Food Accessibility
by Garth Woodruff

I've had some interesting conversations about food accessibility of late. Even have listened in on some hospital administrators lecturing on the mater and the impact it has on community health. The data is overwhelming. Without a question our communities overall health and quality of life is dramatically increased when access to activity and quality food is available. Critical diseases decreases and life expectancy increase as a result. The data also is showing a clear correlation between household income and health, in that with the decrease of income we also see the decrease of a healthy lifestyle, more diseases and a shorter life span. The country as a whole is starting to push back. Few if any large organizations have yet to form and the majority of this movement is seen in grassroots operations like 'grow food not lawns'.

Urban planners like our young landscape designer are all a buzz with re-introducing agriculture into our cities and communities. Books are written about eatable landscapes in residential areas and rooftop gardens in the city. In two weeks I go to Detroit to give tours for the International Association of Professional Landscape Designers showing off the gardens on the east side of the state, some of them to include the downtown reclamation projects for the inclusion of agriculture. And, with all that I wonder if we still aren't off the mark.

We at the University take great pains in dialogue to identify how we can include agriculture into our school and community for health. How do we encourage a new generation to learn the life skills of growing their own food? How do we encourage the outdoor activity for health and fresh air? How do we move farm produce into the community where it could make the biggest impact on our community health? In the past we have supported places like the Benton Harbor Farmers Market as an outlet for that outreach. However, seldom is it the local families who patron that market. Seldom if ever. And, I've started to realize a critical disconnection in my dialogues with other concerned advocates. Local gardeners, to make ends meet, have become more of a boutique then a source for community health. The communities who statistically most need the produce don't shop.
local stands even if placed in their back yard. They also don’t grow their own food or are generally large consumers of fresh fruits and vegetables. It’s not the availability to the produce and maybe not even the education on the health benefits to the produce but the ability to turn these treats of the land into a meal. How many inner-city homes boast a juicer on their counters? How many have a cook pan that works well without grease or a cookbook with low fat options? What role models coached them on how to prepare healthy food in a way that will make the whole family happy? How many have the time after a long day, working for minimum wage and possibly single parents, to chop up all those veggies and prepare them in a palatable way? The functional illiteracy rate in Benton Harbor is 50%. I don’t see that demographic picking up Dr. Fuhrman’s ‘Eat to Live’ and boning up on good vegan recipes any time soon. According to the USDA Berrien Spring is labeled one of the four local food deserts in our county. So, the rising question is how do bring this change to our community?

Like the Guerilla Gardener in LA we need a guerilla cook to rise up. Growing the food is only one piece of the puzzle. I’m finding food accessibility as only half the challenge in our impact of the local community as a whole. Accessibility is still a piece of this challenge however only as it stands side by with the education on what to do with it. Yes, growing your own food is like printing your own money. But that’s not the goal. It’s not enough to grow it we must also eat it. So here my friend is the produce, now what do we do?

### RECIPES

**PARSLEY AND GARLIC SPREAD.**

**Ingredients:**
- Parsley chopped largely 1oz
- Celery chopped largely 1oz
- Bell Pepper medium size chopped 1oz
- Tomatoes chopped 1 oz
- Salt to taste
- Olive oil

**Variation:** some basil, dill or cilantro (though the last one shortens fridge-life of the mix)

**Directions:**
Put all the ingredients but the oil in a food processor. Process them, put the mass you’ve got in the glass jar and add olive oil on the top. (It will soak through). The spread can be hold in a refrigerator up to a week and used on bread any time as an appetizer or as a nice addition to your lunch.

**KITCHEN TIP**

Add a teaspoon of baking soda while boiling eggs, it will make the shell come off effortlessly.

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