Technology Transfer

Rutgers Urban Gardening: A Study in Cultural Diversity and Gardening

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Summary. Rutgers Urban Gardening (RUG) has established a physical, psychological, and emotional environment that fosters and sustains diversity. RUG enhances cultural diversity by employing an ethnic minority work force of six, reaching diverse audiences representing more than 30 ethnic groups, and offering a wide variety of educational programs. Urban gardening gives people an opportunity to meet others, share concerns, and solve problems together. It cuts across social, economic, cultural, and racial barriers, bringing together people of all ages and ethnic backgrounds.

In the 1970s, ecology and environment became important issues. People were concerned about the pollution of land, air, and water. Booming inflation caused food prices to soar. There were more people living in cities than ever before. Many of them came from overseas. They missed growing their own crops and were glad to find garden space, even in crowded cities. Some cities had a large number of vacant lots. The idea of gardens on public land wasn't completely new, and the Urban Gardening Program was started by the USDA Extension Service in 1977. The main purpose of the program was to develop and improve urban gardening to produce food and to promote good nutrition for low-income individuals and families. The program helps people create and develop community gardens in city vacant lots. Encouraging urban gardening reflects a new vision in the city. The city is seen as a part of the natural resource base and as a producer of agricultural goods rather than only as a consumer.

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RUG has operated in Newark, N.J., and surrounding communities since 1978. It has motivated more than 6500 city residents to establish about 1900 community and family gardens covering about 30 acres of vacant city lots with vegetables, herbs, small fruits, and other food crops worth about \$915,000 annually (based on Extension Service-USDA formula in Fig. 1). This paper discusses how urban gardening has promoted cultural diversity in RUG's work force, programs, and audiences.

The data were derived from the records maintained in RUG's office and from interviews using a stratified random sample of 133 respondent gardeners residing in Newark, N.J., and the surrounding communities (Patel et al., 1989). These gardeners were city residents who enrolled in the RUG program.

In this paper, the word "diversity" is defined as human differences in all forms—age, class, ethnicity, gender, physical and mental ability, race, sexual orientation, spiritual practice, and other human differences (Fowler, 1992). The Cooperative Extension System (CES) is committed to an emphasis on diversity in mission, work force, programs, audiences, and relationships with people and organizations.

The concern with diversity and diversity programs by CES has resulted primarily from workforce and population changes in the United States. Available research (Cox and Blake, 1991) supports the idea that diversity programs can assist in reducing cost, attracting and retaining a high-quality workforce, reducing turnover, making full use of the talents and skills of existing workers, increasing productivity, and enhancing creativity and innovation.

CES' effectiveness always has depended on its human resource base. Eighty percent of CES' budget goes for salary and benefits for about 15,000 professionals nationwide (Chesney, 1992). A growing number of women and ethnic minorities will make future work forces more diverse. Of

DOLLAR VALUE OF PRODUCTION

$$\begin{aligned}
 &= \\
 &\quad \text{Area (ft}^2\text{)} \\
 &\quad \times \\
 &\quad \text{Crop intensity (distance between rows)} \\
 &\quad \quad \text{Less than 1' = 1.2} \\
 &\quad \quad \text{1' to less than 2' = 1.0} \\
 &\quad \quad \text{2' to less than 3' = 0.8} \\
 &\quad \quad \text{3' or more = 0.7} \\
 &\quad \times \\
 &\quad \text{Crop quality} \\
 &\quad \quad \text{Good = 0.7} \\
 &\quad \quad \text{Fair = 0.4} \\
 &\quad \times \\
 &\quad \text{Length of season (frost-free days)} \\
 &\quad \quad \text{200 or more = 1.2} \\
 &\quad \quad \text{Less than 200 = 1.0}
 \end{aligned}$$

[For RUG, the distance between rows (crop intensity) was considered 1' to less than 2', the crop quality was good, and frost-free days was less than 200.]

