



the wisconsin foodshed

Grow your own

Gardening coalition seeks to preserve urban gardening land

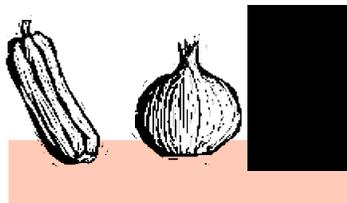
When gardeners at the Sheboygan Avenue Community garden in Madison heard in the summer of 1995 that plans were being readied to turn their garden into a parking lot, they were outraged. For years they had been working the soil, gradually turning the hard clay to friable garden loam. Not only had they managed to improve the soil, they had developed strong relationships with fellow gardeners. Evenings and weekends at the garden provided many hours of pleasant labor tending to flowers and vegetables, and a chance to talk with and learn from gardeners of all different walks of life and from countries far and wide.

To think that this space, which provided sustenance for the body and soul and served as a meeting place where everyone was equally respected, would soon become yet another cement-covered lot, was enough to wilt the most hardy kale plant!

Shortly after hearing about the proposed fate of the Sheboygan garden, city gardeners learned that the land occupied by the Troy Drive Gardens, two of the largest city gardens in Madison, was slated to be sold by the state. Northside residents value these gardens not only as land to grow their own food but as green space and habitat for birds and small animals.

The Madison Community Gardeners Coalition (MCGC) was born out of the threat of losing these three gardens. Community gardeners from a number of gardens formed the coalition so that one organization could speak with a stronger voice in support of community gardening and the preservation of gardening land within the city.

The coalition's first public activity was to publicize the threat to the garden sites through press coverage and a rally held in October 1995 during the last Dane County Farmers Market. Supporters,



joined by Saturday market shoppers, marched around the Capitol Square bearing signs in support of gardens, chanting, "We need garden plots, we don't want more parking lots," and "Uptown, Downtown, keep our

gardens in the ground."

These activities galvanized public support for community gardening, while press coverage helped draw attention to the proposed land sale of the Troy Drive Gardens. Backyard and community gardeners alike, along with politicians, supporters of urban open space, and non-gardening residents who appreciate the aesthetics, functionality, and recreational opportunities of the gardens, joined the coalition to show their support.

Residents of Madison's northside formed the Troy Drive Gardens Coalition to block the sale of the Troy gardens to developers. This group includes non-profit urban open space, gardening, and land trust organizations. They devised a plan to purchase land under a trust arrangement that restricts development of most of the parcel, utilizing a long-term rent and easement agreement.

In the summer of 1996, MCGC sponsored a "Mid-summer Community Gardens Tour and Celebration" at the Troy Drive Gardens, which drew attention to the community's efforts to save the land. This was followed by a potluck gathering in the late fall. These activities helped build a strong, representative community gardens coalition, and drew public attention to the need

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Keeping gardens in the ground

Madison Community Gardeners Coalition (MCGC) is a group of community gardeners and supporters of community gardening. Its goals include:

- g Protecting existing open space for community gardening and finding suitable land for neighborhood gardens.
- g Assisting new and existing community gardening groups with organizing and gardener education.
- g Ultimately, seeking to develop means to assure semi-permanent land leases for gardening sites.

What's for Lunch?

news about the food system

Major regional grocer goes local

The development of a locally based, sustainable food system received a shot in the arm recently when a group of farms working with the Land Stewardship Project (LSP) reached a marketing agreement with a major regional grocer. Under the agreement, Erickson's Diversified Corporation of Hudson, Wis., will buy select vegetables from the Hay River Produce Cooperative during the upcoming growing season. Hay River is a new cooperative of six farms in western Wisconsin.

Erickson's officials approached LSP about setting up a marketing agreement with local farmers after the grocer stopped carrying pork produced by Premium Standard Farms last fall. Erickson's dropped Premium from its 18 stores in Minnesota and western Wisconsin after family farmers and consumers representing LSP and the Missouri Rural Crisis Center talked to store officials about the mega-hog operation's extremely bad environmental and community record in Missouri.

