

Network Action Plan Draft – School and Community Gardens Engaging Children and Youth

Complied by Green Thumbs Growing Kids (Sunday Harrison, Cassie Scott) & Ecosource (Carolyn Bailey)

Summary of the current environment and needs (to build on the existing environmental scan and needs assessment)

Sustain Ontario Needs Assessment Survey

139 people responded to the first Sustain Ontario survey in 2012. 67% of all responses were from Southern Ontario, however all areas of the province were represented. This survey reflected an overall enthusiasm for school food gardens; when respondents were asked what “activities that you are not currently involved in that you would like to be” the most popular category aside from advocacy was “school gardens” (34%) with “Hands-on workshops and training on gardens” not far behind at 29%. In addition, 28% of respondents replied they already utilize school gardens and 30% of respondents replied that they utilize, “Hands-on workshops and training on gardens” to “help connect children to good food”.

With regards to networking, the top two activities rated as “very useful” were “website” (47%) and “mentorship program” (48%). “Conferences or meetings in regions around the province (48%) and “a conference bringing together groups around the province (46%) were the two top activities rated as “useful”. With respect to communication 50% rated “Monthly electronic news with updates from different groups and initiatives” and 48% rated “Quarterly newsletters profiling great work” as “very useful”. In the area of Capacity Building, the top two activities rated as “very useful” were listed “regional funding” (70%) and “A platform for provincial advocacy” (47%). Funding sources suggested as helpful were: Healthy Communities Fund (Government of Ontario), Heart and Stroke Foundation, Ontario Trillium Foundation, Metcalfe, various provincial ministries, OMAFRA grants (innovation, market expansion, etc), Ontario Grocers Foundation, McConnell Foundation, Weston group, Telus, Hellman's Company, Royal Bank of Canada, The Environment & Diversity Project,
<http://www.grants.gov.on.ca/GrantsPortal/en/OntarioGrants/GrantOpportunities/> OSAPQA005130, CanAdapt

OEEN Community Survey

In spring 2013, as a part of the action planning process, a survey specific to community and school food gardens that engage children and youth was created. This survey was administered online by Sustain Ontario and also promoted through the Imagine a Garden in Every School Campaign.

(This segment will be updated in the final draft as any additional feedback comes in)

- 18 projects completed the School and Community Food Gardens Engaging Children portion of the survey: 2 from Hamilton, 2 from Guelph, 1 from Fergus, 2 from Ottawa, 1 from York Region, 10 from the GTA.
- 73% of the projects that responded “have room for one to two classrooms at a time” in terms of how many people can access the garden space.
- 88% of the projects grow food. The projects have been in existence between one and 13 years, with an average age of 4 years. Outside sources of funding was the most frequent answer to “What has allowed your project to be maintained over time”. Summer water, limited space, keeping teachers engaged, funding, vandalism and working with school boards were all listed as major challenges (with funding most frequently).
- School staff and NGOs are listed as the main drivers of gardening projects. Almost 60% of the responding projects employ paid staff, though in most cases they are seasonal.
- 40% of the gardens that responded are used by 100-500 people per year and most participants are school aged children (though also used by youth, adults and seniors). Frequency of visits ranges from daily, to once a season. They are used in a wide variety of ways, but composting workshops and teaching how to grow food are the most frequently cited regular activities (93% of projects compost on site).
- 3 projects answered that they weigh the food they grow; they were evenly divided between 100 lbs/101-500lbs and over 1000 lbs a year.
- Projects reported a range of strategies for summer maintenance, the most common being parents, followed by teachers and community partners.
- Research into nutritional and behavioral impacts of food gardening were listed as “very useful” most frequently. 70% of those responding indicated that research into “Chronic disease prevention through food gardening” would be somewhat useful.

- When asked “ what existing school board policies have hindered or helped your project”, respondents cited difficulty with construction on schools sites/unionized workers and vandalism as hindrances. For school board policy improvements, the following were highlighted as important:

⇒ Increased information available about board facilities policies	36.4%	4
⇒ More curriculum resources	36.4%	4
⇒ More release time for Teacher Training	36.4%	4
⇒ More help with garden maintenance from Facilities Department	9.1%	1
⇒ More funding from school board to develop play areas	36.4%	4
⇒ Better design of schoolyard play areas	27.3%	3
⇒ Fencing grants	27.3%	3
⇒ Better water access	36.4%	4

For community land use/municipal policy improvements, the following were highlighted as important:

⇒ Prioritization of food gardening as a use of public space planning	57.1%	4
⇒ Better design of parks to include food gardens	42.9%	3
⇒ Spending for water access infrastructure to support food growing on public land	42.9%	3
⇒ Access to tool storage areas	28.6%	2

