

The International Undergraduate Journal For Service-Learning, Leadership, and Social Change

Volume 3
Issue 1 Fall 2013

Article 6

September 2013

The Lynch Community Garden Project

Hilary Neff
Oberlin College

Rachel Manning
Oberlin College

Follow this and additional works at: <https://opus.govst.edu/iujsl>

 Part of the [Higher Education Commons](#), and the [Service Learning Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Neff, Hilary and Manning, Rachel (2013) "The Lynch Community Garden Project," *The International Undergraduate Journal For Service-Learning, Leadership, and Social Change*: Vol. 3: Iss. 1, p. 30-32.

Available at: <https://opus.govst.edu/iujsl/vol3/iss1/6>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by OPUS Open Portal to University Scholarship, Governors State University, University Park, Illinois. It has been accepted for inclusion in The International Undergraduate Journal For Service-Learning, Leadership, and Social Change by an authorized editor of OPUS Open Portal to University Scholarship. For more information, please contact opus@govst.edu.

The Lynch Community Garden Project

As students at Oberlin College, we first found ourselves interested in the local foods movement in Northeast Ohio. Hilary volunteered at Oberlin's weekly farmer's market and worked as a Local Foods Representative for the Oberlin Student Cooperative Association on campus. Rachel raised awareness about the industrial agriculture system with Slow Food Oberlin and started healthy cooking classes at a local elementary school. It was not until we spent time together in Lynch, Kentucky for alternative spring break trips that our focus turned to food justice issues in rural Appalachia. During our trips to Lynch, we discussed barriers to food access with the local food ministry. The directors spoke to us about how many impoverished Lynch residents must rely on food handouts from their ministry. After our visit to Lynch in October 2011, we brainstormed how to make healthy food more accessible in this community. With the city's approval, we made plans to start a community garden in Lynch as a summer service project in June 2012.

Our project will address food access, poverty, and crime in this small Appalachian town. First and foremost, we intend to build a community garden that will empower Lynch residents. Ideally, the garden will become a self-sustaining part of the town that will improve access to local, fresh produce for years to come. Furthermore, we hope the garden will bring a diverse group of people together to strengthen bonds between community members. Lynch residents will work together to grow their own food, which will lessen their reliance on the industrial food system. Most foods purchased in Lynch are often processed, and we hope the garden will provide a healthier alternative. Lynch residents will be able to volunteer regularly in the garden, which will encourage active lifestyles. Whether residents choose to have their own personal garden plot or to participate in general garden maintenance, the garden will always provide outdoor activities that involve hands-on work. By the end of August, we hope community members will take on leadership roles in the garden so the project will be productive for much longer than a single summer.

Hilary Neff is currently a third year student at Oberlin College majoring in Environmental Studies with a focus in Food Justice and Sustainable Communities. Hilary is originally from Redondo Beach, California, but she now spends most of her time in Northeast Ohio head cooking at her co-op and leading alternative break service trips for Oberlin students. Hilary is very passionate about local foods and community empowerment projects, and she hopes to pursue a career in these areas after graduating from Oberlin.

Rachel Manning is currently a second year student at Oberlin College majoring in Sociology and East Asian Studies. She is involved with a variety of food justice activities on campus, leads community service trips during academic breaks for Oberlin students, is a head cook for her co-op, and has recently started after-school healthy cooking classes at the local junior high school in town. After graduating college, Rachel plans to focus on making local, sustainable foods available to schools and communities with little food access.

We believe this project will empower youth by providing an alternative to drug-use and other risky behaviors. With the help of the local ministry, we plan to teach educational after-school cooking classes, which will help kids learn about healthy food choices. We will encourage young people in Lynch to volunteer in the garden so that they can be an integral part of this community-wide project. We hope the garden will be a safe space for youth who may otherwise feel pressured to take part in crime or drug-use. By empowering the next generation of Lynch residents to grow their own food, live healthily, and feel valued in the community, we hope this garden will lessen the cycle of crime, poverty, and ill-health in Lynch.

Food access is a major issue in this small town because of its geographic location and high rates of poverty. Since there is no public transportation in the area, many residents do not have transportation to the only grocery store five miles away in Cumberland, Kentucky. For those who are able to shop there, the most cost efficient choices are often unhealthy. Many community members rely on food stamps, so their options are even more limited. The local ministry aims to alleviate hunger in the area, but the need is much greater than one ministry can support. The role this ministry plays is very important because it delivers hot food three times each week to the most elderly Lynch residents and opens its food pantry to the public once per month. However, we believe community members would benefit from the opportunity to grow their own food. The garden will provide a sustainable and reliable source of fresh produce for the community that will be accessible to all Lynch residents.

We will go to Lynch for two months in the summer of 2012 to implement our project. We plan on building 10-12 raised beds using tools from the local hardware store, and we will ask community members what crops they would like to see in the garden. We will accumulate local materials to build raised beds, including deadfall wood, soil, and fertilizer from a local horse farm. Additionally, we will talk to elderly Lynch residents who may still have local agricultural knowledge to become more familiar with the local climate and soil. All interested community members will receive their own plots as space allows, and there will be a wait list if we cannot accommodate everyone. There will also be a designated gardening area for youth to encourage participation from all ages. We will post a list of weekly garden tasks and a list of expectations and responsibilities for garden participants. If a plot is not responsibly maintained, it will be given to the next person on the wait list.

Our community partners from the local ministry have already given us substantial support for this project. They have located a plot of land that we can rent from the city for \$50 per month, which measures 40 feet by 85 feet. In addition, they have offered to let us stay in their guesthouse during our time in Lynch and will help us find local vendors from which we can

purchase materials and tools for building the garden. The plot of land we intend to rent is located right next to the guesthouse we will stay in, which will allow us to keep a close eye on the garden at all times. After one year, we hope to appeal to the Mayor of Lynch to make the land into a public park since the city government already owns it. If rejected, we will raise money at Oberlin College and seek other grants so that the garden can continue in the future.

In addition to our community partners in Lynch, we have several excellent resources in Oberlin that have offered advice and support for our project. Maurice Small is a well known urban gardener in Northeast Ohio who helped us create a responsible budget and will work with us to prepare a timeline for the garden. Ben Wisner is a retired Environmental Studies professor at Oberlin College who has taught us about how to be effective yet respectful outsiders and how to create lasting change in communities. He has offered to serve as a mentor and resource for us throughout our project. Marco Wilkinson, who is an accomplished gardener in Oberlin, has offered us several opportunities to gain additional hands-on experience with garden work so we will be better prepared to begin the Lynch garden on our own. We will also collaborate with David Fisher ('12) on this project. David has already established a personal network in Lynch through his own project, Interfaith Appalachia, which addresses interfaith work in this community. We hope that our project will strengthen the relationship that David has already fostered between Oberlin and Lynch. Oberlin students who travel to Lynch during academic breaks with Oberlin's student-led Immerse Yourself in Service group may work in the garden as well. As Immerse Yourself in Service trip leaders, we will both lead trips to Lynch during academic breaks, where we can check on the garden after our first summer there.

We believe this garden will be a small but important step towards greater food access, healthier lifestyles, and community empowerment. It will provide a forum for people of all ages to come together across different religious and socio-economic backgrounds, and we look forward to planting the seeds for a project that we hope will foster lasting change in this community.