

# Growing Community in Isla Vista: The Methodist Church Community Garden

## Whitner Grange

### University of California Global Food Initiative Fellow

#### Introduction

This was the second year of the Methodist Church Community Garden which began in the Fall of 2018. The garden continues to produce food and host workshops on formerly unused land which now is an activated and valued space in Isla Vista.

The location (just a few blocks from UCSB campus) is particularly well suited to facilitating community engagement with both students and permanent residents. It is highly trafficked by students going to and from classes, next-door to a student housing complex, across the street from St. George's Youth Center and Estero Park, and nearby to apartments occupied by long-term residents of Isla Vista.

During the garden's second year, we worked to roughly double the area of land under cultivation, increase the capacity of our community compost bins, and host more workshops and volunteer days,



#### Project goals

- Maintain an open garden space with as few barriers to entry as possible. There are no rented plots, fences, or restrictions on what can be grown. Community members are encouraged to come to the garden on their own time and to contribute to the space in whichever way they please.
- Grow a substantial amount of food for the congregation, garden volunteers, community events, and distribution to the UCSB Food Bank and other orgs (this later goal has not yet been accomplished)
- Host workshops and classes to provide education on gardening, healthy eating, crafts, and other topics.
- Create a beautiful place in which passersby can relax, explore, and meet their neighbors.
- Develop a work program to employ houseless folks to do garden work.



#### Funding sources

- Grant from Isla Vista Community Services District which provides funding for a community outreach intern and infrastructure and seeds
- Grant from the greater Methodist Church and individual donations from congregants which continue to be spent on on items not purchasable through our IVCS D grant (such as food for community events.)

#### Future funding sources

- The garden has been added as a regular line item in IVCS D's budget! This secures a reliable source of funding for the foreseeable future.
  - I am currently working on the coming year's budget which will include a line item compensating houseless folks for garden work as well as the prior outreach position and anticipated infrastructure costs.



#### Community engagement

It has been amazing to see the community come together around the garden through interactions with congregants and passersby, volunteers, class visits, workshops and partnerships with community organizations. Some of our activities have been:

- Weekly volunteer days as well as special days hosted in partnership with UCSB's Edible Campus Program.
- Individual contributions to our compost bin by roughly 60 households
- Collaboration with a UCSB environmental studies class in which students visited the space.
- Partnership with St. George's Youth center whose after school program visits the garden to learn and volunteer.
- Collaboration with UCSB's Food Nutrition and Basic Skills on cross-disciplinary programming related to gardening and healthy eating.
- Collaboration with IV Compost Collective which delivers vegetable scraps to the garden once per week (IV Compost Collective is a free service that brings household compost in Isla Vista to several community gardens via bike cart.)
- Open community events such a make-your-own-pizza party during which we fired up our cob pizza oven.

#### Conclusions

The garden has continued to improve this year in both our productivity and our community partnerships and the strength of our programming.

We have also achieved the huge milestone of being absorbed into IVCS D's yearly budget as a line item which secures a reliable source of funding for the garden. IVCS D has also vocalized interest in expanding the program to additional sites which is something we are very excited to pursue.

Support from houseless community members in building infrastructure and doing garden work has been incredible to see and the garden is flourishing as a result. This is a strength of our garden that we hope to expand to other sites as we bring new areas in the community under cultivation.

Community partnerships and mentorship from community leaders have been instrumental in the success and development of the garden.



#### Goals for this year:

1. Further develop a work program to employ houseless folks to do garden work.
2. Expand to new sites in Isla Vista
3. Consistently donate food to the UCSB Food Bank and Food not Bombs in Isla Vista
4. Increase the productivity of the garden and record metrics on production and water usage.



#### Acknowledgements

United Methodist Church of Isla Vista

Isla Vista Community Services District

All of our amazing volunteers!