

Feeding Laramie Valley's Kiwanis Park Community Garden

Annual Report, 2021

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This report highlights the 2021 Kiwanis Park Community Garden background, data, accomplishments, challenges, and stories, with notes in anticipation of the 2022 gardening season. Supporting documents are provided as attachments.

Overview

The Kiwanis Park Community Garden (KPCG) operates through a collaborative design guided by a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the City of Laramie (City) and the Feeding Laramie Valley (FLV) program of the community-based, 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization Action Resources International (ARI). The current MOU was fully executed on September 4, 2018 and remains in effect through December 31, 2023, at which time it is subject to renewal. (*See Current MOU Attachment*)

Through this collaboration, the City of Laramie Parks and Recreation provides designated land use in Kiwanis Park for KPCG, above-ground water spigots to access the park's water system, and non-potable water for garden use. FLV provides garden infrastructure (i.e. perimeter fencing, in-ground and raised gardening beds, a portable storage shed), and infrastructure maintenance.

Programming design is overseen by FLV staff, with ongoing implementation conducted collaboratively between FLV and the community gardeners who are plot stewards at KPCG.

KPCG has 30 plots of different sizes. The large raised beds are 44 square feet, the medium sized and ADA accessible raised beds are 37 square feet, and the small raised beds are 34 square feet. KPCG offers 17 large beds, 3 medium-sized ADA accessible beds, and 9 small beds. There is in-ground gardening space where the Feeding Laramie (FLV) Shares Food Production team grows fruits and vegetables for distribution by the program to community members living with food insecurity.

Plots are available on a first-come, first served basis to anyone living or working in Laramie. In an effort to promote equitable and sustainable food security opportunities, ARI-FLV tracks the residence locations of KPCG gardeners on an ongoing basis, reserving the right to hold a majority percentage of plots in this particular garden to residents or workers of West Laramie and low income Laramie neighborhoods that do not have convenient access to a community garden nearer their location.

Plot rental is requested of all plot stewards, priced according to size as follows: Small: \$10 per year; Medium/ADA accessible: \$15 per year; Large: \$20 per year.

Plot stewards in good standing (i.e. have continuously complied with KPCG guidelines and policies) have first right of acceptance or refusal for retaining their original plot(s) to garden in contiguous years.

This payment is an annual contribution used to help maintain the gardens. No one is ever turned away from an inability to pay, with publicized sliding pay scale and fee waiver options available upon request.

(See 2021 KPCG Outreach Flyer and 2021 Community Garden Guidebook Attachments)

Data

of plots available for community gardening: 30

of plots reserved: 30

of total ADA plots available: 3

of ADA plots reserved: 3

of plots identified as being stewarded by a family: 7

of plots identified as being stewarded by a single person: 21

of plots identified as being stewarded by a group other than family: 2

of plots identified as being stewarded by a combined group of family and friends: 2

of plots identified as being stewarded by someone living/working in West Laramie: 11

Volunteers

of Volunteers who assisted with ongoing maintenance: 6

of Volunteer hours: 12

Key Accomplishments

- KPCG continues to increase its usage and successful food production, with garden plot stewards getting to know each other, supporting each other's varying skill levels, and being very engaged with a sense of community ownership for the garden as a whole.
- All 30 plots were reserved, and all were planted from early June through to successful harvesting that concluded in October.
- 11 plots were stewarded by people living or working in West Laramie.
- Plot stewards collectively shared excess harvested produce with Feeding Laramie Valley for the FLV Shares program (precise number of stewards who shared unknown).
- The pollinator garden for KPCG was completed in the late spring/early summer of 2021. A combination of annual and perennial plants (purchased by FLV and donated by community members and members of the Laramie Garden Club) were planted in the northeast corner of the garden set aside for this purpose, quickly attracting bees, hummingbirds, and butterflies to the beautiful blossoms, who all went to work pollinating garden plots and increasing the size of the overall KPCG harvest yield.
- Student Interns, Apprentices and National Service Assistance: In addition to FLV staff and community-based volunteers, ARI-FLV annually hosts numerous high school and college/university interns; provide paid intern positions; and serve as rural intermediaries to Foster Grandparents of the Wyoming Rockies, AmeriCorps, AmeriCorps VISTA, and AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps volunteers, all of whom contribute highly valued service assistance to all ARI-FLV programs, including assistance to ongoing maintenance of KPCG and one-on-one assistance to garden plot stewards as needed.

Challenges

The first two years of gardening at KPCG (2019 and 2020) saw a few small incidents of uninvited “harvesting,” and some destruction of produce items was reported. Plot stewards met with each other and FLV staff to discuss response options, and plans to personalize individual plots with handmade signs indicating private use were implemented. The problem did not escalate. However, late in the summer season of 2021, there were two occurrences of gates being left open; hoses left unwound and the water on; signage, plants and produce being torn from plots and strewn across the garden as well as in the nearby parking lot. Plot stewards were understandably distraught over the vandalism, with emotions being expressed particularly keenly, in part related to the fact that this occurred during the second year of the global pandemic and all of its ramifications on the community and its members.

ARI-FLV staff and management spoke at length with the community gardeners, gathering as much information about the incidents as possible (one gardener arrived while a small group of middle-school-aged children were playing with the hoses and trampling in the gardens). When confronted, they claimed the garden belonged to everyone and they could do what they pleased with them.

ARI-FLV management made the decision to place combination locks on the two gates leading into the community garden proper, and shared the combination with all plot stewards. All stewards were appreciative of the action. The matter was reported immediately and in full to Todd Feezer, Director of Laramie Parks and Rec. There were no further incidents for the remainder of the growing season. Harvesting was completed successfully and with no further losses.

Anticipation for 2022

Allen Gonzales-Willert is a one-year, full-time AmeriCorps VISTA volunteer with FLV, and will be serving as the lead coordinator for KPCG in the 2022 growing season (with FLV staff supervision). He is looking forward to learning about gardening in Wyoming by using FLV space at KPCG to garden, learn, and provide support alongside the other gardeners.

We anticipate for all 30 plots to once again be reserved this year. As of February 9, we have six plot stewards signed up for renewing their plots for the 2022 growing season (which is the same number signed up on this date last year to return to 2021 gardening from the previous year). We receive most inquiries and sign-ups in March - May as the months get warmer, inspiring returning and would-be gardeners to plan what they will grow for themselves for the upcoming season.

The FLV Garden Mentoring program launched in 2020 will be back again this year, with increased outreach for volunteer mentors and mentees from throughout Albany County. Free copies of the Guide for Personal Vegetable & Fruits Gardening in Wyoming can be downloaded as a PDF from the FLV website, or purchased at cost as a full-color binder with individual laminated sheets providing photos and instructions for growing the most popular fruits, vegetables, and herbs that do well in our community.