

My research is focused on community gardens and how they can be utilized, particularly by food insecure populations, to increase connectedness to the local food system and the community itself. I will draw from a variety of actors in the Burlington, Vermont area focused on diverse populations, food security, agriculture and nutrition, particularly Friends of Burlington Gardens.

Community gardens are not only a space for food production. They are also an opportunity to share knowledge, strengthen relationships, and empower individuals. They have been identified as an integral part of the local food movement, which encourages individuals to support agricultural initiatives in their area (be it community, state or region). Vermont, and Burlington in particular, have been touted as leaders in what many espouse as the future of agriculture as conventional practices prove to be unsustainable.

That being said, such initiatives are not without critique. The local food movement has been criticized as being exclusive in nature; predominantly middle/upper middle class, white, and female. Recent initiatives that promote community gardens are said to lack relevancy and not recognize the preexisting knowledge of many immigrant populations. Burlington, overwhelmingly Caucasian, is still largely economically diverse and local food initiatives, including community gardens, should strive to be as inclusive as possible of such marginalized populations.

How do we foster a sense of ownership through “food sovereignty” among those identified as food insecure, particularly those of lower economic class in the Burlington area, through community garden initiatives? What barriers exist for these populations and how can they be addressed in an inclusive and collaborative manner?

I hope to examine such questions through a community participatory action research project which will help to design and ultimately evaluate a community garden program in Burlington’s north end.