



GARDENING - A NATIONAL CALL TO ACTION

Growing Health, Economy, Natural Resources, Community & Future Generations

Over the next 50 years, the U.S. and the international community will face health, food security and environmental challenges more daunting than any civilization has faced before. The United Nations estimates that food production will need to increase by 70% in order to feed a projected global population of 9 billion people in 2050. The challenges multiply as more food will be grown using a depleted and polluted natural resource base and in an unpredictable climate. The solutions to these interconnected issues are not yet known, however gardening will play an important role in feeding all eaters fresh, healthy and safe foods. A national food gardening initiative is a universal solution to reducing health care costs, regenerating the economy, preserving soil and water, revitalizing community, providing national security while leaving a legacy for future generations. Step up to the plate and take an active role in growing food!

National Food Gardening Initiative

By Food & Society Policy Fellows Fred Bahnson, Roger Doiron, Rose Hayden-Smith, Erin MacDougall, Lisa Kivirist & Angie Tagtow

A national food gardening initiative is a universal solution for many of the problems we face today. Gardening empowers eaters to take an active role in producing their own food which can reduce health care costs, regenerate the economy, preserve natural resources, strengthen national security, build resilient communities and nourish future generations.

We are calling upon the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to launch a national gardening initiative by convening a national summit (much like the National Victory Garden Conference in December of 1941) in which a comprehensive home, school, workplace and community gardening plan will be created. As part of this initiative, we propose that USDA form an intradepartmental team focused on gardening as a tool for meeting internal program and policy goals. In addition, we propose that USDA take the lead in establishing an interdepartmental gardening council and use gardening as a universal tool for meeting federal department goals.

Garden author Gene Logsdon said "[A] garden is the only practical way for urban societies to come in close contact with the basic realities of life, and if that contact is not close, it is not meaningful at all...in the garden there is time to sit and think, to produce good food for the mind—these are all part of an education that the industrial world hungers for but cannot name." The time is ripe to step up to the plate, and take an active role in growing food!

Gardens Cultivate Solutions for Positive Change

1. Reduces Health Care Costs

- Gardening reduces health care costs by improving nutrition and increasing physical activity. Those who garden eat more fresh fruits and vegetables for improved nutrition, thereby decreasing their risk of diet-related chronic diseases such as obesity, diabetes, heart disease and some types of cancer. Gardening burns calories and provides aerobic and strength-building exercises while reducing stress and boosting emotional health.
- Children who garden and grow their own food are more likely to eat fruits and vegetables, have a greater knowledge about healthy foods and continue healthy behaviors as adults resulting in a longer life expectancy.

2. Produces Safe Food

- Food gardening puts fresh, health-promoting foods on our plates, thereby replacing highly processed foods that contain colorings, additives, and preservatives.
- Gardening shortens the food supply chain leading to decreased vulnerability of our household food supplies.
- Growing our own food allows us to decrease our exposure to synthetic chemicals such as pesticides, herbicides and chemical fertilizers.



Check Out Our Websites!

- Anathoth Garden**
www.anathothgarden.org
- Environmental Nutrition Solutions**
www.environmentalnutritionsolutions.com
- Inn Serendipity Farm and B&B**
www.innserendipity.com
- King County Food & Fitness Initiative**
www.kcff.org
- Kitchen Gardeners International**
www.kitchengardeners.org
- Victory Grower**
<http://groups.ucanr.org/victorygrower/>

Gardens Cultivate Solutions for Positive Change

3. "Leaves No Eater Behind"

- School gardens improve instruction across the curriculum, encourage physical activity and provide a place to apply learning...not only the ABC's, but science, health, food systems and community service.
- School, home and community gardens provide places to teach and learn about nutrition, healthy eating and healthy lifestyles.

4. Stimulates the Economy & Creates Green Jobs

- Home gardens can offer considerable economic savings for families looking to put healthy, fresh and affordable foods on the dinner table.
- Buying fresh food from a farmers' market, community-supported farm or roadside stand recirculates money within communities and strengthens local economies.
- Gardening cultivates green jobs by encouraging and training new and transitional gardeners and farmers.

5. Protects Natural Resources & Curbs Climate Change

- Growing food encourages eaters to interact with nature and establish practices that protect water and soil.
- Food gardening includes heirloom and heritage varieties of fruits and vegetables further preserving the biodiversity of the food supply.
- Gardening reduces dependence on non-renewable energy needed to process, transport and store food and lowers greenhouse gas emissions.

6. Builds Communities & Social Capital

- Gardens foster peace and healing across racial and economic divides, revitalize broken communities, strengthen family bonds and promote a higher quality of life.

- Growing food maintains cultural food traditions while transferring cooking and preservation skills to the next generation.
- Gardens are a powerful source of personal and social transformation from the urban Food Project gardens in Boston to the Anathoth Community Garden in rural North Carolina.

7. Engages Faith Communities

- Gardening is the original human vocation. In Genesis God tells the first humans to "till and keep" the fertile soil. Gardens provide both a metaphor and a place to learn such care of creation.
- Just as numerous churches have built Habitats for Humanity, so too could they plant Gardens for Humanity - another way that churches can use their land, resources and social capital to serve their community.

8. Protects Homeland & Food Security

- During World War II, 20 million homeowners had Victory Gardens that produced up to 40% of the fresh vegetables consumed in the U.S. Growing food builds food security while decreasing our dependence on other countries for foods that promote health.
- Gardening cultivates self-sufficiency through human power while decreasing reliance on fossil fuels to transport food.
- Diversifying the foods that are grown reduces vulnerability to plant diseases and pests.

9. Nourishes Future Generations

- Gardens not only grow healthy foods, but also the next generation of gardeners and farmers. Many of today's new farmers did not grow up on farms, but had their first taste of the farming life in a backyard garden.
- Gardens grow strong family bonds offering opportunities for multi-generational learning, helping to insure that essential horticultural skills are passed on to future generations.

About the Authors: Fred Bahnson is a Senior Fellow with the Oakland Institute and former director of the Anathoth Community Garden (North Carolina); Roger Doiron is the Founding Director of Kitchen Gardeners International (Maine); Rose Hayden-Smith is a County Director for the University of California Cooperative Extension and County of Ventura Farm Advisor (California); Erin MacDougall is a Program Manager for the Seattle and King County Public Health Department (Washington); Lisa Kivist is an author, farmer and owner of Inn Serendipity Farm and B&B (Wisconsin); and Angie Tagtow is a registered dietitian and Environmental Nutrition Consultant (Iowa). Photo credits: Roger Doiron, Lisa Kivist, Angie Tagtow and J. Chris Carmichael.

