

**DC Specialty Crop Block Grant Program  
Annual Performance Report FY2011-2013  
USDA/AMS 12-25-B-1098**

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**Date of Updated Submission:** April 4, 2014

**Project Title:** Building Capacity in Gardens, Individuals, and Communities

**Project Summary**

In 2009, a report showed the District of Columbia as having the 9th highest rate of any state for overweight and obese children aged 10-17 (35.4%). Many factors contribute to obesity, including lack of physical activity and lack of access to affordable fresh specialty crops to prepare healthy meals. This project was intended to introduce young adults from underserved communities in D.C. to the physical exercise and healthy fresh produce that can be obtained from small-scale organic vegetable gardening. At the same time, program participants were intended to learn “green job skills” related to specialty crop production, food distribution, and fields related to healthy eating and food preparation. The Neighborhood Farm Initiative (NFI) 2010 Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP) proposal was designed to build upon the successes of its 2009 SCBGP, while at the same time expanding into a new activity, which was organic vegetable gardening education for young adults from underserved neighborhoods in the District of Columbia. In a similar approach, the Young Growers Program (YGP) built upon NFI’s work in 2011 with youth from lower income areas in Washington, DC. The program taught participants a full range of organic vegetable gardening skills through hands-on training. Two separate programs were conducted: the Young Adult Program and the Middle School Program. The project work plan focused on specialty crops that can be cultivated with organic methods in Washington, D.C. because the intention of the grant was to expand program participants’ familiarity with and consumption of a broad variety of fresh vegetables; 17 categories of specialty crops and herbs were grown. From October 1, 2012 to date 778 unique volunteers were active in the NFI demonstration garden, tallying over 3,000 hours. NFI produced and donated over 3,000 pounds of produce in all of 2012 and 2013. This project continues to be timely as the District of Columbia government implements its Sustainable DC Plan proposed by Mayor Vincent Gray.

**Project Approach**

The approach toward delivering a replicable, one-year urban agriculture outreach and education project was structured and manifested as a project to:

- Provided gardening education to members of underserved communities;
- Built the capacity of existing community gardens;
- Created new specialty crop gardens in a variety of venues;
- Built capacity and skills of young adults seeking careers in urban agriculture;
- Identified participants – Recruit young adults, targeting Wards 5-8 (Nov 2010–Jan 2011);
- Met with DCPS partners and outline specs for garden installations (Jan–Feb 2011);
- Identified community partners and select Recreation Center sites in Wards 5-8, (Nov-Dec 2010);
- Continued developing partnerships (Jan–Feb 2011);
- Determined garden specs (Feb 2011);

- Commenced the Young Adult Skills-Training Program – Pre/post-test, ongoing field-based garden education (Mar–Oct 2011);
- Conducted garden installations (Mar–May 2011);
- Maintained ongoing garden maintenance in all venues (Mar–Oct 2011)
- Assisted graduating participants in securing jobs (Sept-Oct 2011)
- Conducted field days at community garden sites (Quarterly) – Field Days (Mar, Jun, Sept 2011);
- Conducted community garden workshops (monthly) – Gardening education workshops for community members residing near DPR and NPS community garden partner sites (May-Sept 2011); and
- Conducted DCPS garden consultations/enrichment activities with young adult participants leading ongoing gardening activities for DCPS students at partner sites (Mar–Jun 2011; Sept-Oct 2011).

Significant accomplishments included:

- Increased ability to raise funds separately which aided us to form community partnerships, establish garden sites, recruit program participants and conduct young adult garden education as part of the Mayor’s Green Summer Jobs program;
- Additionally, through working with youth from lower income areas, nearly 4,000 square feet of land was cultivated as vegetable gardens at four sites, producing over 500 pounds of produce;
- Participants took home a portion of the food and the rest was either sold at farmers markets or donated to those in need; and
- Many lessons were learned and some challenges encountered, which helped form the approach to the 2012 program;

