

Solidarity Gardens

2020

Final Report

Cornell

Cooperative

Extension of

Tompkins

Ithaca, NY



The COVID-19 Pandemic has had lasting and far reaching economic, social, environmental and personal impacts across our entire society. The crisis has been particularly difficult for many individuals already suffering from chronic poverty, mental health or substance abuse issues.

For the individual, the psychological buffer that protects us during times of crisis, or surge capacity, has been completely overwhelmed by an ongoing and slow moving disaster. We must rejuvenate in order to avoid long term health impacts. Some of the ways that we can do that are physical activity, time in nature, time with friends, healthy eating habits, relaxation and creative outlets. Gardening provides mental and health benefits while producing nutritious food that can offset grocery costs.

The solidarity gardens project was initiated in April 2020 as a response to the Covid-19 pandemic and its widespread impacts in the community, particularly when it comes to food access. The project seeks to connect community members who have traditionally been excluded from agriculture with garden infrastructure, resources such as seeds, starts, and soil, and gardening education. Through this work we seek to foster a more resilient, interdependent, and self-reliant community and amplify the work of aligned local organizations also engaged in this work. Our strategy to develop an effective crisis response and sustainable

long term organization consisted of the following:

1) Garden Infrastructure Development focused on serving low-income, BIPOC, SNAP-eligible families, and other marginalized community members, the Solidarity Gardens project offered free garden expertise, construction of raised beds, soils through the generosity of Green Tree Soils, compost, and volunteer labor.

2) Seeding Hope:

Our efforts to bring hope to our community included easy projects for first-time gardeners including a microgreens project, garlic growing, flower bulbs, and cooking classes.

3) Workforce NY Job Training Program:

Provided trainees with mentoring and professional development opportunities in urban agriculture, horticulture, landscaping, and community engagement.

4) Movement Building: We offered support to allied organizations, connected low-income and BIPOC communities with resources while building and strengthening one-on-one relationships with community leaders, service-minded community members and began to develop a strong core of volunteers and allies.

1. Garden Infrastructure Development, Sites with regular upkeep by WorkforceNY

Ithaca Permaculture Park Project 2011-2020

Community Champion: Josh Dolan

Location: Alice Miller Way



PPP at Conley Park is directly adjacent to two low-income housing sites run by Ithaca Neighborhood Housing Authority (INHS) and provides an ideal location for outdoor gardening education for low-income residents.

The Site has been developed over the last decade to demonstrate permaculture principles, display a wide variety of food crops, and create a model for sustainable municipal food production that is community-oriented. The municipal food forest model continues to gain popularity

and offers a fertile new avenue to create more just and resilient urban food systems.

In 2020 the six existing raised beds were planted with a “Global Garden” demonstration featuring produce from many different regions familiar to African American and other immigrant communities represented in Ithaca’s Northside neighborhood. Produce was harvested by local residents and donated to the Mutual Aid Blue Food Pantry Box maintained by Ms. Pheobe Brown, a local neighborhood leader.

Beverly J. Martin Elementary/ 2010-2020

Community Champion: Katie Church of the Youth Farm Project

Location: Court St. @ GIAC



For over 10 years, BJM’s garden has been an important outreach and education site for low-income youth and families. In 2020, members of the Solidarity Gardens WorkforceNY team assisted long-time caretaker Katie Church and other long term volunteers associated with the school. Produce made its way to the weekly Cornell food pantry at GIAC and to No Mas Lagrimas weekly food giveaways.

1. Garden Infrastructure Development: Additional Sites

Dig’Nity Garden/ September 2020

5 raised beds

Community Champion: Anthony Halton

Location: Chestnut St.

5 raised beds donated to community garden effort at West Village, a Section-8 housing development.

ICSD Elementary School Gardens/ September 2020 - 29 raised beds



Raised beds were distributed to Fall Creek Elementary, Northeast Elementary, Caroline Elementary, and South Hill Elementary Schools to complement outdoor learning spaces in partnership with the Ithaca Children’s Garden, Erin Marteau, Executive Director and project lead.

Mutual Aid Cortland/June 2020

8 raised beds

Community Champion: Juliana Garcia

Location: Old Cortland Rd., Cortland

8 raised beds constructed to serve as a visible garden accessible to neighbors and serving Mutual Aid Blue Pantry efforts.



The Learning Farm/May-September 2020

20 Raised Beds

Community Champion: Christa Nunez

Location: Enfield Glen Rd.