Erickson's corporation's mission statement states: "We will work to improve the environment and enhance our community that all may prosper." As a result, when they dropped the Premium Standard line, store officials reiterated their desire for quality food products raised locally by sustainable family farmers.

The Hay River agreement is the first formal marketing arrangement to come out of meetings with store officials and area producers. Under the plan, the six farms will serve as the "first source" for nine vegetable products the grocer sells. "That means that if the farms can provide the quantity of say, tomatoes, the participating stores need during a certain week, then they will receive priority over the big California and Florida producers," said Erik Sessions, an LSP policy intern who worked closely with the farmers in developing the marketing agreement.

"This arrangement will help Erickson's meet the increasing demand for locally produced food raised with a minimum of chemicals," said Karl Mathys, Director of Fresh Development for Erickson's.

Mathys says Erickson's stores bought produce from local farmers in the past, but never in an orga-

nized manner. This year, the marketing agreement will be limited to four "More 4" stores in the Wisconsin towns of Hudson, Barron, New Richmond, and River Falls.

All six of the participating farms are Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) operations. During the past decade, at least 25 CSA farms have sprung up in the Twin Cities region. CSA farms often have the capacity to produce more food than their members demand.

Prairie Farm, Wisconsin, CSA farmer Mike Racette, who will raise lettuce and summer squash for Hay River said, "It really is a win-win situation. The community has been supporting Erickson's, and now they can turn around and support the community."

—contributed by Brian DeVore

For more information, contact: Erik Sessions, LSP (612) 647-5024; Karl Mathys, Erickson's (715) 381-2352; Mike Racette, Spring Hill CSA (715) 455-1319

Focus on Food Policy Councils

What do other communities have to teach about setting up local food policy councils? In April, food systems experts across the country gathered in Madison to discuss how food policy councils can address food security, land use, and environmental issues. The conference, called "Exploring Prospects for a Madison-Dane County Food Policy Council," was organized by the Madison Food System Project of the Wisconsin Food System Partnership. (See insert.)

Food Policy Councils (FPC) provide a focal point for local food system issues with a view toward enhancing community food security. Food security typically involves affordability, accessibility, nutritional value, environmental sensitivity, and cultural responsiveness. FPCs may address issues related to hunger prevention, transportation and access to food, nutrition and consumer education, environmental conservation, landuse issues including farmland preservation, and greater food self-reliance. About fifteen communities in North America now have FPCs.

The conference brought together local groups and individuals who are active in different aspects of the food system to discuss how their issues and programs connect. Until now, there has been little discussion about countywide food policy issues and players necessary in formulating responses to community food security questions.

Kate Fitzgerald, Mark Winne, Bob Gottlieb, and Rod MacRae were part of a forum on "Putting Food on the

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CIAS, 1450 Linden Dr., Rm. 146, UW-Madison, Madison, WI 53706. Phone: (608) 262-5200 Fax: (608) 265-3020

Internet: jhendric@facstaff.wisc.edu Web: <http://www.wisc.edu/cias>

From Field to Table

research on the food system

Healthy farmers - healthy profits

What are some work hazards of vegetable production? Anyone who has ever tended a vegetable garden can probably name a few. Now Wisconsin vegetable growers will get help solving production problems that lead to sore backs and injuries.

University of Wisconsin-Madison's Biological Systems Engineering Department is working with area farmers on "Healthy Farmers, Healthy Profits," a 3-year project to study and promote profitable farm practices that reduce physical stresses and health hazards on freshmarket vegetable farms. The project is funded by a farm injury prevention grant by U.S. Centers For Disease Control and Prevention's National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH).

Compared to other workers, farmers have a higher incidence of injury, disease, and disability. Within production agriculture, growers who raise vegetables, fruit, and horticultural specialty crops suffer a disproportionate number of musculoskeletal strain and sprain injuries. Sprains and strains account for the largest proportion of worker compensation injuries in production agriculture.

