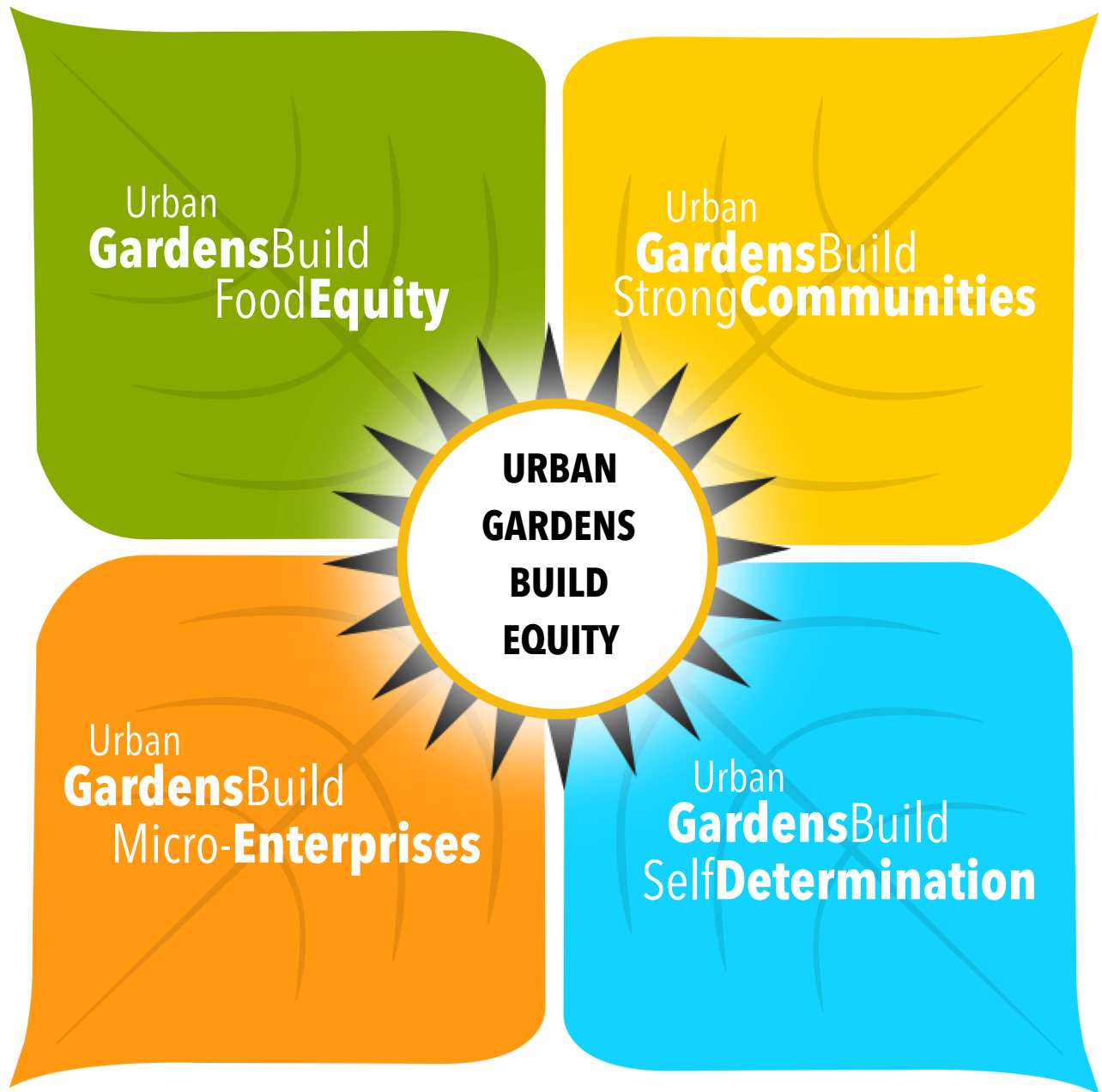


# The Future of Urban Agriculture **in Charlottesville**



CITY SCHOOLYARD GARDEN

INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE / NEW ROOTS

URBAN AGRICULTURE COLLECTIVE OF CHARLOTTESVILLE

CHARLOTTESVILLE FOOD JUSTICE NETWORK

## A place for Charlottesville residents to grow food and community, together.



Urban farms and gardens provide food security, community gathering spaces, beautification, and a number of benefits to the environments and people engaged with them. Unfortunately, they are competing for finite space with other critical needs like improved, affordable housing as well as general development pressure. Through housing redevelopment and general private development pressure, several established agricultural locations are either under imminent threat or unsecured.