Through project funding, the Neighborhood Farm Initiative established two dedicated programs, The Young Adult Program and the Middle School Program. The Young Adult Program was run in cooperation with the District of Columbia Department of the Environment’s Green Zone Environmental Program. The program took place in the school garden at Beers Elementary School in Southeast D.C. through the month of July. Students harvested and washed about twenty pounds of produce. All of the crops specified under this project were defined under the USDA eligibility list. However, our total program encompasses production and reflection on some crops which are not representative of the USDA specialty crop list. Due to proximity, participants often ask about other items which are being grown. Nevertheless, staff organized this curriculum and external training sites around those which solely enhanced the competitiveness of specialty crops. The specialty crops which were utilized in this project include: Herbs (8 types), 5 tomato species, eggplant, 4 types of peppers, sweet potatoes, 5 types of squash, onions, garlic, okra, lettuce, carrots, swiss chard, spinach, kale, cabbage, collards, and broccoli.

Our partners were representative of the increasing activists within the gardening and fresh food distribution system and included:

- **DC Central Kitchen:** The mission of DC Central Kitchen is through job training, healthy food distribution, and local farm partnerships to offer path-breaking solutions to poverty, hunger, and poor health. NFI was able to donate over 1,000 lbs of produce in 2012 for its culinary skills program;
- **Bread for the City:** The mission of Bread for the City is to provide vulnerable residents of Washington, D.C. with comprehensive services, including food, clothing, medical care, and legal and social services in an atmosphere of dignity and respect. NFI was able to donate 500 lbs of fresh produce for Bread for the City's Food Pantry program in 2012;
- **Dig'n Dine:** Dig 'n Dine was a Give Week program that consisted of gardening and cooking lessons for middle-school students at Paul Public Charter School in Ward 4 of the District of Columbia. Over the summer of 2012, students learned about gardening and cooking through hands-on experience. They prepared healthy meals made from produce provided by both NFI and the small garden at Paul Public Charter School;
- **Faircliff Plaza West Community Center Housing Association:** Faircliff is a low-income, tax-subsidized property in Ward 1 of the District of Columbia that offers multiple classes and workshops to its residents throughout the year. One of the classes offered, "Cooking Matters", teaches families how to get more food for their money and better nourishment from those foods. Volunteer culinary and nutrition experts led cooking and nutrition courses and hour-long "Shopping Matters" grocery store tours, during which participants learned how to select nutritious and low-cost ingredients and prepare them in delicious and healthy ways. In 2012, Faircliff Housing used over 100 pounds of NFI specialty crops for their Cooking Matters classes;
- **UNITE HERE,** an organization of students and food service workers promoting "Real Food and Real Jobs", held a dinner made completely with ingredients from within a 100-mile radius of Washington, DC. The locally grown, produced and cooked meal was shared with food service workers and community members from all of D.C.'s universities on August 8, 2012; and
- **Brainfood,** a non-profit youth development organization in Washington, D.C. where local high school students participated in programs such as hands-on cooking classes, lectures, field trips and community service projects. NFI worked with Brainfood to deliver the fresh organic produce that is essential for their hands-on cooking classes. NFI became a space where the students were able to visit and learn about organic gardening, enhancing their culinary skills through awareness of how and when various specialty crops grow. During the 2013 growing season, NFI was able to donate 200 pounds of produce to Brainfood. Brainfood Partnership: Our produce was used by Brainfood not only for their culinary training program for at-risk youth, but also for their new CSA boxes created by their summer youth program for DC residents which included information about NFI with the boxes.

