

**Solano Gardens Annual Report**  
**2021-2022**

# Program Summary

## Project Opportunities

- Inspire individuals in the process of growing food for themselves and others in underserved communities.
- Support the efforts of passionate volunteers in growing nutritious food for the communities.
- Connect churches to food pantries to get food into the hands of populations where food insecurity is prevalent.
- Educate those who are already growing food in underserved communities so that they may increase the effectiveness of their gardens.
- Expand the growing space and productivity of gardens already in our network of gardens installed under our program or serving to provide food for food insecure populations.
- Identify areas where we can increase the environmental impact through permaculture design, and other environmentally sustainable and regenerative practices: such as rainwater harvesting and soil microbiology.
- Engage a population of youth to become involved in growing food, and cultivating their interest into a possible pathway towards an equitable and profitable career in regenerative agriculture.

## Lessons Learned

- The cost of water may be a barrier for some of these communities in deciding to grow a garden as was learned from a site that was planned, but halted due to concerns with water costs.
- Schools have a high turnover of volunteers lending itself more to the possibility of becoming abandoned in time as is what happened with Matt Garcia Middle School in Fairfield.
- Champions (those who monitor and maintain the gardens) have varying degrees of knowledge about gardening and therefore may need greater degrees of education and guidance, or an easy to follow method of gardening.
- In some cases weeds can become unruly and completely take over these gardens because of the lack of time that some volunteers can be in the gardens.
- Larger plots of land that can have in ground growing as opposed to raised bed gardening have potential of providing more meaningful quantities of food.

## Project Highlights

- With the assistance of youth in the community we significantly expanded the growing space of 2 current gardens (Armijo Highschool, and Parkway Plaza).
- Solano Gardens installed 2 additional new gardens (Dixon Community Church, and Fairfield Seventh Day Adventist) which have the potential for large amounts of growth in terms of capacity to expand the program and in terms of food production.
- Solano Gardens assisted in piloting a permaculture market garden approach on farmland in the Pleasants Valley to test the feasibility of producing food on a larger scale.
- Working with youth to expand gardens was a huge joy and helped develop ideas for future pathways for youth interns to gain practical experience in growing and preparing food. These developments have led to the expansion of Solano Gardens into an internship program in food production and food preparation to create meals for underserved communities in the county beginning in the fall of 2022.

# Overall Impact Summary

All totaled up, Solano Gardens has the potential to produce 16,594 pounds of food for underserved communities in Solano County. This equates to 13,772 meals! In addition, there are nearly 30 “champions” who have taken the lead in maintaining these gardens who report how much joy the care for these gardens brings them and those within the community that volunteer. This program also provided a respectable income for 2 burgeoning garden designers from Solano County.

## Current Gardens

### *Armijo High School, Fairfield*

#### **Amount of space in production**

450 Sq ft.

#### **Project Summary**

Focus for this garden was to redesign the space to allow for more production. The past design left a lot of space open, and had opportunities for more perennials that could be easy to maintain yet still produce a harvest. We removed a lot of wood chips to make space for new growing areas, planted new vegetables, and relaid irrigation.

#### **Results and Impact**

The enthusiasm from the community created by Solano Gardens’ support drew additional funds from the school to install an ADA accessible decomposed granite walkway through the garden, and drew support from Innovative Health Solutions (a benicia based small business) to purchase a large metal raised bed which will help to increase their production of annual vegetables in 2022!

**Over the next 5 years this garden has the potential to create 1687 pounds of food equivalent to 1400 meals**

### *Challenge Academy, Fairfield*

#### **Amount of space in production**

275 Sq ft.

#### **Project Summary**

Challenge Academy had a lot of difficulties due to Covid. They were not able to perform as much garden work and were relying on the teens to hand water the garden. Now that Challenge Academy is once again able to manage the gardens we have come up with a plan that will expand the growing space, increase the ability for plants to thrive, and will set them up on a drip irrigation system that will place less reliance on the work from the kids. This work will be performed in the fall of 2022.

#### **Results and Impact**

At risk teens get to make a connection with nature through the production of healthy food that they in turn get to eat. The work we do to make it easier to manage their garden will make the connection more enjoyable and help build confidence.

Over the next 5 years this garden has the potential to create 1031 pounds of food equivalent to 856 meals

### ***Dixon's Veteran's Home, Dixon***

#### **Amount of space in production**

75 Sq ft.

#### **Project Summary**

Maurice is our sole champion at this location. It is a small plot in the backyard of the Dixon's Veterans Home. Maurice does a great job of maintaining a few raised beds and some in ground plants. We supplied Maurice with tools, soil, and vegetable starts.

#### **Results and Impact**

Our support in supplying tools, soil, and plants allows Maurice, and other veterans in the house to enjoy home grown, nutritious food. We also applied some compost extract to help grow healthier and plants with increased yields.