The project hopes to reduce musculoskeletal and traumatic injuries and other job-related injuries and



diseases among small scale growers of labor intensive crops such as freshmarket vegetables. The project has the following goals:

g Learn what small growers have already done to create a safer, more profitable workplace.

g Collaborate with local farmers to test new tools, equipment modifications, and management practices that have the potential to improve farm safety and profitability.

g Evaluate how modifications affect farm profits.

g Share results with farmers throughout Wisconsin and the Upper Midwest.

The research team currently is seeking farmers who would like to cooperate on the project. Involvement could include answering a few questions about work hazards, brainstorming about ways to improve working conditions, or helping to set up a small experiment to test a new tool or labor management practice. Any help is greatly appreciated, because the research will be more useful if it is based on real life experience.

—contributed by Bob Meyer and Astrid Newenhouse

If you would like to be part of this project or have questions, contact Larry Chapman, Bob Meyer, or Astrid Newenhouse at the UW Biological Systems Engineering Department, 460 Henry Mall, Madison, WI 53706; (608) 262-7408.

Food Policy Councils, from page 2

Community Agenda: How the Austin, Hartford, Los Angeles, and Toronto Food Policy Councils are Doing It." The panel showcased the experiences of these communities in addressing community food security issues, and their successes and challenges in promoting food-secure environments.

The Austin Sustainable Food Center, for example, initiated a "food bus" that links low-income communities to area supermarkets. This project is a direct outcome of a study that reported how low levels of car-ownership and existing transit routes limit low income people's access to larger grocery stores. The Hartford Food System collects and disseminates information periodically on the prices of common grocery items in area supermarkets to promote informed food shopping. The Toronto Food Policy Council has taken a public-health perspective to food policy issues, resulting in a broad-based and preventive agenda. The Los Angeles Food Policy Council has undertaken studies related to food pricing and grocery store location relative to low-income communities.

Besides the forum, a food systems workshop drew farmers, retailers, hunger-prevention activists, nutritionists, community garden and sustainable agricul-

ture advocates, and university and government officials. Individuals from different local food system sectors presented their perspectives on key local food policy issues. Newly elected Dane County Executive Kathleen Falk made a statement of support and commitment to community food security—portending a political climate sympathetic to food policy work.

As a followup, small groups discussed the potential for a Madison/Dane County Food Policy Council. Issues included the need to involve additional participants; the structure of a potential policy entity and its relationship to local government; and pressing local food policy issues. The workshop ended on a high note of support and enthusiasm for tangible food policy actions, and highlighted the need—through continued dialogue—to outline more specific objectives. Forthcoming actions include compiling a report on the workshop and identifying food policy actions that would provide both symbolic and substantive content on which to build future actions.

—contributed by Kami Pothukuchi, UW-Madison, Dept of Urban & Regional Planning.

The public forum can be viewed on Madison cable channel 12 on June 13 at 8 p.m. For more information on the conference or on food policy councils, contact: Jerry Kaufman, Director, Madison Food System Project, at (608) 262-3769.

Grow your own *from page one*

for community gardening space within urban areas.

During the past winter months, while gardeners were dreaming over seed catalogues and anxiously awaiting the end of a long winter, MCGC members

Table Settings

g Since 1983 ten Madison community gardens have been lost to parking lots, housing, and transportation and industrial development. MCGC has helped delay or prevent the sale of three sites since 1995.

g *The Christian Science Monitor* (Dec. 1996) reports that about 750 cities have community garden programs, up from 23 in 1976.

g According to the National Gardening Surveys conducted by Gallup, the percentage of American households that maintain vegetable gardens dropped to 28% in 1995, from 49% in 1975.

g The United Nations Development Programme estimates that 800 million urban farmers produce more than 1/7 of all the food consumed on the planet and more than half of the vegetable, poultry, and pork eaten in towns and cities.

g James Trager's *Food Chronology* (1995) reports that in 1942, 20 million Victory Gardens supplied 40 percent of the fresh vegetables consumed in the U.S.

were busy planning for the upcoming season. During 1997, MCGC will be involved in an array of activities, from advocacy to garden organizing and education to research. In order to integrate community gardens into land use planning, MCGC members are reviewing open space and gardening policies from other garden associations in the U. S. and Canada. From this research, members will develop a draft policy that will be shared with city and county officials.

