

Community Gardens Meeting Feb. 20, 2009

Each small group identified at the January meeting met one additional time to more clearly define their concepts. The purpose of this meeting was to share and review all the ideas generated. This meeting's discussion centers around which of those ideas are a priority and considers how to proceed. Participants were also requested to consider existing umbrella organizations such as Green Omaha, Activate Omaha Kids as they decided both priority and next steps. The discussion focused on how launch their concepts, who or what organizations might help to support the work.

The group reports were as follows:

1. Food Bank and Co-ops:
 - a. Concept- Gleaning produce from local gardens for distribution through the Food Bank "Fresh Truck" or other food pantries.
 - b. Process - A core group of volunteers would be organized along with a schedule of community gardens to routinely "glean" the garden and deliver the produce to the food bank or pantry. The Omaha Food Bank through work with community agencies would develop a schedule to deliver produce to areas of the community considered to be "food deserts" using the Food Bank Fresh Truck. Through the Master Gardeners and Extension flash cards would be developed containing instructions regarding the preparation and cooking of produce. These cards would accompany produce packages at food banks and pantries.
 - c. Who responsible – The Food Bank and Master Gardeners would take the lead in this project and expect to begin the project this summer.

2. Neighborhoods and community gardens:
 - a. Concept – Develop a toolkit containing information and resources aimed at getting a garden started and how to maintain community garden efforts over time.
 - b. Process – The toolkit would be developed with three main focus areas: Choose your own adventure describes the steps to start a community garden such as how to acquire land, where to get water, how to plan and plant the first crop to name a few, The second focus is how to maintain your garden throughout the growing season and would include references how to schedule volunteers, how to manage the produce from the garden and when to celebrate successes. The final focus would be how to assure the long-term success of a garden including ideas to keep volunteers and interest. The toolkit would include checklists, guides and resources. In addition the group would begin to develop a list of existing community gardens and gardeners to provide support and networking for those interested in establishing gardens.

- c. Who responsible – Big Gardens and City Sprouts would take the lead to look at existing toolkits and integrating their own tools and experience. The toolkit would be completed by October 2009 to be introduced at the Farmer's Market festival.

3. Farmer's Market:

- a. Concepts – To increase access to Farmer's markets by expanding to Midtown location, developing a shared space for community gardens at the Old Market location and pursue a state policy to create farmer's markets as WIC vendors. In addition the group wanted to work with the food bank to take excess produce from the farmer's market to shelters or food pantries. The Omaha Farmer's Market would plans to share the success of these efforts through a conference held in October.
- b. Process – The Omaha Farmer's market has a plan in place to open the Midtown market this summer with Wed. evening sessions planned. They will also be working with Big Garden to negotiate a space at the market for community gardens. Big Garden will work with other community gardens to establish interest and a schedule to use the space throughout the growing season. The Omaha Food Bank will discuss with the market a plan to send the food truck to the market to pick up any produce for donation. The Omaha Farmer's Market will look for grant funding and sponsorship to hold a fall festival which will feature tracks initial ideas for those tracks include grower and vendors, public, policy makers and community gardens.
- c. Who responsible – Vic Gutman will bring together a group of volunteers to help plan the conference and the community garden space at the market.

4. Micro-business

- a. Concept – To increase the communication and opportunity for individuals interested in beginning a micro business in the area of gardening and produce.
- b. Process – The group will move forward on two concepts. The first is to establish a communication center. The initial center will be a virtual center focused on providing updates and a chat room for gardeners to share information and resources. The long term vision is for an actual community center location in which classes regarding cooking, canning, seed saving or composting could be held as well as establishing a library of resources, meeting space, equipment sharing etc. The second concept is to develop a food Co-op Storefront where fresh produce from the gardens as well as canned or cooked goods can be sold. The process is to make affordable fresh local food and fair trade goods available year round.
- c. Who is responsible – Micro business group will continue to work on the concept and attempt to make progress..