*"We envision affordable living - not just affordable housing in Charlottesville. So for P&R, we see the focus on trails and parks as an equity piece of the puzzle. Making people who walk, ride bikes and buses equally safe, convenient, enjoyable and get you to the right places. And if you can't bring the people to the grocery store, then bring food access to the neighborhoods... for some that's through gardening."*

Chris Gensic, Parks & Trails Planner, City of Charlottesville

### **Food Equity Goals**

**Cultivate food equity within the urban environmental sustainability space by promoting and preserving permanent land for green infrastructure dedicated to achieving community food security for low-income residents.**

Create more equitable processes for acquiring and accessing land/garden rental space.

Promote awareness and utilization of edible trails in Parks & Recreation.

*The Urban Agriculture Collective works side by side with residents to grow up to 10,000 pounds of food, annually. In 2019, UACC worked with over 100 resident volunteers and served over 300 families.*

*In 2020, UACC lost almost 90 percent of its land to housing redevelopment. That's thousands of pounds of food lost and hundreds of families and community volunteers that will be affected.*

*City park land offers the opportunity to provide greens-space for urban agriculture in Charlottesville.*

# The big picture.

## An overview of urban agriculture in Charlottesville.

### **Current Landscape**

Today the urban agriculture landscape of Charlottesville consists of a patchwork of public and private land, as well as an assortment of more and less organized systems that support it. The most prominent and recognizable include the City's three garden rental spaces located in flood plain and one city park; City Schoolyard Garden which hosts gardens and garden programs at 8 public schools, the Urban Agriculture Collective's remaining garden that supplies many low income families with fresh food at no cost in the growing season; and the International Rescue Committee's five New Roots garden spaces geared toward providing growing space for home and market use for Charlottesville's refugee population. Other spaces include gardens at Trinity Episcopal Church, individual garden plots in the Westhaven originally sponsored by the University of Virginia student-led project called Growing for Change; Casa Alma, a Catholic Worker community that includes an urban farm; as well many private gardens, shared private spaces and unofficial arrangements between individuals.

### **The Urban Agriculture Collective of Charlottesville**

UACC's mission statement is, "We believe that working together to grow and share healthy food helps cultivate healthy communities." This local urban farm began as a community action in 2012. It grew out of the 2007 Quality Community Council's Farm Initiative. The catalyst for the creation of the farm was to build bridges between Charlottesville neighborhoods where people from across the socio-economic spectrum could grow good food and healthier communities together. In 2019 UACC managed about an acre of land – across three gardens - located adjacent to the public and subsidized housing communities they served.

Operating in the non-profit space, UACC relies on community volunteers to support the work of its small staff. Historically UACC has grown between 8,000 and 10,000 pounds of produce per year. That food is distributed, free of charge, to residents every Friday on Market Days during the growing season.

In 2020, after the loss of two of its gardens as part of Charlottesville's housing redevelopment effort, UACC retains 4,400 square feet of land under management at Sixth Street

and Monticello. 2020 will be the last season for this small garden, which is slated for redevelopment in 2021.

### **The IRC New Roots Program and the Refugee Community**

Charlottesville's refugee residents have and continue to be actively involved in urban agriculture in Charlottesville and the surrounding area primarily through the International Rescue Committee's (IRC) New Roots Program. The IRC is Charlottesville's only resettlement agency, helping 200+ people each year resettle to the area and serving roughly 800 people annually through its case management, employment, education and other programming.

New Roots was established in 2011 and works with Charlottesville's refugee and SIV\* community in support of their community connection, wellness and household economics through food and agriculture. The IRC operates 5 gardens with 1-acre total in production. Sites are rented at a reduced rate or provided for free. The IRC provides technical assistance and currently serves 68 refugee and immigrant families, some of whom grow food to sell at the neighborhood market on Michie Drive, adjacent to public housing. IRC staff also help their clients access Charlottesville's public garden rental system, operated by the City's Parks and Recreation Department, and work with Bellair Farm in Southern Albemarle County to link some growers to additional farming space. Two of the five properties cultivated are for sale, three are slated for redevelopment, and one location is in flood way and was severely damaged in 2018. Lack of land tenure in the face of mounting development pressures directly threatens urban farmers ability to grow fresh food for themselves and others.

