

Developing a Community-Designed Healthy Urban Food System

Abstract

Learning About Food in Urban Communities is a comprehensive guide with Extension resources for Food Production, Food & Business, Food & Family, and Food & Community. This publication emerged as part of a 2-year community-planning project. An interdisciplinary OSU team worked with the Weinland Park community, in the central Ohio University District, to explore how food could be a catalyst for urban neighborhood development.

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Introduction

Extension's ability to address the needs of urban constituencies is critical, but not necessarily new (Borich, 2001 & Ford Foundation, 1966). A metro area contains a core geographic urban area of 50,000 or more population as delineated by the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) with data from the U.S. Census Bureau. United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Economic Research Service (ERS) researchers also analyze communities using urban-influence codes, exploring county data that is subdivided into finer residential groups through a 12-part county classification for the analysis of trends that are related to population density and metro influence.

Extension professionals in many states have focused on various issues in urban areas, such as community planning in Iowa (Balassiano, 2012), youth development volunteers in California (Smith, Dasher, & Klingborg, 2005), integrated pest management in Illinois (Cecil & Czapar, 2001), urban food equity in Ohio (Ohri-Vachaspati, Masi, Taggart, Konen, Kerrigan, 2009), and comprehensive urban initiative in Texas (Fehliss, 1992). At the 2013 National Urban Extension Conference, Extension professionals from 27 states shared expertise on working with a variety of issues and audiences in urban areas. Community-university partnerships have taken many forms and have been recognized as a valuable contribution to both the academic community and our cities (Kotval, 2003).

Community Planning Project

Extension educators desire to improve communities through helping others learn (McGrath, Conway, & Johnson, 2007). Ohio State University Extension established a presence in the university district adjacent to the Columbus campus more than 10 years ago. Building on this foundation, an interdisciplinary team of OSU Extension faculty and staff collaborated with other community organizations on a 2-year Urban Agriculture Overlay Planning Project funded by a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Community Challenge Grant. The goal of the project was to explore how this urban Columbus Ohio neighborhood could make the production, processing, distribution, preparation, and celebration of food a catalyst for urban re-development in the Weinland Park neighborhood

Weinland Park is an urban neighborhood located between downtown Columbus, Ohio and The Ohio State University's main campus. It is home to approximately 4,500 residents, many of whom confront unemployment, poverty, and crime. Despite the challenges of this neighborhood, residents and businesses have demonstrated resiliency. With the help of community, corporate, civic, church, and university partners, this neighborhood is being revitalized. The community decided to use food as a focus for transformation. Interest in food and farming system development creates an opportunity for Extension to provide leadership and expertise (Sharp, Clark, Davis, & Smith, 2011). Extension educators set the stage for stable relationships, inter-organizational linkages, and feedback loops upon which localized food systems could be built (Dunning, et al., 2012; Gulati & Gargiulo, 1999; Ramasawmy & Fort, 2011; Sundkvist, Milestad, & Jansson, 2005).

The interdisciplinary OSU Extension team focused on the education component of the project by:

- Conducting a Community Food Assessment Survey to better understand educational interests and preferred mode of instruction, as well as the community members' thoughts on food production, business, family, and community.
- Piloting educational workshops, such as a Grow Your Own workshop series and a new Master Urban Farmer curriculum.
- Facilitating strategic planning dialogues.
- Meeting with stakeholders at numerous events.
- Engaging in ongoing interaction through the University District Extension office.

