

Tackling Food Insecurity & Access: Role of Community Connectors in Northfield, MN

Presenters:

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What is Sharing Our Roots?

- Sharing Our Roots (SOR) is a non-profit agency in Northfield, MN
- Mission is to advance a resilient agriculture system that demonstrates the power to heal our lands, nourish our communities and prepare aspiring farmers.
- SOR has a 100 acres organic certified farm.
- SOR Staff includes three Community Leaders or Community Connectors from different ethnic groups to outreach and engage in the community. We provide services in English, Swahili and Spanish.

Sharing Our Roots Organic Farm LandShare Area



Photo credit Antonio Alba, 2021

Meaning of the Word Root

- Sharing Our Roots believes that *Root* means going back to the start [Soil Mother Earth].
- Protecting the soil and the conservation of its health.
- Conservation means using the correct methods in how to protect the soil and conserve it. That is using different types of methods such as:
 - Organic fertilizers
 - Organic seedlings
 - Organic seeds
 - Crop rotation
 - Methods of irrigation
 - Methods of planting

Based in Regenerative Agriculture

- Our work is based in regenerative agriculture:
 - ✓ Culture of plants or animals to produce healthy food based in the knowledge of nature: Maintaining the soil quality and fertility and protecting wildlife, humans and the environment.
- Land Share Program: Our main land access production program in the farm was created since 2018.
- Community members have access to garden plots, learn and apply organic methods, SOR support with cover cropping, and ideas for marketing.
- In the SOR farm and some community gardens, SOR give priority to families living in apartments and mobile homes, and who self-identify as low-income.

Role of Community Connectors

- To connect with African-American, Latinos, Asian-American, and Whites in the gardens and the SOR farm
- We engage growers in several community gardens with different ethnic groups.
- Oversees what is carried out in the gardens and the SOR farm
- We advise the growers on how to take good care of the soil and do soil conservation [Mother Earth needs to be respected] by using the right tools, organic fertilizers and limited organic pesticides.

Role of Community Connectors

- We advise the growers on food safety, and good agricultural practices, for example, hand washing, mask wearing, and washing of the produce.
- Growers are advised on how to use the soil and get best results through technical assistance in the farm and the community gardens.
- Community Connectors share ideas from different ethnic groups on how to get the best harvest.
- Traditionally, we support growers to exchange different organic seedlings with each other from cultural crops and seeds such as managu, chinsaga, chiles, tomatillo, kale, corn, tomato, squash, cilantro, beans, and others.

Role of Community Connectors

- We share different methods on planting and seed conservation, etc.
- We are very involved with all ethnic groups in sharing ideas and learning from each other.
- We exchange the produce [among ourselves]
- We sometimes market the produce from the community gardens and Land Share in the Community Supported Agriculture CSA and Local Food Shelves.

Support to our program participants

- Provided irrigation systems maintenance
- Provided organic seedlings and organic fertilizers
- Helped with fences and deer repellent



Photo credit Antonio Alba, 2021

Challenges during 2020 and 2021

- Community Connectors assistance was crucial.
- Covid-19. More difficult outreach process.
- Weather conditions. Extreme drought in 2021
- Pests and animals [Japanese Beetle and deer]



Accomplishments under Pandemic Conditions

Trainings for our program participants about nutrition, and farm equipment safety



Photo credit Antonio Alba, 2021

Accomplishments under Pandemic Conditions

We had a good harvest despite all we went through!



Photo credit Antonio Alba, 2021

Questions

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Thank You!

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