



Proposed Strategies to Make Ferguson a Better Place to Eat for All!

In April 2017, EarthDance Organic Farm School was awarded a Missouri Foundation for Health grant to conduct additional community and stakeholder outreach and engagement for the organization's Ferguson Community Food Assessment (CFA). The CFA was conducted in 2016 through a USDA grant.

The major outreach and engagement outcomes were to:

1. Inform Ferguson residents about the results of the CFA and encourage them to visit the Farmers Market and EarthDance Farm School;
2. Share the CFA findings with Ferguson residents in an engaging and interactive manner at a series of ten community conversations;
3. Learn from residents the goals that were most appealing to them;
4. Develop further recommendations to achieve the goals identified during the CFA.

The following goals and strategies were developed in response to the findings of the CFA and the follow-up community engagement process. They represent the ideas, stories, and suggestions obtained from Ferguson residents during community conversations and smaller focus groups.

Goal 1: *Enhance existing food system infrastructure and resources (such as, EarthDance, Ferguson Farmers Market, community and school gardens and local food pantries) to fully execute goals 2 and 3 (new goal developed during CFA Phase II, based on engagement results)*

Goal 2: *Expand food access and improve affordability to all Ferguson residents, regardless of age, ethnicity, income and residence.*

Goal 3: *Increase knowledge among residents about how to obtain, grow, store and prepare nutritional food.*

PROMISING STRATEGIES

1. **Seek opportunities to partner and collaborate with other agencies and organizations working toward similar goals.** For example, EarthDance could join the

St. Louis Healthy Living Coalition's Access to Healthy Foods subcommittee. While the coalition is not specific to Ferguson, it can provide possible networking and future partnering opportunities.

2. **Initiate a local and healthy food "advocate" program**, comprised of a diverse group of residents representative of the community by age, ethnicity, income and residence. They could be the eyes and ears of Ferguson as they raise awareness about Ferguson's food system assets and projects, identify pilot projects for future implementation and recruit others to join Ferguson's local and healthy foods initiative. The advocates program would be a stable group of community members who are committed to making Ferguson a better place to eat for all through networking, advocacy and volunteerism. To get started in this direction, EarthDance could partner with United Peoples Market's existing Healthy Food Advocates program to create a community-wide food system advocates initiative that would support all system resources. These advocates would choose how they want to be involved – from advocacy to leading a cooking or nutrition class and/or forming a cadre of gardening volunteers class – and they would each recruit other advocates to expand the network.
3. **Create and launch a local and healthy foods marketing campaign**, using inexpensive media (social media, YouTube, Pinterest, Instagram and Twitter). The campaign will showcase all the food system resources and emphasize how Ferguson is becoming a better place to eat through community initiatives.
4. Develop partnerships to **bring more youth to EarthDance for ongoing learning**. The organization currently provides field trips and service opportunities to 1000+ youth annually. EarthDance will explore options (such as an after-school club) to offer young people ongoing, rather than one-off experiences on the farm. In 2018, EarthDance is launching one such collaboration: monthly farm-open house days operated in partnership with Simple Positive Play. Simple Positive Play engages families with young children in education via play. Simple Positive Play will help guide families to explore the farm through hands-on fun.
5. Work with the **Metro Market (mobile farmers market) to get more fresh produce to underserved Ferguson locations** (such as Ferguson apartment complexes and schools) on a weekly basis. Residents lacking transportation and/or with multiple jobs, may find the Metro Market more convenient than going to the Ferguson Farmers Market. EarthDance and Metro Market are currently working together to offer EarthDance produce at accessible prices to the veggie bus' customers.
6. **Foster a welcoming environment for all Ferguson residents at the Ferguson Farmers Market** by encouraging African American producers to become vendors and adding more culturally appropriate produce.

7. **Develop an “Opportunity Gardens” program to install gardens at private residences** and/ or apartment complexes and provide regular garden coaching for homeowners to maintain their gardens. This strategy, modeled after the Columbia Center for Urban Agriculture’s program of the same name, has proven effective in other communities across the country. Home gardens are more convenient to maintain than distant community gardens. Installing the gardens would surmount the initial obstacles of start-up costs and lack of confidence about getting started. Garden coaching could help new gardeners maintain motivation and troubleshoot common problems.
8. **Meet Ferguson’s young people where they are** in order to influence greater numbers of youth in their attitudes toward growing and eating fresh food. Transportation and time represent barriers to connecting more Ferguson youth, on a regular basis, with EarthDance Farm. EarthDance heard from stakeholders during the CFA engagement process that the organization should go into schools and other youth-focused spaces. EarthDance staff could provide support to school gardens and/ or offer in-class enrichment about farm and food topics.

ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES FOR FUTURE STUDY

Investigate the long-term financial and operational feasibility of developing a healthy foods café on West Florissant, in conjunction with the Great Streets Initiative.

Partner with churches for commercial kitchen use and host intergenerational cooking classes. Additionally, host crock-pot cooking classes for residents, especially those living in transitional housing, such as hotels.

Assess school gardens, by speaking with coordinators, to understand the issues influencing implementation and curriculum integration; encourage the Ferguson-Florissant School District to apply for grants funds to hire either a district garden coordinator with expertise in education and gardening.

Assess food pantries, by speaking with coordinators, to understand the issues influencing food quality and quantity; and create strategies to improve services.

Ferguson has two food pantries, where residents have remarked that the food quality (at times) is sub-par and the quantity of fresh produce is limited. To address the limited produce, food pantries should consider developing raised beds for demonstration projects, and produce to distribute. Congregants and neighbors would serve as gardeners.