**Over the next 5 years this garden has the potential to create 281 pounds of food equivalent to 233 meals**

### ***Dixon Community Church, Dixon***

#### **Amount of space in production**

450 Sq ft.

#### **Project Summary**

This new project began in collaboration with Solano Sustainable Backyards which is a Sustainable Solano program funded by the Solano County Water Agency. We worked with community members to install perennial and edible gardens on the perimeter of the growing space and then more market garden type annual growth in raised beds in the middle. Raised beds will be grown using the square foot gardening method to maximize food production potential and serve as an educational tool for the school that leases space at the church.

#### **Results and Impact**

Dixon Community Church is committed to donating at least 80% of what is grown to food banks, and food bank equivalent organizations. They also will explore the potential of holding donation days on their premises.

**Over the next 5 years this garden has the potential to create 1687 pounds of food equivalent to 1400 meals**

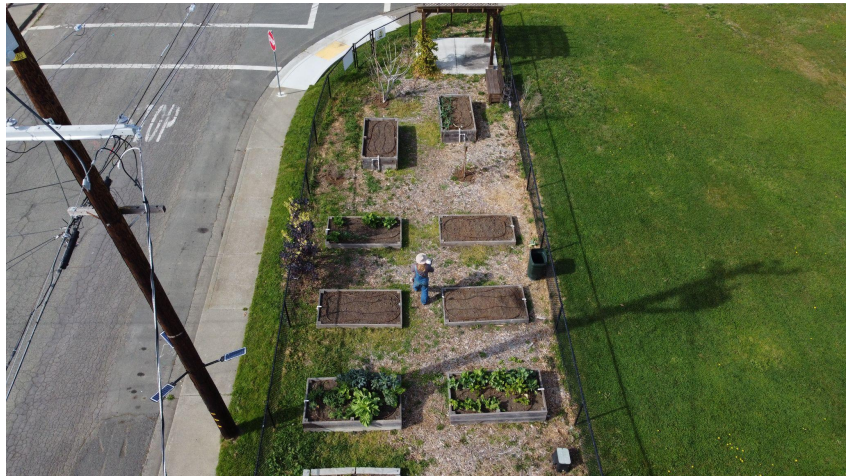
## ***Emmanuel Temple, Vallejo***

### **Amount of space in production**

300 Sq ft.

### **Project Summary**

This garden is going strong with 3 main champions that ensure the garden is well kept. The church holds food drives every week, and the food harvested from this garden gets distributed through those drives. We also added a number of perennials like passionfruit, grapes, and asparagus to maximize the space and provided annual starts.



### **Results and Impact**

We have been able to increase the yield at this garden. In the fall of 2022 we will further increase the yield here by introducing the square foot gardening method, putting down low growing ground cover in the raised beds, and renovating the drip irrigation for increased yield and healthier plants.

**Over the next 5 years this garden has the potential to create 1125 pounds of food equivalent to 934 meals**

## ***Fairfield High School, Fairfield***

### **Amount of space in production**

225 Sq ft.

### **Project Summary**

Being that this garden is at a school, it suffered a bit from Covid. In addition one of the two beds is significantly shaded. We increased the number of perennial plants on the perimeter of the garden space to maximize the available sunny space and provided some starts for their raised beds. We will be helping to refill the beds and repairing their irrigation system in late summer 2022. They also need some education on gardening skills so we will be setting them up to use the square foot gardening method. All of these improvements will help them to grow more effectively in the coming years.

### **Results and Impact**

The teacher (who is the main champion at this school) and the students in her gardening club are feeling enthusiastic about the improvements we will be making and the support we will be providing.



**Over the next 5 years this garden has the potential to create 843 pounds of food equivalent to 700 meals**

### ***Fairfield Community Seventh Day Adventist's, Fairfield***

#### **Amount of space in production**

900 Sq ft.

#### **Project Summary**



This is a brand new install that was installed at the end of May. With the help of 12 champions, and a very enthusiastic group of 20 additional volunteers from the community, we were able to establish (12) 25x3 foot in ground permanent beds in a market garden style. We were donated over a hundred annual plants from Morning Sun Herb Farms and were able to put all of them in the ground to get a late start to the growing season. Since then volunteers can be spotted at random times throughout the week joyfully weeding and harvesting. This garden has a lot of potential for expansion which will be explored further in the fall of 2022.

#### **Results and Impact**

The large and diverse group of volunteers and community members were extremely excited and enthusiastic for this garden. There is not doubt that this garden will serve to provide not only dietary sustenance but also emotional and mental reprieve. Kids and adults alike are participating in growing food that will nourish themselves, but also will be donated through their bi weekly food drives.