Approximately 20 raised beds constructed on the bank close to house and entry to the farm. Learning Farm is host to STEAM school year and summer programs, Khuba International, and the Quarter Acre for the People project.

Multicultural Resource Center/ May 2020 – 3 raised beds

Community Champion: Rose Fleurent

Location: State/MLK St.



Three raised beds constructed in Late May serving the Mutual Aid Tompkins blue food sharing cabinet and managed by MRC. Food raised in these beds for food pantry use.

1. Garden Infrastructure Development: Additional Sites, *continued*

Mutual Aid Tompkins

5 raised beds

Community Champion: various

Location: county-wide

Raised beds, soil, and starts or seeds distributed to Blue Food Pantry Box sites in Newfield, Varna, and Ithaca. There are about 40 Mutual Aid Blue Food Pantries located around the county, serving both urban and rural residents. They are maintained by volunteers and offer 24 hour self-service of shelf-stable items.

No Mas Lagrimas/May 2020

5 raised beds @ West Village

Community Champion: Ana Ortiz

Location: Chestnut St.

Five raised beds constructed to serve as home gardens for three low-income households in West Village Section-8 housing.

Press Bay Food Hub/ April 2020

6 raised beds

Community Champion: Melissa Madden
(Property Manager, Urban Core)

Location: Press Bay Court, Green St., Ithaca



The garden is a partnership between Press Bay Food Hub and Full Plate Farm Collective. It serves as a U-Pick for CSA members and supplies fresh produce to a weekly food pantry.

Southside Community Center/ August 2020

3 raised beds

Community Champion: Nia Nunn (President, SSSC Inc.)

Location: 305 South Plain St.



Three new raised beds installed in the garden area and all existing and new beds planted with fall crops.