## Goals and Outcomes Achieved

### Community workshops

- **June 6, 2012: Rain Garden Swale Workshop** (30 Attendees) – This project was initially proposed by the George Washington University Neighbors Project, together with the GW student chapter of the American Society for Civil Engineers, to improve the drainage at the Mamie D. Lee Community Garden, which includes the NFI Fort Totten demonstration garden and GEP garden. GWU undergraduate engineering students formed groups and surveyed the garden area for several weeks, performed drainage analyses, sent in soil samples, and presented their proposals to a panel made up of GW Professors, members of the Mamie D. Lee Board, and staff of the Neighborhood Farm Initiative. The winning presentation proposed a rain garden swale to prevent water from flooding the MDL and NFI garden sites. A swale-building workshop was then held, which started off with a lecture on swale construction and how swales can prevent water runoff.
- **June 26, 2012: Garlic Harvest Party** (14 attendees) – Attendees celebrated the kick-off to the summer season by assisting in harvesting NFI's garlic crop. Attendees were given a demonstration by staff about the proper method for harvesting, braiding and storing garlic. Attendees were also taught how to save garlic for planting during the next growing season. **Sweet Potato Harvest Festival** (15 attendees) – This event was NFI's big fall harvest and was centered around a large sweet potato harvest crop. Volunteers were given garden tours in the morning and then worked together to review harvesting techniques for sweet potatoes. Volunteers also harvested carrots, Swiss chard, butternut squash, chives, beans, rosemary, and beets. After the harvest, volunteers planted a new round of garlic that had been harvested and dried the previous June. All the produce was donated to Dangerously Delicious Pies, a local restaurant and food truck, who used the specialty crop ingredients in their pies to serve later that week at our educational movie event (see next event).
- **October 24, 2012: Food Day Celebration** (75 attendees) – NFI celebrated Food Day with our own harvested specialty crops made into savory and dessert pies by the local restaurant and food truck, Dangerously Delicious Pies. Attendees snacked on the specially made pies before watching the movie Greenhorns, a documentary that explores the lives of America's young farmers. It was the filmmaker's hope that by broadcasting the stories and voices of these young farmers, those considering a career in agriculture would be emboldened. A panel-led community discussion followed the film screening. The panelists were three young farmers who currently work in Washington, D.C., Kristin Brower, Director of NFI; Liz Whitehurst, Education Specialist at Arcadia Farms; and Meredith Shepherd; Owner of Love and Carrots Capital City Farm Co., and Neighborhood Farm Initiative.

- Rooting DC 2013 brought in a total of 742 attendees from all eight D.C. wards, Maryland and Virginia. In addition to collaborating in the design of the event, NFI presented two sessions of the workshop “It Begins Here: Seed Starting” to a total of 85 attendees. The presenters were NFI Director Kristin Brower, and NFI Board Chair Cathy Anderton. The workshop reviewed all the essentials of seed starting, including soil, water, light, temperature, container types, transplanting, and timing. The workshop was the fourth most popular amongst all the workshops presented at Rooting DC 2013 and received a high evaluation rating of 4.16 out of 5;
- **March 9, 2013: Soil Testing Workshop** (5 attendees) - Participants from the NFI community joined us on a very cold day in March to learn the process of collecting soil samples and how to prepare the samples to send in by mail;
- **May 11, 2013: Medicinal Herb Walk** (15 attendees) – Botanist Holly Pooles-Kavanna used NFI’s growing space as an instructional tool to show attendees where and how to use specialty crops and herbs into your everyday life for better help without the use of modern medicines;
- **June 8, 2013: NFI Spring Open House** (40 attendees) – NFI opened its doors to the DC community to volunteer in the garden in the morning, attend three workshops in the afternoon, and then enjoy fresh food picked from the specialty crops at the end of the event. The workshops were: “More Bang for your Buck – Planning your Garden on a Budget”, with Abbie Steiner from the Capital Area Food Bank; “Using Nutrition to Heal Chronic Illnesses”, with Joseph Gonzales from The Cancer Project – Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine; and “Edible Weeds” with Christina Scheltema from the E.P.A.;
- **June 22, 2013: Vermicompost Workshop @ The Tudor Place Historic Gardens** (5 participants) NFI’s Director gave a demonstration about starting and maintaining a healthy worm-bin and how to compost kitchen scraps in your own home. Participants learned about different types of bins, how to make their own bin, how to set-up their bin, how much to feed their worms, and how to trouble-shoot their bins if their worms are unhappy. Participants left feeling comfortable being able to set-up and maintain their own bins and begin composting their food scraps; and
- **September 7, 2013: Homegrown DC 2013** (300 Participants) Homegrown DC was a one day hyper-local farmers' market and festival organized by Neighborhood Farm Initiative, Common Good City Farm, and Old City Farm and Guild where school gardens,

community gardens, and urban farms within the city came to show off their specialty crops grown, and we can celebrate growing healthy food right here at home. NFI brought and donated our produce of green beans, radishes, tomatoes, cherry tomatoes, sweet and hot peppers, okra, and many herbs. NFI also engaged the community by creating a seed-to-vegetable matching game, where participants needed to match the seed with the corresponding vegetable. D.C. Community Garden Census was updated and vacant land assessment completed.

