



Probationary Faculty Development Grant Report:

Launching the Growing Educational Pathways Through Food Sovereignty Project at CSUS



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PROJECT OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVES:

The Growing Educational Pathways for Food Sovereignty (GEPFS) project aims to promote food sovereignty through urban agriculture and advance both the theory and practice of belonging for culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students in the Sacramento region. The project builds on existing research establishing that community garden programs, culturally responsive/sustaining pedagogies, and family engagement can promote food justice and engender student belonging. Through the exploration and implementation of innovative approaches to promoting food sovereignty through place-based campus-community partnerships, the project advances the goals of both the CSUS Anchor University Initiative and the Antiracism and Inclusive Campus plan.

This project emerges from previous research conducted as a part of my doctoral dissertation project, through which I have been working collaboratively on two lines of community-based research over the past five years. One which examines barriers to educational success for CLD students in high school and university contexts, identifying sense of belonging as a key deficit. The second line of research examines the root causes of food injustice in urban centers, identifying key strategies for community-led urban agriculture initiatives to promote food sovereignty. While conducting this research at the University of Utah, I worked with a broad coalition of community and university partners to explore how culturally sustaining urban agriculture initiatives can advance school belonging among marginalized students. Together, we envisioned a program that moves belonging past a psychological sense into a more critical construct, engaging students in the political, social, and cultural elements of belonging. We considered how working at the intersections of the right to belong and food sovereignty might foster community-level autonomous food production in the long-term. Driven by these questions and goals, and with reciprocity as a guiding principle, we established a program in which marginalized high school students earn college credit through a food sovereignty course set in community and university gardens. The program then creates opportunities for students to shape community-level food initiatives through paid campus and community positions as peer mentors with younger students.

In my first year as a new faculty at CSUS, the PFD grant provided me with resources and time with which to begin laying the framework to adapt this program to the Sacramento region in accordance with the unique needs of students and community members in this region. The probationary faculty development grant has enabled me to begin establishing interdisciplinary partnerships with other CSUS faculty as well as local and regional community partners to launch the Growing Educational Pathways for Food Sovereignty Project at CSUS.

PROJECT SIGNIFICANCE AND BACKGROUND

Despite Sacramento's recognition as 'America's Farm-to-Fork Capital,' food insecurity is a persistent issue across the region. According to the 2021 Sacramento Region Food System Action Plan nearly 300,000 residents (1 in 6) across the four-county region experience food insecurity, or lack a lack of access to nutritious, healthy, and culturally appropriate food (Valley Vision, 2021). These issues are also prevalent amongst the CSUS student body as just over 47% of CSU students report experiencing food insecurity (Chancellors Office Study on Basic Needs, 2018).

Urban agriculture is a promising strategy to alleviate food insecurity by increasing availability of fresh food in urban centers, which in turn can promote health equity, community resiliency, and food justice (Alkon & Norgaard, 2009; Angotti, 2015; Dubbeling & De Zeeuw, 2011; Martin et al., 2016). Research from Sacramento State's Institute for Social Research indicates that communities of color and lower income residents in Sacramento report the highest levels of interest and lowest levels of access to community gardens (Food System Resilience Poll, 2021). These findings echo previous research which points to systemic barriers that prevent Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) from engaging in urban agriculture (Joyner et al, 2022; Reese, 2019; Valley Vision, 2021).

As has been seen during the COVID-19 pandemic, education and food injustices are intertwined and produced by the same systems that have long marginalized and disinvested in communities of color (IPESFS, 2020). Locally, the Sacramento Region Food system Action Plan identifies a need for programs that support food literacy and urban agriculture partnerships in K-12 to promote increased access to community gardens and local foods for communities of color and lower income residents (Valley Vision, 2021).

Thus, it is the aim of this project to explore opportunities to promote increased food security through an educational program that promotes food sovereignty through educational pathways to higher education for CLD.

PROJECT RESULTS

The first phase of launching the GEPFS project consisted of exploratory fieldwork to establish relationships with community members and form an initial understanding of the local foodscape and related issues in the Sacramento region. The PFD grant provided me with the time to assemble an interdisciplinary research team, craft a qualitative research methods protocol (including drafting interview questions), and begin interviews with community members to explore their dreams and visions for the GEPFS Program. During Spring 2022, I met weekly with Dr. Gabrielle Gonzales (Department of Sociology) and monthly with Dr. Si Gao (Department of Environmental Studies) to collaboratively develop our interview protocol, gather background research on existing urban agriculture and food justice initiatives in Sacramento, and to share and brainstorm key contacts. During this process, I was

also able to use course release time provided by the PFD grant to write and publish a peer-reviewed article in the journal *Social Sciences*, which employs a retroactive review of data collected during my dissertation to identify interactional strategies that promote critical reflexivity and prompt paradigm shifts towards food sovereignty (Joyner et al, 2023).

Drawing on the findings of this article, I worked with Dr. Gonzales and Dr. Gao to develop an interview guide which elicits information about community members' visions for how urban agriculture can alleviate food insecurity in the region, prevalent concerns about environmental justice issues relevant to urban agriculture in Sacramento, and how they feel the GEPFS program could best be designed to establish pathways to higher education for CLD and other marginalized students in Sacramento (see Appendix A for completed interview guide). Additionally, I recruited an RPTA graduate student who had previously expressed interest in research relating to urban agriculture and food justice in Sacramento. Once hired, this student joined Dr. Gonzalez and myself for weekly research team meetings. Thus far, she reports having gained valuable training in qualitative research and insights into how she might be able to design her own studies in the future.

