

Feeding Laramie Valley's Kiwanis Park Community Garden

Annual Report, 2022

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This report highlights the 2022 Kiwanis Park Community Garden background, data, accomplishments, challenges, and stories, with notes in anticipation of the 2023 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 2022 Community Garden Guidebook Attachment)

KPCG Data for 2022

of plots available for community gardening: 30

of plots reserved: 24

of total ADA plots available: 3

of ADA plots reserved: 2

of plots identified as being stewarded by a family: 4

of plots identified as being stewarded by a single person: 20

of plots identified as being stewarded by a group other than family: 0

of plots identified as being stewarded by a combined group of family and friends: 0

of plots identified as being stewarded by someone living/working in West Laramie: 7

of plots identified in year end as available for new steward(s) in 2023 gardening season: 14

Volunteers

of Volunteers who assisted with ongoing maintenance: 16

of Volunteer hours: 91.25

Key Accomplishments

- There was a substantial increase in volunteer garden maintenance assistance in 2022, with the highest number of individual volunteers (16) and total volunteer hours (91.25) in the last three years. We attribute this increase to a focused effort on improving volunteer outreach, training and overall appreciation and engagement opportunities offered by FLV. Volunteers cleared the overall garden, added pathway materials where needed, freshly stained raised beds prior to planting, and provided fresh paint and routine maintenance to the garden's on-site shed.
- 24 out of 30 plots were reserved, and all were planted from early June through to successful harvesting that concluded in October.
- 7 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).
- Garden plot soil was supplemented in quantity and amended by FLV Shares Food Production staff, using purchased high quality top soil and amendments from donated natural organic matter.
- The pollinator garden for KPCG was added to and enhanced in its effectiveness as a result of targeted assistance from the FLV Shares Food Production Team, providing a combination of annual and perennial plants (purchased by FLV and donated by community members and members of the Laramie Garden Club).
- Communication and cooperative management efforts between the staff of City of Laramie Parks and Recreation and FLV ran smoothly and efficiently throughout 2022, with great benefit

to KPCG. FLV, KPCG plot stewards, and the community at large regularly express feelings of being very well served by this partnership.

Challenges

With ongoing challenges facing Albany County as a result of ongoing effects from the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent economic disasters (profound increases in the cost of fuel, housing, food (most especially in the cost of fresh produce), FLV faced an unprecedented rate of increased demand for its food security services in 2022. The number of individuals and families participating in the FLV Shares Food Production and Distribution program for people living with food insecurity, and children participating in the FLV Kids Out to Lunch Program, more than quadrupled over the already high numbers served prior to March, 2020.

In spite of a robust, dedicated team of permanent and seasonal employees; apprentices and interns; National Service members and volunteers, time and effort demands of FLV staff was stretched farther than ever before. While nearly 1000 people were served meals and fresh produce every week (with nearly 100 households receiving delivery service), funding to help support direct service and ongoing education to community and backyard gardeners through FLV fell short of expectations.

The majority of KPCG plot stewards expanded their gardening and increased personal food production, many donated excess produce to the FLV Shares program, and deep appreciation for the presence of the garden was expressed by stewards through in-person feedback. However, a few new gardeners were discouraged by how difficult gardening turned out to be, and have decided not to renew their plots for 2023.

Strategic Planning for 2023

After completing 13 years of local food security service to Albany County, FLV and its 501(c)(3) umbrella organization Action Resources International (ARI) made long-term sustainability the priority concern for strategic planning conducted in 2022 and aimed at organizational stability and growth over the next decade. In addition and response to the unprecedented expansion in program participant number, FLV-ARI has received \$1.25M in new infrastructure support funds to help launch a local food hub and provide the organization with mid- and senior level staff management positions. This together with increased levels of private and corporate funding will move FLV's capacity to create self-sustaining program services while expanding local food security to include increased agricultural and institutional involvement.

These new support systems and entrepreneurial ventures will have an immediate impact on community gardening, with KPCG a beneficiary of enhanced educational and support opportunities including but not limited to:

- Effective April, 2023, a full-time permanent employee position at ARI-FLV will take on KPCG coordination, outreach and community education duties, with paid staff assistance, intern, apprentice, national service and volunteer roles in support positions.
- Effective early June, 2023, the FLV Shares Program, now operating as two fully-staffed and distinct teams (food distribution and food production) is dedicating specific staff hours each week to KPCG pollination garden and on-site shared food production management).