Fig. 1. **Formula to estimate dollar value of production (from the USDA Extension Service Urban Gardening Program, 1981).**

Table 1. *Rutgers urban gardening audience.*

Category	No.	Percent ^z
African-American	4650	75 (40)
Hispanic	1116	18 (12)
Caucasian	372	6 (39)
Asian and other	62	1 (9)
Total	6200	100
Male	2170	35 (48)
Female	4030	65 (52)

^z1990 population census. Figures in parentheses indicate percentage of county population.

people entering the work force in the United States in the year 2000, more than 43% will be ethnic minorities or immigrants (Chesney, 1992). To reflect these changes, Extension must identify, recruit, and support a staff of diverse personnel.

With reference to RUG workforce, "minorities" means racial minorities—African Americans, Hispanics, and Asians. RUG's workforce of six includes three African Americans, two Asians, and one person of Hispanic background. The RUG staff was recruited on the basis of qualifications and experience required for the job. They were not put together intentionally for the purpose of diversity. However, it turned out to be a diverse workforce at the end of 6 years. This might have happened because of a special program like urban gardening, diverse audiences, a wide variety of educational programs offered in an urban setting, or a combination of all these factors. RUG respects and appreciates each person's contributions and perspectives through awards and prizes. Every member of the team has received state/national awards for outstanding performance. In 1992, RUG won two Rutgers Cooperative Extension awards for diversity and equal employment opportunity.

Literature about serving culturally diverse audiences (Grogan, 1991) suggests that some ethnic minority participants stay in educational programs longer when they are instructed by individuals who share the same cultural background. Ethnic minority staff, therefore, can contribute significantly to the goal of educating minority clientele.

RUG clientele (Table 1) are comprised of 75% African Americans, 18% people of Hispanic background, 6% Caucasians, 1% Asians, and more than 30 other ethnic groups represented to a lesser degree. The data indicate that 94% of the RUG audience is from ethnic minority groups; 65% of them are female. RUG also pioneered providing leadership to promote a summer intern program for minority youth from 1890 institutions in 1990 and 1992.

The next century promises a larger proportion of low-income Extension audiences (Schuchardt, 1991). More than 90% of RUG's audience falls into the low-income category: about one-third receive public assistance and two-thirds are retired/senior citizens with limited resources.

An interview schedule was developed for a field survey of a stratified random sample of 133 gardeners. Each respondent mentioned more than one benefit of gardening.

The results indicate that gardens are places for socio-cultural interactions and community-building. Of the participants involved, 31.3% developed new friendships through the gardens. Gardening promotes a community atmosphere. Twenty-nine percent of the participants helped others, and 14.5% shared their produce. Many gardeners expressed beliefs such as: "We didn't know many in the neighborhood until we started gardening together." "We have developed new friendships with different ethnic groups through gardening." "We forget race when we garden." (Patel, 1991).

RUG has organized a spring gardening school, master urban gardener training, hands-on training for seedling production, clinics, workshops, vegetable and garden contests, fund-raising transplant sales, volunteer training, harvest banquets, and nutrition education. RUG has established demonstration gardens in Newark's different wards and encourages various ethnic groups' participation in program activities. Each year, about 6500 city residents participate in about 20 educational projects and activities aimed at developing food gardens on public land.

CES' mission demands that all groups participate in and benefit from Extension programs. Greater participation by members of culturally diverse audiences is Extension's priority. The future success of Extension will be determined, not only by the relevance of its educational programs, but by the extent to which low-income and culturally diverse audiences participate and consider the programs valuable. The present and future holds tremendous potential for urban gardening to foster activities/ programs for a culturally diverse audience. In order to remain effective, productive, and relevant, CES should recruit, employ, and maintain staff from a diverse workforce that is becoming more diverse, and should provide programs to a diverse population that is rapidly changing and becoming more diverse in its composition, issues, and needs.

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