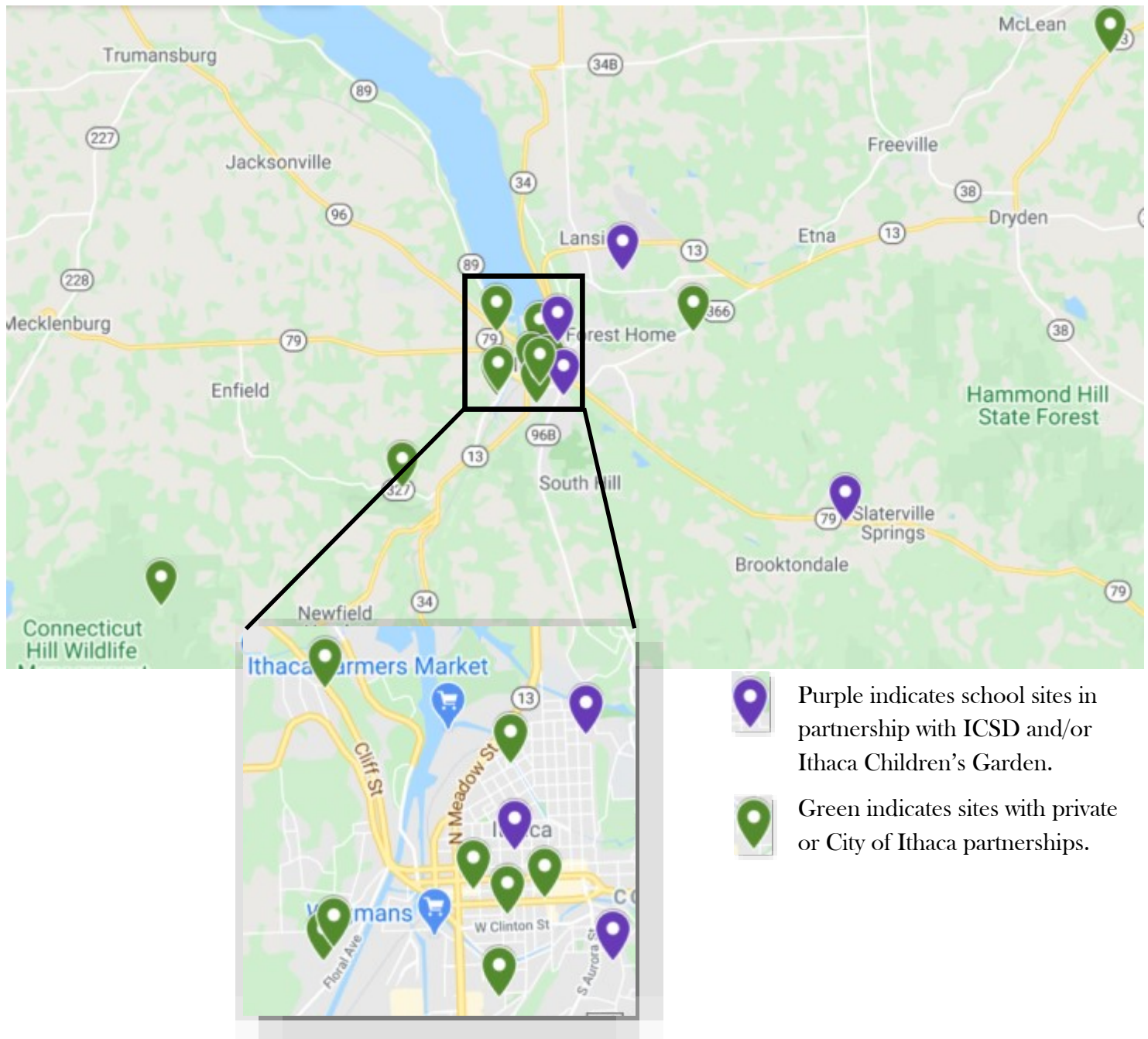
Titus Towers/ May 2020

Community Champion: Molly Birecree (IHA Staff)

Location: Titus Towers Senior Residence

Senior housing site expanded its pre-existing community garden established by Gardens 4 Humanity in 2010-2011. Staff and volunteers increased gardening space due to high demand.

1. Garden Infrastructure Development, Solidarity Garden Sites



Garden Infrastructure, by the numbers:

110 raised garden beds built and installed at 17 sites across the county, many at sites that serve low-income and SNAP-eligible families.

44+ cubic yards of soil and compost delivered to Solidarity Gardens

15 new community champions

2) Seeding Hope



Seeds of Hope Microgreens Project

Throughout the summer, WorkforceNY Youth Staff worked on the Seeding Hope Microgreens Project; first conducting research on the process of microgreen production, then packing seeds and soil, creating instructions, and growing sprouts as a demonstration.

Master Gardener Volunteers joined in with packing kits, making it possible for over 120 families to grow microgreens in their homes.

Kits were created and distributed at West Village Section-8 housing and at a new food pantry in partnership with No Mas Lagrimas.

Garlic & Flower Bulb Giveaway

New gardeners often feel that once October rolls around, gardening is done. Our fall Garlic & Flower Bulb Giveaway was an attempt to help gardeners learn that growing happens even through the colder months while encouraging participants to spend more time outdoors in the fall, and hopefully in the spring when their flowers bloom.

Growing from bulbs and cloves is an easy entry point for many new gardeners since all the nutrition a plant needs to grow to maturity is pre-packaged in the bulb. Looking forward to spring blooms gives a point of hope and anticipation during our long upstate winter.



This year our Master Gardener Volunteers worked with Josh Dolan and Mila Fournier to package kits for Solidarity Gardens participants, providing enough garlic to grow 300 plants and giving away 1,100 flowering bulbs.

Cooking Classes

Starting in May, Josh Dolan held 12 on-line cooking classes, helping participants learn to prepare the harvest from Solidarity Gardens. One set of classes was in partnership with the Open Doors English ESL program, another set was open to the public, free for SNAP-eligible participants. The classes reached between 80-100 participants.

3) Workforce NY Job Training Program

Beginning in July, four WorkforceNY youth employees were assigned to the Solidarity Gardens Project under the supervision of Josh Dolan. Aside from the Microgreens Project, the four summer WorkforceNY youth staff members also worked extensively in the community at the Permaculture Park, Beverly J. Martin Elementary, Southside Community Center, and more. They constructed wooden raised garden beds, built pathways, maintained gardens, harvested and distributed produce, conducted neighborhood surveys, created instruction materials, and learned valuable job skills.

Together, these four youth workers contributed about 500 hour over the summer and into September.

Growing microgreens in soil ~
We found that microgreens grew faster in the soil than on the paper towel. Most seeds took only 2 days to germinate and trays germinated more evenly. The soil provides consistent moisture and dark.