### **Measurable Outcomes:**

- Young Growers Program 2012: 12 participants (ages: 16 -23) in the Young Adult Program and a changing group of 5 to 10 students (ages 11-13) for each session of the Middle School Program. **Impact:** Family members of the students and young adults benefited from fresh produce brought home from the gardens. Based on an average of three family members per participant, a minimum of 66 people indirectly benefited from this program;
- Adult Garden Education Program 2012: 6 participants (approximate ages: 23-45); Adult Garden Education Program 2013: 22 participants (ages 22 – 65). **Impact:** Assuming the participants each shared some of their produce with one or two other people, over 50 people were indirectly impacted;
- Demonstration Garden 2012: 450 volunteers; 1450 volunteer-hours; approximate ages: 11-70); Demonstration Garden 2013: 328 volunteers; 1500 volunteer-hours;
- Community workshops: 584 participants (approximate ages: 13-65);
- NFI donated over 2,000 pounds of produce to several partners (Bread for the City, DC Central Kitchen, Faircliff Plaza West, Dig 'n' Dine and UNITED HERE). These partners provided hundreds of people with meals over the course of the season—primarily to residents who were struggling with food security in 2013;
- In 2013 NFI donated over 500 pounds of specialty crops to Brainfood who used the produce in their culinary training. Brainfood students also visited the NFI garden to participate hands-on in the digging, weeding, and harvesting of the specialty crops. During the summer, Brainfood had 15 students enrolled in their programs and 15 households were signed up for their CSA boxes;
- Young adult participants donated approximately 20 pounds of freshly harvested specialty crops to area residents, usually by leaving them at the front desk of Beers Elementary School (where the garden was located) for school staff and parents to take. The vegetable garden planters tended by middle school participants at McFarland School were placed in highly visible spots on either side of the main door to the school. Dozens of staff, parents and other students would have seen the planters in the course of entering and exiting the school;
- Adult Garden Education Program: The Mamie D. Lee garden, and particularly NFI's portion of the garden, is very visible from a high-traffic footpath that leads from a Metro

station to densely populated mixed-income neighborhoods. GEP participants and others working at the garden often have informal conversations with people walking by about what they are doing and how people can get involved. Some of NFI's most dedicated volunteers are people from the community who initially became aware of the organization through these conversations. According to one GEP participant at the start of the program this past year, "I remember being interested in the Fort Totten plot when it was being built a little while back and this is the perfect opportunity to get involved" ;

- As noted above in "Measures", the original grant proposed pre- and post-test evaluation of the Young Growers Program participants;
- Given the fluid nature of the participants in the Middle School Program, this sort of highly structured evaluation was not possible. Because the instructors for both the young adult and middle school groups worked closely with small groups of students, evaluations were done through direct observation, casual conversations and oral interviews of participants throughout the duration of the programs.

For the young adult program, students met the following benchmarks:

- Demonstrated proficiency and safety with the tools used in urban gardening;
- Gave three examples of organic growing practices commonly used in urban agriculture;
- Were able to identify at least two potential "green jobs" in the area;
- Spent at least 2 program hours reflecting on their learning in a journal through writing, photography, drawing, and or discussion;
- Gained a broad perspective of all of the aspects involved in specialty crop production including cultivating, tracking production, harvesting, processing, sales and marketing, and community engagement;
- Participants who previously had no experience in maintaining gardens learned and practiced their new skills in installing and maintaining organic specialty crop gardens at 2 worksites;
- Increased exposure to and consumption of organically grown specialty crops through cooking lessons;
- Consumed a minimum of 5 servings of specialty crops during the duration of the program;
- Half of the participants were able to identify at least 10 specialty crops growing in the field the other half significantly increased their knowledge of specialty crops and were able to identify at least 5 specialty crops;
- Taught at least one of their peers in the program a new skill;
- Increased their exposure to "green job skills" through hands-on learning, discussion, and networking with peers and leaders of a successful specialty crops operation; and
- Donated approximately 20 pounds of freshly harvested specialty crops to area residents, increasing the per capita consumption of specialty crops and access to fresh produce.