⇒ Off hours access	0.0%	0
⇒ Soil testing guidelines / funding	57.1%	4

Interesting narrative responses:

Impact on the community: *Students have a greater understanding of where food comes from. Students are more willing to try a variety of foods. The community has worked together in a positive way. The front of our school looks better and there is a greater sense of school pride and environmental stewardship. (Blake St. School)*

Impact on the community: *Our garden has provided 10's of thousands of pounds of fresh, organic produce to local food banks and residents in all of the surrounding neighbourhoods, as well as provided full-time summer employment for youth from the adjoining high schools each year. Volunteers, including both youth and seniors from the community have benefited by learning and sharing gardening skills, and taking home their share of produce week to week as a thank you for their efforts. Once empty and unused spaces are now being used to facilitate food production, biodiversity, pollinator and butterfly sanctuaries, and natural habitat for bird wildlife. (PACT)*

Success: *Getting the garden built and having parents maintain it over the first summer. This was exciting because there was a general sense in the community that this project would rely solely on teachers, and that has not been the case at all. There has been such a feeling of community pride come out of this. (Blake St School)*

Additional Environmental Scan Actions:

⇒ *Our working groups will be reaching out to undertake additional phone interviews to increase geographic scope represented in survey responses, and will update analyses based on any additional survey received online.*

Additional Community Resources & Relevant Environmental Information

These survey results were considered in conjunction with several additional resources and recent research documents examining the current academic and community context of school and community food gardening, including the following (can be attached):

- School Food Gardens in Ontario: Educating for Health and Sustainability (Green Thumbs Growing Kids, 2013)
- How do our Gardens Help Us to Grow? Understanding Health & Community Impacts of Community Gardens (Ecosource, 2013)

- Literature Review of associated articles and bibliographic resources relevant to this topic.

Goals and Objectives

Overall, our action plan recommends that the following goals and objectives be undertaken by OEEN in collaboration with relevant community partners:

- A. **Increased Data Collection:** Continue and increase data collected about what the current climate is for school and community gardens that engage children and youth in Ontario to develop more comprehensive information and statistics about on-the-ground gardening projects underway.
- B. Collective advocacy and actions taken to support the following items:
 - a. **Increase opportunities for project funding:** Respondents noted external sources of funding are critical for tools, equipment and staffing.
 - b. **Increase awareness of good collaborative practices and networking to foster partnerships around gardens:** Multi-stakeholder projects are most successful, we should build on existing networks and conference opportunities to share good practices and learn from one another/foster new projects and alliances.
 - c. **Increase dialogue with planners and policy makers to understand how and why to include food gardens in community planning:** Respondents noted prioritization of food gardening as a use of public space in municipal and provincial community planning
 - d. **Increase access to food growing infrastructure (ie, water, fencing, storage etc. and planning supports (soil testing & safe construction practices) in communities:** Respondents noted that infrastructure to support food production in public spaces is important to support new project growth and relieve the burden on community groups to fundraise externally for these items
 - e. **Recommendations to government:** Based on our review of research undertaken by GTGK, *School Food Gardens in Ontario -- Educating for Health and Sustainability*, we recommend that school food gardens be employed to advance established policy goals, on the provincial and local level, in the area of environmental education and note that existing frameworks such as Acting Today, Shaping Tomorrow and the Foundation for Healthy Schools (Health & Education Ministries) support their development and expansion. Specifically we recommend:

Recommendation #1: *That the Ministry of Education invest further into the Healthy Schools Recognition Program, to create a best practices platform and evaluation strategy, and offer prizes and increased exposure to participating schools which achieve measureable results.*

Recommendation #2: *That the Healthy Schools Recognition Program recognise and highlight the health-promotion potential of school food gardens.*

Recommendation #3: *That the Ministry of Education recognize school grounds as places for student instruction, and adjust the education funding formula so as to recognize the variable and place-based costs involved with establishing and/or refurbishing grounds to make outdoor instruction possible.*

Recommendation #4: *That the Ministry of Education revise design standards for new and refurbished school grounds to include areas for outdoor instruction, with shade and biodiverse plantings, as well as a sunny spot with a raised garden bed large enough for an average class to gather around, and good access to water.*

Recommendation #5: *That the Ministry of Education complete implementation of the Acting Today, Shaping Tomorrow policy framework with respect to Ontario College of Teachers qualification guidelines and an additional qualification course, related to environmental education.*

Recommendation #6: *That the Ministry of Child and Youth Services expand the Student Nutrition Program to include support of community organizations working in partnership with schools to develop and maintain school gardens.*

In addition, the **Imagine a Garden in Every School (IGES)** campaign is committed to researching policies and best practices in other jurisdictions in order to explore how best to work with the Ministry of Education, school boards and individual schools in Ontario.