We launched interviews in April, with interviewees included local food advocacy leaders, community members, and researchers who have experience with the Sacramento regional food system. While we initially anticipated conducting 15-20 interviews during Spring, I found that it was more time intensive than anticipated to publish the article which informed our methodologies, develop our interview guide, identify key contacts to interview, and recruit and train a graduate student in qualitative research methods than anticipated. As such, our team completed five interviews in Spring 2023, and are continuing to conduct interviews during Summer 2023. We look forward to releasing a report to all community members interviewed in Fall 2023, which will inform our continuing efforts to launch the GEPFS program at Sacramento State.

FINAL COMMENTS

I would like to thank the Probationary Faculty Development Grant Award Committee for their support of this project. The course release made available through this grant provided me with much needed time to publish a peer-reviewed article, develop an interview guide grounded in transformative methodologies, and begin establishing the community relationships that will be the cornerstone of the Growing Educational Pathways through Food Sovereignty Project at CSUS.

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***Cover photos provided by Leah Joyner from the Summer 2023 GEPFS Program at the University of Utah.*

APPENDIX A: LAUNCHING GEPFS AT CSUS INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interviewees: Urban Farmers, Community Gardeners, Food retailers, food banks, educational equity programs, food advocacy groups. All interviewees must have an urban agriculture component & be located within Sacramento County.

Additional inclusion Criteria/Exclusion Criteria:

Food banks: must have garden or agriculture component.

Farms: must include a community outreach and/or educational program component

Food Retailer: must have an educational equity component.

Food Advocacy Group: must have agriculture component.

Community Garden Groups: must be available to the public.

Question Block 1: Establishing Familiarity

- Please tell us a bit about yourself
- Please describe your work with [insert organization/farm name]
- Describe any details about your personal or professional background that have brought you to the work you do in Sacramento?
- What are your motivations for the work you do here?
 - Why did you start your farm or organization?
- Who are you doing this work for?
 - Describe the demographics of the population you serve and/or your target audience/customer base.
- How would you describe [your organization's] relationship with the following communities? [Local Community/Sacramento Community/ Relevant movements or groups your org is connected to?]

Question Block 2: Transformative Memories

- What are some of the main issues that your organization addresses?
 - In terms of your work [i.e., food justice & urban ag/and/or educational equity], have you noticed any themes or patterns?
- Can you share a story about when you felt fulfilled or affirmed by your work?
 - How would you describe the connections between food justice and urban agriculture in Sacramento?
 - How would you describe the connections between urban agriculture and health[y eating]?
 - How would you describe the connections between urban agriculture and hunger alleviation programs? [Ex. SNAP, food banks, other mutual aid or charitable organizations dealing with food insecurity]?
 - What environmental justice issues do you think are relevant to urban agriculture in Sacramento? Who is affected by these?
 - If asked: Environmental Justice is defined as “the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people, regardless of race, color, national origin, or income,

with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.” (DOE, 2023).

- Prompt(s):
 - Environmental justice issues could range from concerns about pollution, soil, water, natural disasters, equitable access to resources, etc.
 - What is the soil quality and/or water access like where you grow food? Do you think this is different in different parts of the city? Could this prevent community gardens or gardening in certain locations?
 - How do you feel issues of race/class/& or gender shape these connections between urban agriculture and food justice (if at all)?
 - Have any forms of public policy [city or state] positively or negatively affected your ability to do your work? If so, please describe.

Question Block 3: Transformative Visions

- How would you describe your vision for an ideal food system in Sacramento?
 - What are your hopes and dreams for the future of the food system?
 - What are some specific components of this vision?
 - Here in Sacramento / the broader region / globally?
- Are there any policies that could be in place to sustain your vision for an ideal food system? [repeat back key points from their vision as needed]
- What role would you envision that the following should take in shaping that ideal food system?
 - Sacramento State &/or other educational institutions
 - Researchers / Us?
 - Local farmers
 - Food Access Organizations
 - Community Residents
 - Your organization / you personally?

Question Block 4: Seeking Advice

This research project is being launched in part to inform an educational equity initiative to promote justice through urban agriculture in Sacramento, specifically through a program that would offer college credit for high school students from food apartheid impacted areas. We are working community partners in other communities who have envisioned a program through which students can learn about gardening and food justice in community gardens near where they live or go to school in addition to participating in urban agriculture on the Sacramento State campus. A part of our research goal is to understand how community relationships with urban agriculture promote food justice overall. To do that we are looking at what visions local organizations have for strategic growth/additions to the food justice movement in Sacramento.

- Do you think an educational equity & urban agriculture program for high school students is needed, why or why not?

- In what ways do you think an educational program to promote food justice might be beneficial in Sacramento?
- What are some key components / commitments that you feel should be reflected in a program like this?
- Are there any existing programs that you feel this research may be similar to and/or should support?
- What alternatives to an educational program like the one we've described do you think might be beneficial for community needs?
 - Encourage participants to dream big & share a variety of visions even if they seem very different from the proposal we've described.

Final Questions:

- Is there anyone else that you can think of that we should interview?
 - Can you put us in touch with them?
- What is the mailing address where we can send your gift card? (record in "potential interview contacts" spreadsheet)