NFI conducted before and after surveys within the Adult Garden Education Programs participants to measure gardening knowledge learned and to help gauge the effectiveness of the program. This excerpt from the before survey from one of the participants reflects a common sentiment:

*“I have fantasized for years about having a garden but the twin impediments of no place and little know-how have held me back. We had a very large garden when I was a small child....I'm enormously excited about this opportunity to get my hands in the dirt and provide family and friends with good food”.* According to another participant in the before survey, *“I have no idea how food grows.... Is corn a veggie?”* By the end of the growing season both of these participants, and all the other participants, had grown several rounds of productive crops using the organic techniques they had learned.

Here are a few statements from the post-survey:

- *Born and raised in a big city, I never got to the chance to experience growing my own food. I also have the worst touch just keeping house plants and flowers alive, so I needed a lot of instruction and support. The class was so educational and rewarding leaving me with delicious vegetables I grew from seeds! The class leader and even other friendly gardeners in nearby plots helped give me the confidence and knowledge to be able to do it on my own!*
- *The Garden Education Program gave me the skills I needed to be able to begin a hobby that I know I'll enjoy for the rest of my life. I loved learning in the well-established community of the Mamie D. Lee community garden, where I was also able to benefit from the experience of longtime gardeners, in addition to the program instructors. Through community work days I felt like I became a part of the garden even before I had a plot there in the years after I finished the program. I would recommend GEP for anyone ready to begin planting and growing!*

The expected results outlined in the original project proposal were far-ranging and ambitious. Over the course of the 2011 and 2012 growing seasons, NFI pursued the goals of the original project proposal and, while we were successful in carrying out youth garden education programs in both those seasons, the programs did not meet the expectations of the original project proposal. In particular, we were not able to expand our work into the number of venues projected by the original proposal. Nor were we able to create the “train-the-trainer” aspect of the program described in the original proposal.

We found that working through partners to conduct off-site programs with youth was very difficult. There are other organizations in D.C. who focus on doing garden education with youth, particularly in lower income areas, and we feel they do a more effective job of working with these populations. While pursuing the objectives of this grant, we also saw that our limited staff was severely overstretched. We had four part-time staff with very minimal salaries working at five different sites throughout the growing season. Toward the end of the 2012 growing season we had a retreat with all staff, board members and several dedicated volunteers, during which

we decided that NFI would be more effective working from one core site, the Mamie D. Lee community garden, in 2013.

When looking at staffing for 2013, we decided the organization needed at least one full-time staff member paid a reasonable salary, so that NFI could benefit from that person's undivided attention. In February we hired a full-time Director. We requested and received an extension of this grant until the fall of 2013 and a scaling-back of the original scope of the grant to concentrate on educational activities that could be pursued at our demonstration garden in Northeast D.C. By concentrating our activities at this one site, we were able to make better use of our limited staffing.

For the 2013 growing season, we hired a new Adult Garden Education instructor and had a very successful season. In contrast to the abundance of youth gardening programs in DC, we have found that there is great unmet demand for adult food gardening education. We are now confident that we will be able to expand our adult education program both into new neighborhoods in the Metro DC area and into the winter season by introducing courses on year-round urban food gardening. We believe that educating adults to grow their own food is a powerful albeit indirect way to reach youth and positively affect their eating habits by helping the adults who are raising them provide them with a wide variety of vegetable-based meals starting at a young age.

The garden beds are still present and usable at both Beers Elementary School and McFarland Middle School. The whole Mamie D. Lee community garden benefitted from the rain garden swale that NFI put in. This helped to alleviate significant drainage issues in parts of the garden. Beers Elementary and McFarland Middle School: We hope that the school community will continue to be engaged in urban vegetable farming by making use of the gardens created by NFI.

Mamie D. Lee Community Garden/NFI Demonstration Garden/Adult Garden Education Program site: The demonstration garden, through its open volunteer program, continues to serve as an entryway for beginning urban gardeners in the Washington, DC area. In addition, there is ongoing informal engagement of the surrounding community through conversations started with passers-by on their way to and from the adjacent Metro station. Even the pedestrians who do not stop to chat are affected by watching the growing season unfold at the garden as they walk by.

