce that comes from it has the ability to empower community members; rather than feeling like consumers with no control over their food, an effect the industrial world has on individuals (Hansen, 2011).

Although the Green Patch is the start to an alternative from the industrial food system, a problem community gardens face is that they will only be viewed as an alternative if they dramatically increase in size allowing for an increase in participants (Hansen, 2011) this way they would be view as sustainable. The Green Patch although at the surface appears to fit into the food sovereignty model well, is not a perfect example because, community garden “do not demonstrate a perfect practice of social justice or food sovereignty” (Hansen, p.166). This is okay as with any new framework there is always room for improvement. Other implications the Green Patch faces is that it may be taking a step away from a food sovereignty model because it takes away from local farmer’s incomes as community members become less reliant on their produce. Through community gardens agricultural production moves away from domestic

consumption which is normally what ensures adequate incomes for farmers, which makes the Green Patch a movement away from the food sovereignty model (Wiebe & Wipf). Another reason the Green Patch may be viewed as opposing the food sovereignty framework is because everyone becomes a producer through community gardens. But, food sovereignty is about achieving economic, social and ecological justice for producers and Canadians (Beingesner, 2011). With everyone becoming a producer this economic, social and ecological justice will not be occurring, especially for farmers who currently rely on the dependence of community members.

A shift

Under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights food is listed as a necessity (Article 5, UDHR). In the current neoliberal paradigm, the marketplace does not, and has no obligation to look after the needs of the common person (Westaway, 2012). The current state of the corporatized food market is driven by the fiduciary responsibility of making money. This paradigm allows for inequalities and inequities to arise due to; high prices, scarcity, and food that lacks the nutritional elements necessary to maintain a healthy lifestyle (Nyéleni newsletter 2015). As a basic human necessity that everyone requires to survive, food creates a market for itself, this market has been exploited in a near monopolistic fashion by a handful of oligarchical corporations. There are very few equalizers that can be introduced to the modern society that will be allowed by the food corporations and lobbyists. Therefore, a paradigm shift is required to be able to return the self-sufficiency and consumer power back to working class people.

## Incentives & Inequalities

Community gardens give self-sufficiency back to the common person, and alleviate the financial burden grocery shopping has become (Wiebe & Wipf, 2011). In a modern urban setting grocery and convenience stores become the common way citizens obtain food. Community gardens also raise the property value around the garden itself, “We find that gardens have significant positive effects, especially in the poorest neighborhoods” (Been & Voicu, 2008). Besides monopolizing on food availability and prices grocery stores also latently create food deserts. Food deserts and price fluctuations can be countered by community gardens because, they provide a productive alternative by letting people pay in labour and effort instead of paying significant monetary value to large corporations.

## Inequalities Among Communities

The inequalities caused by the lack of basic human necessities, due to the neoliberal market and current food monopolies have a racial component. According to Noreen Willow “the Aboriginal population is vulnerable to food insecurity and increasingly lives off the reserve.” (Willow, 2008), and when the reserve population moves into urban communities they are often forced into lower class neighbourhoods in cities. Food insecurity is often a question of access rather than supply problem (Gustavsson et al, 2011). Mentioned earlier was the concept of a food desert in urban areas, these occur more frequently in poorer neighbourhoods i.e. reserves. North Central in Regina is also an example of a food desert in a poor neighbourhood, because, access to fresh food is limited due to the lack of grocery stores. To combat this, REACH has established portable food stores but, community gardens stand to replace stores during optimal growing seasons.

## Demographics

There is little information on who is using community gardens because privacy rules, but Anna Dipple with the RPIRG did mention that majority of participants in the local Green Patch were between the ages of 18-30. Rather than seeking information regarding individual participants associated with community gardens, it was more fitting to attempt to map out how many community gardens were in several cities throughout Canada. The idea behind this was to attempt to make a correlation between population size and the amount of gardens. Although there was a slight relationship between population and number of gardens, it was insignificant, inconsistent, and not generalizable.