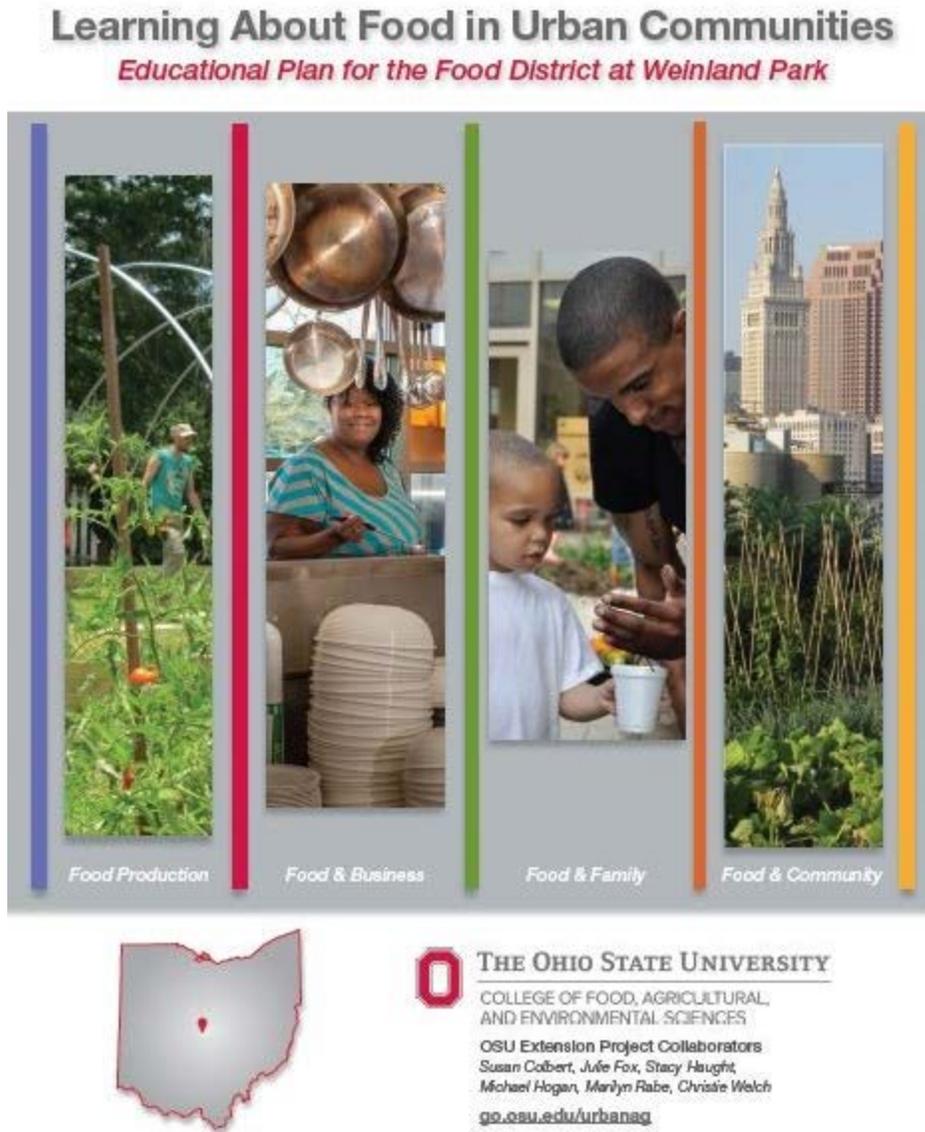
Learning About Food in Urban Communities

To advance sustainable community economic development, the OSU Extension team developed a food-related education plan for the neighborhood. The comprehensive guide draws upon a foundation of national, state and local Extension research-based programming, as well as the literature, urban agriculture resources, existing community assets, and engagement with community residents. Urban agriculture is increasingly recognized by public health professionals, urban planners, community organizations, and policy-makers as a valuable tool for economic development, preservation of green

space and improvement of food security (Brown & Jameton, 2000).

Figure 1.

Front Cover of Education Plan Document



The education plan is included in the publication, *Learning About Food in Urban Communities*. Primary objectives of this plan focused on:

Food Production (sustainable food production practices and food production capacity)

- Growing with your family and community
- Growing for profit
- Food production health and wellness
- Safe food production and harvesting

Food & Business (business start-ups, employment and investment)

- Business planning and management
- Workforce development
- Employee health and wellness
- Food safety business practices

Food & Family (healthy behaviors and health indicators)

- Accessing, planning and preparing healthy meals
- Preserving food for your family
- Family health and wellness
- Serving safe food to family and friends

Food & Community (social, environmental, and economic conditions)

- Planning and supporting community food development activity
- Leadership and community development
- Community health and wellness
- Community food safety

These four areas of focus are intended to help frame the sometimes-overwhelming topic of food. There are natural linkages between many of the topics in these four areas. For example, those involved with community gardens can benefit from the educational programs outlined in both the food production and food and community areas of the plan. Common themes of food safety and health and wellness emerged and are included in each area. Many programs involve youth and are designated as such throughout the document.

Conclusion

This project provides a starting point based on what was learned during the Urban Agriculture Overlay Planning Project. Implementation of the education plan is an ongoing process that will evolve as the redevelopment of the neighborhood moves into various phases of implementation. With a business plan, development campaign, detailed facility plans, the education plan, and a vision for a sustainable regional food hub, community partners including OSU Extension are moving into development stages of the Food District at Weinland Park. Educational needs and priorities will continue to emerge. For project updates and resources that can be replicated in other urban areas, visit go.osu.edu/urbanag.

Acknowledgements

The work that provided the basis for this article was supported by funding under an award with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Through this Community Challenge Grant, OSU Extension collaborated with the Community Economic Development Corporation of Ohio (CEDCO), Godman Guild, the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC), Wagenbrenner Development, Local Matters, OSU Knowlton School of Architecture, Franklin County Board of Commissioners, AmeriCorps VISTA, and Weinland Park residents.

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