Things you need:
Empty clean salad container
Good quality potting soil
Seeds to plant

Planting

- Fill the salad container with 1 inch of potting soil, smooth the top.
- Sprinkle seeds evenly.
- Cover with ¼ inch of soil.
- Water gently but thoroughly
- Once seeds have sprouted, place them on a sunny windowsill in the sunlight outside for at least 4 hours daily, or under grow lights.

Harvest your microgreens with kitchen scissors and enjoy them!

Microgreen seeds can be purchased from Johnny's Selected Seeds, in Winslow, ME 04901. The phone number is 877-564-6697 and they can be found online.

If you would like to purchase already grown microgreens, you can order online at Dancing Turtle Farm. Dancing Turtle farm is located right here in Ithaca and can be found on Facebook.



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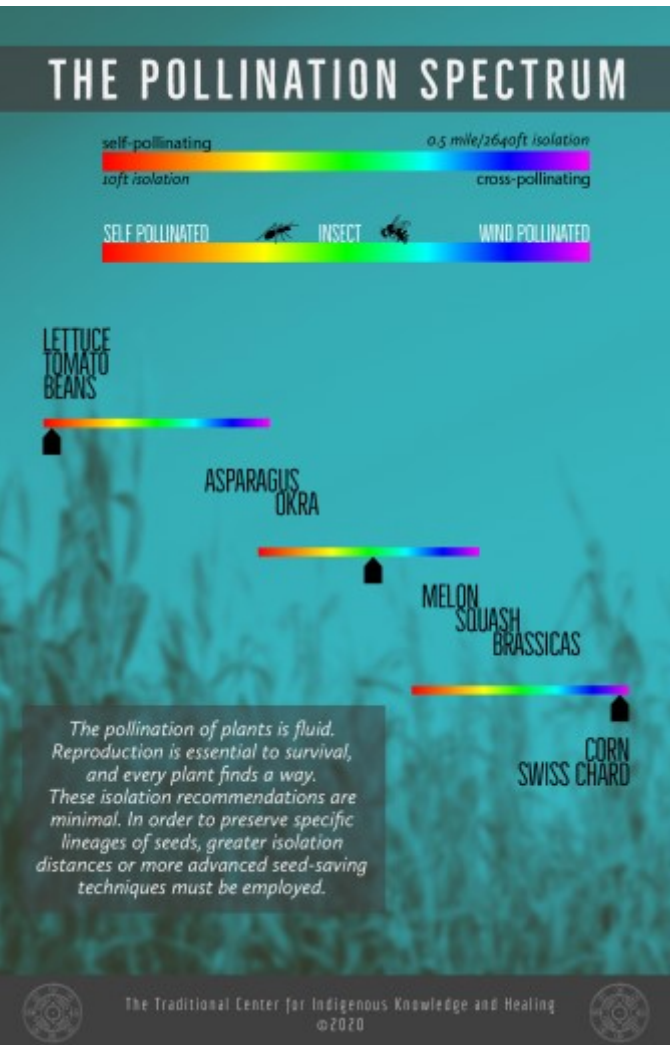
4) Movement Building

Indigenous Center for Traditional Knowledge and Healing/ May-July 2020 8 raised beds

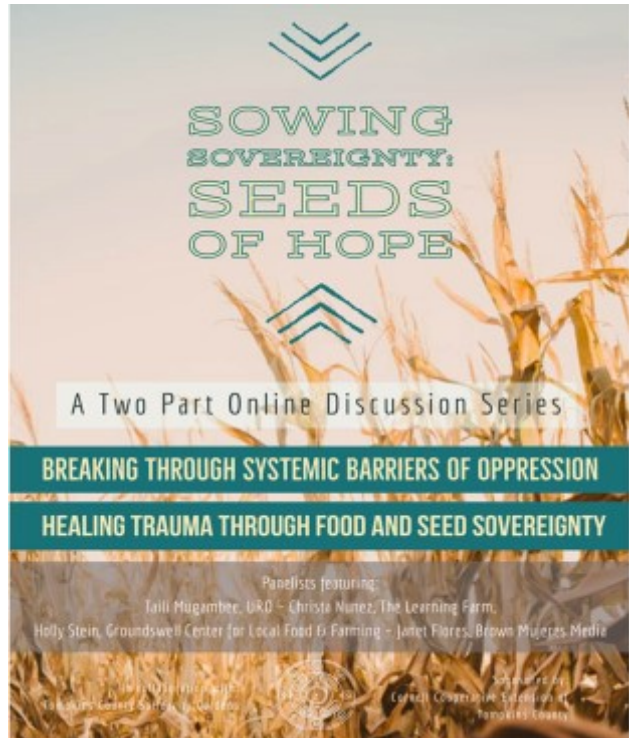
Champions: Alexas Esposito & Joe Soto
Location: Connecticut Hill Rd., Enfield

As part of our community outreach, Solidarity Gardens awarded a mini-grant to the Traditional Center for Indigenous Knowledge and Healing. They conducted rural outreach and created infographics and email content to promote seed saving with easy entry crops that don't easily cross-pollinate.

