



COMMUNITY ACTION COALITION
FOR SOUTH CENTRAL WISCONSIN, INC.

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Save the date!
**CAC's Garden
Bike Tour is
Saturday,
August 27th.
See page 4 for
details.**

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Community Gardens of Dane County Community Action Coalition for South Central WI Inc.

Late Summer E-Newsletter

August 2011

Community Gardening: What's its worth?

By John Bell

With a passion for gardening and a 26-year membership in the community of Troy Gardens, I've never felt a strong need to measure the experience in dollars and cents. Good food, strong friendships and the pleasure of physical labor in a remarkable setting—these and other rewards have been far greater than the financial costs.

Still, I'm enough the son of a father who came of age on an Iowa farm in the depths of the Great Depression to wonder now and then: how much money would it take to buy a season's worth of what I grow in my two plots at Troy?

A chance to answer that question came last growing season from taking part in the research of Vince Smith, a UW graduate student who did much of his doctoral work while serving on the board of Community Groundworks, known originally as the Friends of Troy Gardens.

Vince's study, "The Socioeconomic Value of Community Food Production: A Landscape Approach," is an extension of his interest in the relationship between people and place. His master's degree from Oregon State University explored the ways that children form their beliefs about the environment; his term on the Community GroundWorks board ended in January, and this fall he will join the faculty of Southern Oregon University in Ashland.

The raw data for his research was collected early last fall from 38 Madison-area urban agriculturalists--home gardeners, those with plots in community gardens and leaders of educational

gardens. Throughout the growing season, growers kept records of their costs for inputs (seeds and seedlings, hay, row cover, soil amendments, etc.), varieties and weight of crops grown and the amount of time they spent in gardening. They weighed their yields on scales that Vince provided with funding from Annie's, Inc., makers of organic, kid-friendly foods who donate \$75,000 annually to projects that involve sustainable agriculture.

Vince received 264 grower surveys and held 53 in-depth interviews with growers and other key participants. I was one of those "citizen researchers," meeting Vince at Troy in early summer to learn about his study and in September for an interview about my season of gardening. A few weeks later, he sent me these figures for my individual plots:

Total weight of produce: 460.31 pounds.

Gross value of crops I grew: \$1,017.05

Net value (less cost of inputs): \$1,002.05

My plots also showed a net value of \$2.54 per square foot of garden space and a value of \$31.29 of food produced per hour of labor. However, I began my record-keeping after the growing season had started and did not report my plot rental fees or the cost of seed potatoes and a few packets of seeds. (Against the advice of every knowledgeable gardener, I tend to keep seeds almost indefinitely.) Neither does the net value include the costs of driving to the garden from our home near

Tenney Park, and the hourly value doesn't account for the time spent in driving or growing most of my own seedlings. Nevertheless, my hourly rate of compensation came out to be much greater than I'd expected.

Vince's interviews with growers revealed insights on the reasons why we garden and the tremendous increase of interest in gardening among Madison residents and Americans generally.

Throughout much of their history, community gardens have provided a source of grow-your-own produce to needy families and a means of increasing food production during times of war. Most community gardens in Madison were developed (and many of them are still supported) by the Community Action Coalition for South Central Wisconsin, whose overall mission is the support of low-income residents.

The interviews suggest that today's community gardeners are more motivated by the quality of the food they grow and their pleasure in gardening and

consuming what they grow. Asked to rank their reasons for gardening, 90 percent of those interviewed with community plots gave greatest importance to fresh food, followed by enjoyment of the activity by 84 percent, health (71%), therapy (67%), concern for the environment (64%), money saved (32%), availability of garden space (26%) and food sales as little as 2 percent. **CAC note: food grown in gardens receiving CAC assistance or on City of Madison property is intended for consumption by the families and friends of those who grow it and may not be sold.**

I'm content to have a sense of the economic value of my gardening, and I certainly hope that Vince's research will have important consequences in raising the level of support for urban agriculture. But what I value most about gardening can't be easily reduced to numbers. Healthy, delicious food is an obvious benefit, but my time at Troy is also about a bond with the land and my fellow gardeners, a connection that for all the years continues to thrive.

CAC Gardens Update from Chris Brockel and Greta Hansen

Dear Friends of Gardens,

It is an uncertain time for CAC and our communities. We all know that funding cuts are hurting people and programs that improve the quality of life in our community, including community gardens. **Earlier this year we asked you to contact your elected officials and many of you did. Your calls have made a difference in reducing cuts for 2011.**

We still expect severe cuts and staff reductions as we close out 2011. With reduced resources and personnel, these changes at CAC could potentially impact the quality of your community gardens programs in 2012.

As you reflect on this growing season, **please take a few minutes to share your personal story about community gardening.** Simply send us your story electronically or in the mail. CAC plans to share these stories with our elected officials to show them the real difference that community gardens make in people's lives.



Greta C. Hansen, Executive Director



Chris Brockel, Manager of Food and Gardens

Canning Class – August 28

Interested in preserving some of this season's bounty without filling up your freezer? MACSAC is offering a pressure canning class for low acid foods. Class will be held from 4-7 p.m. at Lakeview Lutheran Church, 4001 Mandrake Road, Madison. Cost: \$25. Reserve your seat by emailing Gini at gini@macsac.org

CAC Community Garden Bike Tour — August 27

Join CAC Staff and Mayor Paul Soglin for a 10-mile, family-friendly bike tour of community gardens on Madison's west side. The garden tour runs from 9 a.m. through 1 p.m. See page 4 for details!