The data collected was further analysed for population size and referenced with the median income of each city. The result reached was the poorer a city, the less likely they are to have a community garden. The higher the median household income, the more likely the city was to have more community gardens. Alberta does have community gardens but the correlation between income and number of gardens was not significant, for instance, Regina with roughly 200,000 citizens has twelve acknowledged community gardens while Edmonton with 800,000 citizens and a higher median income only houses eleven community gardens. Examples of Moose Jaw and Prince Albert were more evident, both have similar population (within 1,000) but are very different median income-wise. Moose Jaw has a higher median income by about \$10,000 more per citizen than Prince Albert, Moose Jaw is home to four gardens while P.A only has one acknowledged garden. This lead us to assume that socioeconomic status (SES) of a city does play a significant role in how many community gardens operate within cities

## Backyard Gardens Vs Community Gardens

Community gardens provide community empowerment, a source of pride, and a platform to bond with those in one's neighbourhood, but there are more than just these reasons as people are starting to associate with their community gardens as a sense of accomplishment. With growing populations in urban areas, cities like Regina have seen the switch from isolated neighbourhoods and suburbs to apartment and condos popping up attempting to maximize prime areas around town. According to the 2011 census, 29.6% of people who lived in Regina did not live in a household that had adequate room for a garden due to restrictions such as: living in an apartment or row house with limited or no backyard. With the construction of two major neighbourhoods in Harbour Landing and the Greens consisting of a majority semidetached, apartment/condo, and row house, there are less citizens with backyards to even consider starting a backyard garden (Hopper, 2012). The transition from backyard to community gardening is not by choice, rather community gardening is the only viable option if one wishes to produce for themselves. "Community gardens are similar to, but not synonymous with urban agriculture, but differ from backyard gardens that are privately managed by a family" (Guitart, 2012), and if there is no room in people's backyards community gardens become more ideal.

There is more data related to why people choose to participate in community gardens, than who is participating. The "most common motivations reported were: to consume fresh foods, social development or cohesion such as community building and culture exchange, to improve health among members and to make or save money by eating from the garden or selling the produce" (Guitart et al, 2012). Community gardens can also help with community nutrition because these gardens help bring awareness to people about all the processed and unhealthy food that is not made naturally. Community nutrition has to do with the shift from individual person to

populations (Engler-Stringer 2011). Community nutrition has to do with getting a community of people the traditional food that they need to survive and stay healthy.

### Green Patch recommendations

#### Bring more awareness

Although the garden is out in the open and is not hard to find it is very easy to walk by it every day and not know what it is. A sign or banner that explains exactly what the garden is and how someone can get involved could help to bring more awareness. Another way to get more people involved is to make a contest. Perhaps, for every hour an individual volunteers their name could be put into a draw for a large vegetable basket or prize at the end of the year. It's an idea that could give students more of an incentive to volunteer more hours. Another medium that brings awareness is social media, we noticed that the RPIRG has a website, Facebook and twitter page. The best way to promote these would be through promotions and word of mouth. For example, every share or follow on social media leads to more and more exposure for the Regina Public Interest Research Group.

#### Offer as a class

Offering as course for a credit or a certificate could be a good course of action to take because it would look good on a student's résumé. Students are always looking for opportunities to bulk up their résumé so having a certificate for when a student reaches a certain amount of hours or completes a course could be a way to get more people involved in the garden. The best

way to approach this is to start off with a discounted or even free course and as it is further established potentially make the green patch into a fully accredited course.

### Permanent location

The green patch is a program that has continued to get more and more traction each year. With this in mind the Green patch does not have a permanent location on the campus. At this point it is located behind the Archer library which is a good location but, a permanent location would be ideal to eliminate the chance of the Green Patch being taken away. Another reason to get a permanent location is so permanent fencing can be put up around the garden. This could potentially eliminate the problems with rabbits and gophers. The key here is that the more established and permanent the garden is the more and more it will grow and people will begin to invest more and more of their time as they will know their hard work will not be taken away.

### Conclusion

All together, community gardens appear to fit into a food sovereignty model. There are many benefits and various reasons as to why people are involved in both backyard and community gardens. Although, it has been outlined a shift away from neoliberalism needs to occur in order for community gardens to become the norm of individuals means to attain food. Small steps are being taken to get all members of various ages and SES involved in locally driven food production and consumption.

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