The plan is intended to solidify support for community gardening through long term and comprehensive land use plans that protect land for urban gardening. MCGC members also are developing materials to assist gardeners, including a citywide newsletter that contains information about gardening resources and people available to lead gardening education workshops.

Other MCGC research will help better understand the needs of Madison's community gardeners and identify models from other cities that have been successful at strengthening garden groups and preserving garden land.

As spring approaches, coalition members are excited about planting garden seeds, along with seeds of change and collectivity, as they work to increase gardening opportunities for all Madison residents.

—contributed by Sharon Lezberg

For more information about MCGC please call (608) 231-2622 or the Community Action Coalition (CAC) Garden Program at (608) 246-4730, extension 222 or 218.

Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems
1450 Linden Dr., Rm 146
Madison, WI 53706

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More News from Field to Table

special supplement to the wisconsin foodshed

The Wisconsin Food Systems Partnership announces its first group of funded projects

The Wisconsin Food Systems Partnership (WFSP) is an effort to bring people from communities and the University of Wisconsin together to build a more food-secure future for all. The WFSP seeks a world with less poverty, a plentiful food supply that is varied, enjoyable, safe, and healthy, and food that is produced and distributed in profitable, fair, and environmentally sound ways.

With funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the partnership provides small grants and other support to community-university partners for a variety of teaching, research, service and action projects. The first set of projects funded by WFSP are described below.

For more information about these projects or about WFSP, contact Sharon Baumgartner or John Ferrick at University of Wisconsin-Madison, College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, 240 Agriculture Hall, 1450 Linden Drive, Madison, WI 53706; (608) 262-1271; E-mail: smbaumga@facstaff.wisc.edu

Assessment of Milwaukee's Food Security

The Hunger Task Force of Milwaukee is collaborating with the Center for Urban Initiatives and Research at UW-Milwaukee to look at the challenges involved in accessing the local food system and eating patterns and nutritional intake. The studies focus on individuals and families in central-city Milwaukee and will use telephone interviews and focus groups to gather data.

Community Housing and Services (CHAS) Food Project

CHAS is a private, non-profit organization serving low-income, single men and women in Madison. Their food project will examine the role of food for the working poor, identify barriers to good cooking and healthy eating, and train residents to prepare food.

Community Scholars Program

The Community Scholars Program is a one-year academic program for undergraduate students at UW-Madison that promotes partnerships among students, faculty, staff, and community-based organizations and creates opportunities for experiential learning about food system issues in Wisconsin. In addition to a series of classes and seminars, the students will work in teams to implement projects with community organizations and develop and present policy proposals as a result of their experiences.

Food, Health, and Community for People with Developmental Disabilities

This Wisconsin health promotion project will enhance skills of people with developmental disabilities and their caregivers through workshops in gardening, food acquisition and preparation, and nutrition. Goals of this statewide project include producing at least five training events for service providers, developing a resource guide for teaching and outreach on food issues, and devising a plan for involving students and community-service organizations in nutrition and food system issues.

Food Systems Curriculum and Outreach Project

This project, coordinated by the Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems, will support UW-Madison faculty and departmental efforts to build food systems concepts and activities into curricula (both existing and new courses), develop and facilitate a network of teachers and courses on food systems, and communicate results of student research to the academic community, food system professionals, communities, and citizens.

Food Systems Undergraduate Course

The Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics at UW-Madison will develop a new, introductory food systems course for undergraduates. Innovative teaching approaches such as service/experiential learning will provide opportunities for both individual and team learning. The course is being planned using input from food systems professionals and community groups.

Issues Forum

WFSP and a variety of individuals and groups will establish a statewide public forum focusing on critical issues facing Wisconsin. A group of citizens will identify discussion topics and each forum will feature speakers who can provide balanced information on each issue.

