

2020 Garden Project Annual Update



COMMITTED TO:

Helping our community grow a high volume of healthy food, to prevent hunger

Fostering self-sufficiency & empowerment

Building community connection & capacity

"Partner to alleviate hunger one meal at a time, to create a future where everyone has access to nourishing food."

2020: A year like no other
It was also a chance
to put our *values*
into action

compassion
leadership
collaboration
accountability
respect



AKA: Pre-Pandemic

To be honest, it is hard to remember what the first 10 weeks of 2020 were like. We hosted *in-person* seed sorting shifts, *in-person* garden leader networking events, and even an *in-person* Resource Center seed distribution shift.

(We also felt like we were in great shape for the 2020 season to unfold...)

March



Joining warehouse operations

With the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, Garden Project staff shifted, joining our food bank colleagues to keep the warehouse operational during Stay-at-Home orders. All volunteers were cancelled during the first nine weeks of the pandemic, so our small (and mighty) team **packed food boxes**, which were then distributed to 140 community partners.

April



Mailing seeds across seven counties

Across the region – and the country – instincts toward self and community-resilience were brought to the surface. The public assessed what we consider essential and what we need to feel safe and nourished. Garden Project dug deep into our seed stock and provided nearly **47,000 seed packets** to those in need. 1,098 custom seed orders were mailed across three dozen zip-codes and 4,000 Garden-to-Go Bags were delivered directly to 48 GLFB partner agencies.

May



Curbside vegetable transplant distribution

May started with all gardens closed to the public and without a plan for getting any of the 24,000 vegetable transplants growing in our southside greenhouse out to the public. By month's end, garden safety protocols were in place, and a curbside plant delivery system underway. Garden Project provided 553 plant pick-ups and offered 72 different vegetable varieties to meet the wide range of cultural needs. Local nurseries also donated and in total, **37,350 veggie seedlings** were provided to our network of home and community gardeners. We also provided seed potatoes and compost.

June



Gardens open safely

To make sure gardens remained accessible to community members that rely on them for food security, Garden Project created **Covid-19 safety protocols** that every grower committed to. Despite one third of the community gardens in our network being closed due to pandemic, we estimate the 69 open gardens produced **over 800,000 pounds of produce**.

July



Virtual Garden Tours

Despite the delay opening gardens, plots were full and lush by late July and ready to be featured on GP's annual garden tour. This year, GP created a four-part series that featured 13 community gardens and interviewed dozens of growers. For many, 2020 was one of **their best growing seasons**, thanks to great summer weather and the availability of time to spend in the garden while so many other places were closed. Abundance, care and pride were evident across the network.

August



Water improvements and great growth

Garden Project has steadily been making **upgrades to irrigation systems** across the network these last few years. This season brought new systems to Slater Park and Okemos International, where gardeners had been dragging hoses across parking lots and hauling water for a decade. With the onset of hotter, drier summers, this will be crucial to the productivity of growers going forward.

September



Robust harvests

Each year, gardeners take part in GP's Grow-A-Row initiative by planting extra for their local pantry and those in need. This year, despite over two thirds of registered gardeners reporting some level of food insecurity, over **85% reported sharing** their produce, and nearly one third gave directly to those with food insecurity. This extends the reach of the food bank, and the ties that keep our community connected.

October



Late season volunteer help

Volunteers are the life blood of Garden Project but to protect their safety, we **cut volunteer hours** down to 10% of what we host in an average year. In the fall though, we partnered with local LDS missionaries for two dozen garden workdays! They weeded paths, built fences, moved compost, laid mulch and restored untouched school gardens. Despite GP going most of the season without extra help, gardens were left in excellent condition for 2021.

Nov & Dec



Infrastructure repairs

The close of this challenging year brought dry and mild weather, perfect for infrastructure repairs and **site improvements**. Garden Project staff masked up and planted over 1,500 native perennials in areas that had been requiring regular mowing, built a deer fence at a senior assisted-living facility and laid the groundwork for a new, outdoor gathering space at the GP Demonstration Garden. We look forward to hosting outdoor workshops and events in the future.



We hope we never again go through a year with as much hurt and hardship as 2020. The suffering so many endured was heartbreaking.

Garden Project felt privileged to come alongside the community though and we remain committed to growing healthy food and cultivating community, *together.*

