

The Health Issue: Poor Diet

Solution: Community Gardens and Urban Agriculture

Quick Facts

Fact: In San Jose, fast food and convenience stores outnumber grocery stores and fresh produce markets by a ratio of 4.6 to 1; above the 4.3 to 1 ratio for Santa Clara County, and the 4.2 to 1 ratio for the state as a whole

Fact: Overall, in Santa Clara County, 26% of all middle and high school students are overweight or at risk of becoming overweight.

Fact: Between 1984 and 2004, Santa Clara County lost 33,288 acres of agricultural land to development, or 1,664 acres per year.

Key Messages

Message: "Integrating community gardens into urban spaces reconnects people with their food. What better place than in the Valley of Heart's Delight to ensure school children understand where their food comes from and to start developing healthy eating habits early on."

Message: "Everyone deserves accessible, healthy and affordable food."

Policy Suggestions

- Partner with the County and nonprofit organizations to promote community gardens in low-income and high density areas as an opportunity to grow affordable and healthy food.
- Develop partnerships with nonprofits and the school districts to connect school children with community gardens, providing children with educational opportunities and access to healthy foods.
- Identify nutrition-deficient neighborhoods and encourage the location of full service grocery stores and farmers markets in these areas.
- Expand the production and consumption of locally grown fresh produce, including the provision of more community garden sites.
- Ensure that remaining agricultural lands inside the urban limit line are preserved and used for growing food. Connect these spaces with educational institutions.

Local Examples

The San Jose Community Garden Program was established in 1977 and has accumulated 19 community gardens on approximately 35 acres of land. The majority of the gardens are older than 15 years. The newest garden, Guadalupe, was opened in November 2008. More than half of San Jose gardeners are immigrants. Middle Eastern, Portuguese, Filipino, Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Romanian, Latino, Bosnian, Italian, and Vietnamese people mix and mingle while growing a variety of fresh produce that reflects their diverse backgrounds. This also helps reduce the seclusion that many immigrant families experience when they arrive in Santa Clara County. In other countries where most needs can be met within an easy walking distance, the auto-dependent sprawling neighborhoods of the South Bay can be isolating.