Land Use Consortium

The Agriculture and Natural Resources Consortium is collaborating with WFSP to work on critical land-use issues in the state. Their goal is to encourage community groups to work with university people to develop frameworks for research and outreach.

Madison Urban Food Systems Program

This program focuses on food security needs of low income residents in the Madison area. Its goals are to better understand how the urban food system works, develop strategies for improving food security for low-income residents, and establish partnerships between Madison-area community groups and university faculty and students.

Migrant Farm Workers in the Wisconsin Food System

For the first time, migrant service organizations and state agencies are working together to develop a strategic plan that will enable them to meet the needs of Wisconsin's migrant population more effectively. In this project, these organizations will collaborate to identify common goals and resources needed to reach those goals.

Milwaukee Urban Food Systems Program

The Milwaukee Urban Food Systems Program will focus on reducing dependency on the emergency food system by initiating and supporting activities that improve food access and benefits to low-income residents and communities. Specific goals include facilitating collaboration between the community and university on food system issues; increasing student involvement in food systems research, curriculum, and internships; and building a foundation for a UW-Milwaukee Center for Urban Food Systems.

Pesticide Education for Farmers, Students, Migrant Farm Workers, and Service Providers

Family Health La Clinica, the only health clinic in Wisconsin for migrant farm workers, will collaborate with a variety of organizations to provide pesticide education for migrant farm workers, their employers and healthcare providers, as well as university faculty and students.

Redirecting Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) to Meet the Needs of the Poor

CSA is an arrangement in which farmers grow food directly for members who purchase a "share" at the beginning of the growing season. The cost of CSA membership is similar to the cost of local, organic produce and therefore inaccessible to many low-income households. This project will develop partnerships among Madison-area churches, local businesses, farms, neighborhood and community centers, low-income families, and special-needs resident facilities to make local CSA farms more accessible to all.

Science Education and Employment Development (SEED)

SEED is a statewide effort to create educational and job training opportunities for children from elementary, middle, and high schools, through college and employment years. Initial efforts have focused on giving underserved elementary school children opportunities to learn about science and nutrition while they tend a ten-acre garden.

Traditional and Nutritional Use of Food and Herbs by Native Americans in Wisconsin

The Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council will collaborate with faculty, students, and other groups in a project designed to provide insights and direction for contemporary Native American health and nutrition. Research will focus on how diet is linked to problems such as diabetes, heart disease, and obesity.

The Troy Drive Gardens Coalition Planning Process

Troy Gardens are the largest community gardens in Madison. The Troy Drive Gardens Coalition is working on a plan to acquire and preserve the garden site, as well as develop an innovative plan that will include gardens, parkland, and mixed-income, owner-occupied homes. Several UW-Madison programs and departments are working with the coalition to plan urban educational programs that teach gardening, food preservation, and nutrition to community residents and students from elementary through university levels.

The Wisconsin Garden: Culture, Agriculture, and Curriculum

The Wisconsin garden project involves elementary students in Madison, the Oneida Nation, and rural south-central Wisconsin. Young people will have the opportunity to learn about traditional Oneida gardening and farming practices, modern sustainable agriculture, and gardening in the classroom, backyard, and community. Students will meet their counterparts in Oneida and communicate with them through Web sites, online discussion groups, and electronic mail.

Updating the Wisconsin Idea

The Wisconsin Idea is the philosophical framework for the university's partnership with the state. WFSP is cooperating with UW-Madison's Outreach Development Office to encourage faculty and staff to participate in partnerships with communities. Goals include increasing the visibility of existing programs, helping people become involved in ongoing activities, and stimulating the development of new partnerships.

For more information about these projects or WFSP, please contact Sharon Baumgartner or John Ferrick, University of Wisconsin-Madison, College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, 240 Agriculture Hall, 1450 Linden Drive, Madison, WI 53706; (608) 262-1271; E-mail: smbaumga@facstaff.wisc.edu