In the future, we will continue to strengthen partnerships in the community with existing allies utilizing the micro-grant model established in 2020.



Sowing Sovereignty: Seeds of Hope—a two-part online panel discussion



As part of the mini-grant the Traditional Center for Indigenous Knowledge and Healing facilitated two community conversations. Led by Alexas Esposito, Joe Soto, and Maya Soto, two transformative conversations occurred and featured representatives from several local food sovereignty efforts including The Learning Farm, Ultimate Reentry Program, Groundswell Center for Food and Farming, Mutual Aid Tompkins, and more. Part one focused on the importance of seed saving and land access toward a more just and resilient food system. Part two discussed historical trauma and healing in the context of transforming the food system. Over 70 people attended the discussions and at least another 150 tuned into the FB live broadcast.

Steering Committee Meetings, May-Sept

The Solidarity Gardens Project convened monthly meetings bringing together community members with interest in food security, land access, and gardening.

Challenges and Next Steps

This was a year of relationship building, both within our organization and throughout the community.

Internally, the Solidarity Gardens found a home in the Cooperative Extension of Tompkins County's Horticulture Department with a new supervisory structure. While it was wonderful to finally have a dedicated team home for this project, starting a new project under work from home orders offered an unanticipated set of challenges. Lack of face-to-face opportunities to work together made it more difficult to establish a strong supervisor/supervisee relationship. The breakdown of normal in-person work flows and the need to establish new work from home work flows reduced efficiency, both in working with the Horticulture staff and in coordinating, hiring an assistant, and training new volunteers. Even with these challenges, and the challenge of navigating strict rules about involving volunteers, the Solidarity Garden project saw a number of volunteers who together worked approximately 100 hours. Unfortunately, we were unable to find a suitable candidate to assist in the program, so we were especially glad for those volunteer hours and the dedication of our WorkforceNY staff.

Creating events was also eliminated due to COVID, so in-person training had to be presented virtually, which proved to be a significant barrier to participants who did not own home computers or have access to reliable internet service. Even for participants with ready internet access our program leaned through our Virtual Cooking Classes that Zoom fatigue is a real affliction. While we originally expected to be able to offer cooking classes throughout the growing season. After the 12th class, we decided that continuing the cooking classes at the end of the day was offering diminishing returns, both for Josh Dolan, who attempted to do live demonstrations from his home kitchen, and for the participants for whom the call of a summer evening outside was far too strong, especially after spending much of the day on-line.

Unanticipated in our planning was the need to spend much more time building relationships with project participants. Because of the historical distrust between BI-POC communities and public service agencies, our offers of resources and education were sometimes unanswered and we found that collecting demographic infor-

mation was especially challenging. We needed to build a long-term relationship of trust before expecting low-income and BIPOC communities to readily volunteer demographic information to survey takers.

Considering the challenges presented this year and the tight timeline, the Solidarity Gardens Project achieved its four primary goals of garden infrastructure development, seeding hope, workforce training, and movement building.

Looking forward to next steps, the Solidarity Gardens Program is pleased to be collaborating with students from Cornell's Master of Public Health program to conduct demographic surveys and do some program evaluation.

Beyond this winter's collaboration, we are looking forward to developing more teaching materials to be distributed monthly during growing season and a system of offering instant information about what is growing in our Solidarity Gardens. We also look forward to strengthening volunteer participation through collaborating with existing volunteer programs such as the Master Gardeners and the Master Composters and with a volunteer orientation and intake form, training, and enthusiasm-boosting outreach events.

We hope that this program can be funded to continue in future years during which we can:

- Increase administrative, communications and volunteer management capacity with new hire
- Plan for early spring outreach to potential casual employees from low income and BIPOC communities to serve as outreach workers and garden champions
- Strengthen relationship with Workforce NY and develop a year-round jobs program
- Create a community visioning process between allied organizations to set shared goals for 2021 and beyond.