Fort Dupont Park Community Garden: This garden is in many ways "hidden away" in the center of a very large park that does not have easy access via public transportation. Consequently, NFI's work at this site has less visibility than the other garden sites. Nonetheless, the garden benefited from the new plots opened by NFI in 2011 and 2012. During the 2013 growing season, the National Park Service expanded the number of gardening plots available to individual gardeners by including the plots previously worked by NFI.

NFI held ten workshops under this grant, reaching approximately 584 attendees. NFI's seed-starting workshop at Rooting DC 2013 was the fourth most popular workshop among all the workshops presented. According to session feedback forms collected at the end of the event, it also received one of the highest evaluation ratings—4.16 out of 5.

It is difficult to stay in touch with young growers from other sites so we do not have hard documentation of long-term results. However, given the immediate outcomes documented above, we know that participants in the program greatly increased their gardening and nutrition knowledge and abilities. The most likely long-term impact will be on their openness and tendency to purchase, prepare, grow and consume fresh fruits and vegetables.

Some of our more notable success stories are as follows:

- Two adult GEP participants went on to become successful regular plot holders at the Mamie D. Lee Community Garden;
- One GEP participant went on to become the Garden Education Program instructor in 2012 and is now in an intensive one-year farming school. She plans to make a career in this field;
- Several NFI demonstration garden volunteers have gone on to related activities, including graduate training in nutrition, Peace Corps volunteer service in Africa, and One GEP Student will use her garden knowing to educate her family.

## **Beneficiaries**

As a whole, the direct beneficiaries of the project represented two categories. They were either D.C. Public School students or they were residents of D.C. Wards 5-8. By default, of course, the students are also residents. As previously described, however, several organizations were also beneficiaries. Furthermore, the financial benefits through project visibility and marketing were likely to have had some additional outcomes.

## **Lessons Learned**

The lessons learned through the administration of this project were partially organizational and included:

- Do not over extend staff;
- Do not rely too heavily on part-time and poorly-paid staff;
- Do not over extend programs to too many sites;
- Do not fall into “mission creep” by targeting a population (youth) with which the organization has limited experience;
- Do not overestimate what partnering organizations can deliver;
- Do not rely on partnering organizations to deliver key components of programs; and
- It is difficult to become established in new communities, particularly when the project offered is not specifically requested by those communities.

A number of observations which were made from the positive lessons learned will provide a framework for future activities. We know that growing organic food in an urban setting provides multiple opportunities for partnership with organizations that can use donated produce for their own educational and programmatic activities. As referenced earlier, we made organizational change, even when challenging, this can make an organization more effective in the long run. Furthermore, we noted that the largest impact of projects may be on individuals or communities other than those originally targeted.

There is a large unmet need for adult urban food gardening education in the DC area, which NFI is suited to address through our Gardening Education Program. Many of the positive outcomes of our activities could be replicated with further funding. In particular, the Garden Education Program and Demonstration Garden, in addition to efforts to work with youth in partnership with youth organizations at NFI-run sites could be significantly expanded, which we are planning to do with the SCBG of 2013. We will be expanding the current Garden Education Program into a three-season garden education program. The program will start in the spring with seed-starting and cold-frame construction, and end with our fall program about seed saving and cover-crops.

## **ADDITIONAL SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION/INFORMATION**

### **Website:**

- Our website is our largest asset for recruiting volunteers, partners, and new students. On average, our website gets over 1,000 views per week. The majority of the visitors come to our website by directly typing in our name or doing a search through Google/search engines.

### **Twitter:**

- The @nfi info Twitter feed has 771 followers and NFI follows 510 Twitter feeds.

### **Facebook:**

- (<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Neighborhood-Farm-Initiative/123463445796>) The NFI Facebook page currently has 1,156 total fans (“likes”), with a potential reach for 501,655 people through Friends of Fans. For the range of August 24 – September 21, 2013, our weekly total reach (meaning the number of Facebook users who looked at our posts) was 2,551.

### **NFI Blog:**

- The NFI Blog has been running since May 2008 and since then has reached a pageview of 22,562.