Recommendations for how to achieve goals and objectives & Priorities, timelines, roles and responsibilities, Resources

*** This segment is currently a work in progress – we are interested to see where action areas might have synergy with action suggested by other Action Planning teams, and on feedback from the steering committee as we continue to work out the appropriate timelines, roles and responsibilities etc***

Goal	Priority Level	Actions	Timeline	Roles/Responsibilities	Resources/Funding
<p>Continue and increase data collected to better understand current community projects and data related to school and community gardens that engage children and youth in Ontario.</p>	<p>High</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Host streamlined survey on IGES website. - Reach out to university and post secondary partners to see if there is interest in having a fourth year undergrad or masters student take on an in-depth interviewing or environmental scan project, in ongoing collaboration with the IGES initiative. - Reach out to Ontario Community Garden Network and compare data to surveys collected through current Sustain Ontario survey process for additional relevant information. - Host a feedback/data collection aspect at Bring Food Home and other 'benchmark community events' where many practitioners may come together. - Attend Nishnawbe Aski Nation Food Sovereignty conference August 2014 		<p>Collaborate with IGES to determine a survey end date with incentives for first round survey.</p> <p>Collaborate with IGES to engage masters and volunteer internship students to collect and analyze survey data.</p>	<p>Local universities and post-secondary institutions</p> <p>Targeted fundraising application for any subsequent research projects.</p>

		to continue learning about the relevance and specific practices of school food gardens in the North.			
Increase opportunities for project funding	Mid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Share online lists of grantors who provide this type of funding. - Create a short backgrounder sheet to share with funders/for applicants to use if they are looking for different kinds of funding ‘rationale’ for why this type of project can be good for the community on different levels. - Share information and good practices/ examples from Ontario and other provinces/countries that highlight an Asset Based Community Development approach to undertaking gardening projects, to empower groups to seek non-financial resources in their communities to undertake and maintain/continue gardening projects - eg. finding the gardeners in the community, finding ways to engage them with school gardens & community gardens hosting children and youth, looking for partnership opportunities eg. interns, co-op and practicum students, seniors, master gardeners and local horticultural societies etc. 			
Increase awareness of	Mid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Host collaborative sessions at 			

<p>good collaborative practices and networking to foster partnerships around gardens:</p>		<p>conferences and large community events.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Catalogue existing resources (both print and electronic) online in a centralized location via the OEEN and IGES websites - Facilitate ongoing networking through continued collaboration with the IGES campaign, the Ontario Community Garden Network and other relevant food and education network groups. 			
<p>Increase dialogue with planners and policy makers to understand how and why to include food gardens in community planning:</p>	<p>Mid</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Share summary documents with planners, and lists of research documents and other supporting information to make the case, seek out additional local (Ontario-based) community and academic research to share local impact information. - Feed back into some of the work that Sustain has been doing around hosting webinars about municipal planning practices that support community gardens etc, potential to build on these connections to continue to build support. - 			
<p>Increase access to food growing infrastructure</p>	<p>Mid</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - List types of infrastructure needed for gardens 			

<p>(ie, water, fencing other items) in communities:</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Share Detroit and Toronto soil testing guidelines via the IGES website and other electronic list serves and resources. - Explore good practices for safe community construction in public spaces so that neighbourhood level groups can have more autonomy to construct things in the garden, but can do so safely/with the blessing of the policy/liability folks. 			
<p>Create government backgrounder/summary document to share current policy frameworks from ministries to assess current opportunities for growth & share information between 'silo-ed' ministries in the government.</p>	<p>Mid</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Summarize findings of current IGES policy recommendations as stated above, and deepen research specific to each ministry in collaboration with student researcher(s)—Possibly supported through Sunday's current work on MES at York U (TBD for final action plan document). 			
<p>Review current legislation in other jurisdictions that impacts on school food gardens</p>	<p>Mid</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Eg. Healthy Schools Act, District of Columbia, 2010. - Consider fact-finding trip, and inter-provincial/international networking to build stronger case. 		<p>Sunday is interested in pursuing this, but would be great if more OEEN folks would also consider coming from different Action Planning areas. The legislation is very comprehensive eg Farm to School, School</p>	<p>Researching funding options</p>

				Gardens, Breakfast & Lunch programs, Wellness policies woven in.	
Build more relationships in the education sector, eg. teachers, ed assistants, caretakers, principals, vice-principals.	Mid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create ways for teachers to interact with gardeners, to learn more about each others’ world and how to work together - specifically through an increase in workshops and publications that emphasize this connection. - Work through unions as much as possible to create supportive relationships between unionized maintenance staff and community projects. - Outreach to bodies that represent school staff and trustees to engage in dialogue and share case for support. 			