**Over the next 5 years this garden has the potential to create 3375 pounds of food equivalent to 2800 meals**

### ***First Christian Church, Vallejo***

#### **Amount of space in production**

400 Sq ft.

#### **Project Summary**

This garden is maintained by 3 dedicated champions. Their concern for producing food for the community shows in the types of foods they grow, and how often they show up to the garden. There is a large variety of produce being grown in their raised beds, and perennial



perimeter. We piloted with success the square foot gardening method and a new drip grid which improved the quality and quantity of the food from the beds that were piloted.

### **Results and Impact**

We were able to show that the square foot gardening method is an effective way for volunteers with little garden experience or time to produce a diversified amount of vegetables in great quantities. Different types of peppers, celery, lettuce, broccoli, cauliflower, beets, radishes, and beans were all grown in harmony in one 12 foot by 3 foot raised bed. Produce was donated to Faith Food Fridays in Vallejo to go out to the underserved communities.

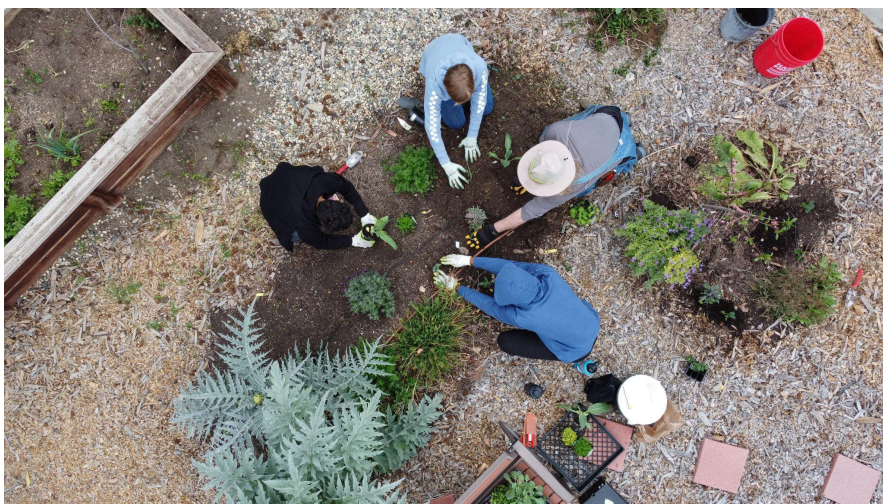
**Over the next 5 years this garden has the potential to create 1500 lbs of food equivalent to 1245 meals**

### ***Parkway Plaza, Fairfield***

Amount of space in production  
1800 Sq ft.

#### **Project Summary**

Parkway Plaza is a low income retirement community in Fairfield. They have 20 raised beds as well as perennial plants in the middle that not only provide food, but provide a beautiful and peaceful aesthetic. We enlisted the help of our Sustainable Solano Youth Fellowship to expand the garden by removing wood chips in the center to establish more perennial space. The youth also were able to help the community there plant annual vegetables that were provided to them by Solano Gardens.



### **Results and Impact**

It was beautiful to see multiple generations come together around planting food for this community. Both groups really enjoyed the interaction, and gained knowledge and experience in unison around growing food.

**Over the next 5 years this garden has the potential to create 6750 pounds of food equivalent to 5602 meals**

## **On the Horizon**



### **Plans for 2022/2023**

The work done in the 2021/2022 fiscal year had a huge impact, and moving forward our goals are increasing 10 fold. To address inequity brought about by the pandemic, we are increasing our program this year to include the following resources.

1. Garden Hubs - These hubs will be centers in which the community can come and rent tools for free, get free seeds, learn about gardening, and more.
2. No cost trees and plants - For community members that have a place to garden for themselves, we will be providing trees and plants for them to create food forests in their own yards that will hopefully assist them in addressing the high cost for nutritious food.
3. Free Chickens and Coops - To address the protein needs of the community we will be providing chicken coops and egg laying chickens and no cost.
4. Prepared Meals - While giving people carrots and broccoli is important we need to address the needs of people that may not be able to cook. In doing so we will be piloting a project in which interns will help create meals with the produce we are growing at hubs. We will be looking for partners in the future to explore the possibilities of delivering the meals to those who may not have adequate transportation.
5. Paid Youth Internships - We are developing 2 internship tracks for youth to choose from. They can choose our food production internship where youth will be learning to grow food in various methods. The second of the tracks they can choose would be our food preparation track. The interns in our food preparation track will be assisting with the prepared meals described above.
6. Farm Feasibility Study - In addition to urban agriculture in small scale gardens, we will be exploring the possibility of obtaining acreage in an attempt to provide a route for new farmers that want to grow food for our programs that provide food to the community. We are also exploring how these farmers can do this in an equitable and sustainable way.