### **NFI Brochure:**

- NFI has always reached out to those who may not have access to the internet and/or social media, in which case we hand out our brochure. We also bring our brochures to every major event to hand out to attendees and participants. This year NFI has received assistance from Hattaway Communications to revamp our language and message. We will be rolling out new brochures after our final training with Hattaway Communications on October 15, 2013.

**NFI Newsletter:**

- NFI keeps a weekly newsletter that currently has 1,957 subscribers. On average it is read by 25-30% of the subscribers, which is considered very good for an e-mail newsletter.
- NFI was featured in two video projects that focused on urban agriculture in D.C.: An artist from upstate New York, working on the “Habitat for Artists” collaborative project of the Corcoran Museum and THEARC in Washington, DC, included an interview with one of our staff at our Mamie D. Lee garden. Habitat for Artists created installations throughout the city for the display of community-based artwork. This interview was part of a project that revolved around D.C.'s urban agriculture scene. The NFI clip can be seen here (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4v2bQ805gF0>).
- Graduate students from American University’s School of Communication produced public service announcements about NFI.

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**Project Title:** Common Grounds Garden

**Project Summary**

The *Common Grounds Garden* (CGG) was designed to increase the knowledge and practice in sustainable gardening methods, familiarize school communities with the cultivation and consumption of Specialty Crops, increase the amount of chemical-free food grown locally and equip economically disadvantaged groups with skill sets to improve health and financial outlooks. Additionally, the project sought to use food as a tool to strengthen and preserve community history, heritage, and traditions. This would be accomplished by using school-based gardens to plant, grow and harvest Specialty Crops emphasizing heritage and history through creative, sustainable agriculture and community-building practices. The Common Grounds Gardens would reflect the diversity and strengths of the city’s native-born and immigrant populations through the comparison and contrasting of their agricultural folkways and traditions, while giving youth a unique hands-on history lesson unparalleled in any other program.

**Project Approach**

The approach of the CGG project was to expose youth to the joy of sustainable gardening through the cultivation and consumption of Specialty Crops grown with their own hands. Many young people were oblivious to the origins and nature of the food they eat and were unaware of the great distances food travels from large agribusiness farms in other states and aboard

before they reach their tables. Few were aware that local, healthy, chemical-free food choices are available and that they, the youth have a terrific opportunity to grow their own food through their school communities. Our project prompts students to view the food they eat in a different light and in the process help strengthen and preserve community history, heritage and traditions.

Partner organizations for the Menare Foundation included:

- The Johnson Middle School and the “A Wider Circle” which is a regional non-profit;
- Truesdell Educational Campus and the “Heart of Education Project”;
- Aquabarrel;
- Growing Soul;
- “Our House” which is a live-in facility which provides job training for at-risk youth; and
- The Growing Connection.

### **Goals and Outcomes Achieved**

In order to attain the above, the project developed and executed agreements with the two schools, developed the planning process and garden sites and identifying prospective student participants. The initial teachers were apprised of the project and engaged in the process. Five teachers participated in the initial presentation and training as lead by the project coordinator. During the first months, the Foundation ordered supplies, identified field trip destinations, and began building the sites.

We were able to consider another organization, The Washington Center for Children, for the second effort. It has locations in northeast and northwest Washington, DC. The student population differed from the DC public schools as the student population is developmentally challenged. However, the challenges associated with this population and this project was difficult programmatically.

The Menare Foundation temporarily discontinued to project and subsequently, chose to submit a withdrawal from the program and declined additional grant support.

### **Beneficiaries**

While the physical and initial administrative structures for the project were established, the early termination prevented the foundation from attaining the benefits and impact which it sought. We did convey the essential information regarding the development, process, and potential educational outcomes of the program. Additionally, a framework for future gardening projects was provided for the involved students and teachers.

**Lessons Learned**

Our progress was predicated upon seamless management and procedural expectations with the State agency. We discovered that a small organization should utilize the resources of, and access micromanagement opportunities provided by the State agency. Organizations with small staffs and varied objectives often over extend without ample cash reserves. We also recognized that a lengthy disruption within the financial pipeline may cause a “season dependent” program to render useless its work plan as well as the associated timelines. By not considering the impact of external administrative processes, this project did not move beyond the startup phase. Agencies should discuss contingency planning during the post-award meetings. It would be wise to consider several “what if?” scenarios.

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