Willy Street Coop Eat Local Challenge — September 5-October 2

Sign-up starts August 26th online or at the store (Williamson Street in Madison or University Ave. in Middleton). Eat more local foods from farmers' markets, CSAs (Community Supported Agriculture), your garden or our local food stores. Participate for two to four weeks. See <http://www.willystreet.coop> for details.

Growing Food & Justice for All Initiative — September 9-11

Sacred Soil: Cultivating Seeds of Community Transformation. The Growing Food and Justice for All Initiative (GFJI) is aimed at dismantling racism and empowering low-income and communities of color through sustainable and local agriculture. The conference will be held in Milwaukee, WI and is hosted by Growing Power, Inc. See <https://www.growingfoodandjustice.org> for more information.

Fitchburg Fields Volunteer and Donor Appreciation Evening — September 10

Join Fitchburg Fields volunteers and donors for a potluck, games and dance at Memorial United Church of Christ's Fellowship Hall, 5705 Lacy Road, Fitchburg, WI. 6-9 p.m. See <http://www.fitchburgfields.org> for detailed information and registration.

Good Food and Garden Party at Troy Gardens — September 10

Join Community GroundWorks for an evening of local, sustainable, and delicious fine food (ticketed event) followed by a FREE celebration at 8:00 p.m. with dancing and music by the Madpolecats. On the big lawn at Troy Gardens, 500 Troy Drive. See <http://www.troygardens.org> for detailed information.

REAP: 13th Annual Food for Thought Festival — September 17

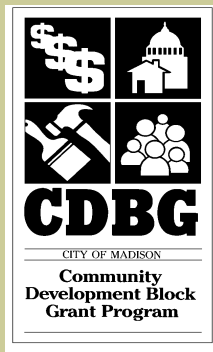
The annual Food for Thought Festival is a fun, festive forum that explores and celebrates our many opportunities to eat more pleurably, healthfully and sustainably. The Food for Thought Festival is Free and Open to the Public. No tickets or reservations are required. 8a.m. - 1:30 p.m.; Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd, Madison, WI. See <http://www.reapfoodgroup.org> for more information.



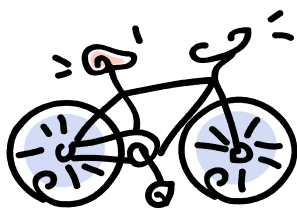
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2011 Bike Tour of Community Gardens on August 27th



Join Community Action Coalition for South Central Wisconsin, Inc. and Madison Mayor Paul Soglin for a family-friendly bike tour of community gardens on Saturday, August 27, 9am-1pm. We will ride the 10-mile tour at a leisurely pace, with garden visits and kids activities between 20-30 minute bike rides. Accompany us to learn about Madison's unique and diverse community gardens and meet the gardeners who tend them. We will meet at Sheboygan Community Garden located at Sheboygan Avenue and Segoe Road at Hill Farms DOT at 9am. There is an optional downtown start at 8a.m. at N. Carroll and W. Mifflin Streets. The tour will visit four west side gardens and include free breakfast, coffee, and lunch, along with kids' activities and music. For more information, contact Nicole at CAC at nicolec@cacscw.org or 246-4730 x208 or visit www.cacscw.org

CAC Food and Gardens Staff Profile: Shelly Strom

As the new Food Pantry Gardens VISTA at CAC, I am stepping into an incredible position previously supported by Patty Zehl and Michelle Shively. Their groundwork, as well as the support of the entire CAC staff, has made my transition seamless. I was formally trained as a landscape architect and science writer. In school, I focused on people, land and food and how to create sustainable communities. Now, I hope to put some of my academics into action by fostering relationships among gardeners, growers and community members; bridging gaps in fresh food access, and promoting gardens for personal health and community well-being.

Most recently, I have had opportunities to work alongside the staff of Community GroundWorks, Dane County Public Health and Madison Fruits and Nuts on projects ranging from urban forestry to front yard food gardens. These experiences have solidified my goals of connecting people to place and empowering them to create whole, resilient communities... including access to healthy, local, fresh food.

This year at CAC, I will continue the mission of supporting food pantry gardens and strengthening connections among growers, food pantries, people, neighborhoods and organizations that fight hunger. I will also work to link harvest and home, helping to promote cooking, preserving and *eating* fresh food throughout our communities. Feel free to contact me shellys@cacscw.org or 608.246-4730 ext. 234

Get Involved With Madison Area Community Gardens

How Can You Help CAC Gardens?

There are many volunteer opportunities available assisting the community gardens in the Madison area. Read more about the current opportunities at [http://
www.cacscw.org/downloads/2010%20Garden%20Volunteer%20Brochure.pdf](http://www.cacscw.org/downloads/2010%20Garden%20Volunteer%20Brochure.pdf). For more information, contact Chris Brockel at chrisb@cacscw.org or call (608) 246-4730 ext. 206.