Both UACC and IRC/New Roots work toward alleviating food insecurity and health disparities around food access, by providing local, affordable, culturally relevant healthy food. Figure 1 below graphically highlights some local statistics around food access, health, and how UACC engages the community to address these problems.

*\*SIV's are "Special Immigrant Visa" holders who worked with the U.S. Armed Forces or under Chief of Mission authority as a translator or interpreter in Iraq or Afghanistan.*

# The big picture.

## Challenges for urban agriculture in Charlottesville.

### Housing redevelopment

Planning for housing redevelopment in Charlottesville, on both the public (CRHA) and private (PHA) side, has been underway for some time, but in 2020, this work has finally come to fruition. Construction crews will be breaking ground at Friendship Court and at South First Street. Both sites are on ground, once thriving with UACC food production gardens. This classic tug-of-war between urban agriculture and urban development sets up a false dichotomy based on the assumption that urban agriculture and housing are mutually exclusive. They are not. Affordable housing construction and healthy food production, can and do, co-exist, but it requires reimagining urban agriculture as a component of a healthy city.

### Lack of long-term land-use agreements

Neither UACC nor IRC/New Roots owns the land that they farm. In the case of UACC, in 2019 their largest parcel of approximately 12,000 sq. ft. of vegetable beds was owned by Piedmont Housing Association (PHA). A second and third parcel, 8000 and 4,400 sq. ft. respectively, are owned by the Charlottesville Redevelopment and Housing Authority (CRHA). At Friendship Court, there is an additional 14,000 square feet of native species beds, an orchard of pear, cherry, plum, persimmon, and paw paws, and a berry garden of blueberries, gooseberries, strawberries, blackberries, and raspberries. All of this fruit is free for residents to pick as they please. When construction of new housing begins, all of these trees, and many of the berry bushes will be lost.

### Lack of access to fresh produce for low-wealth residents

There is little doubt that a diet rich in fresh fruits and vegetables is a powerful causative factor in human health. At Myplate.gov, the recommendation is that one-half of the meal plate should be made up of fruits and vegetables. Numerous studies show that fresh produce consumption correlates well with improved cardiovascular function, weight management, and is an excellent source of fiber in the diet.

Sadly, many of our low-wealth residents are missing out on the benefits of fresh fruits and vegetables due to lack of access. The

barriers include cost, proximity to stores where fresh produce is available, and insufficient public transportation. Additionally, many of the children from low-income homes rely heavily on school breakfast and lunch programs. When we combine lack of access with school food programs that rely too heavily on highly processed convenience foods, like cereals and pre-cooked pizza, we can observe a correlative rise in childhood obesity and Type II diabetes.

### Lack of long-term land-use agreements

Both the UACC and IRC programs provide a roadmap and a way forward. That road was paved by over 12 years of residents working side by side, in community meetings, and in the fields. In different ways, they both address issues of health disparities, garden-based community building, job training, self-reliance, and entrepreneurship through small-scale food production. But for these programs to have the kind of impact that drives real change, a greater commitment from the city is required. In Charlottesville, both PHA and CRHA have commitments to residents to set aside land for shared garden spaces, but those commitments are in danger of being minimized or lost in the cacophony of the redevelopment effort.

Community gardens often arise as a temporary solution to the long-term problem of equitable access to fresh produce. Typically, they're used as a low-investment land use for a vacant lot until market forces and a bulldozer wipe them out of existence. This two steps forward, two steps back approach to urban agriculture erodes the communities who come to rely on these gardens.

Charlottesville has an opportunity to live up to the City Council's vision statement of "A great place to live for all our citizens," by making a long-term investment in urban agriculture. That investment can be realized by thinking of urban agriculture as a foundational component of a healthy city, embedded in the city plan. Beautiful gardens, healthy food, and better opportunities should not just be for the affluent, but for everyone.

*Charlottesville has an opportunity to live up to the City Council's vision statement of "A great place to live for all our citizens."*

# Case Study: Housing Redevelopment and the UACC Farm Gardens nearly 90 percent of growing space lost in 2020.

## The Spaces We Grow

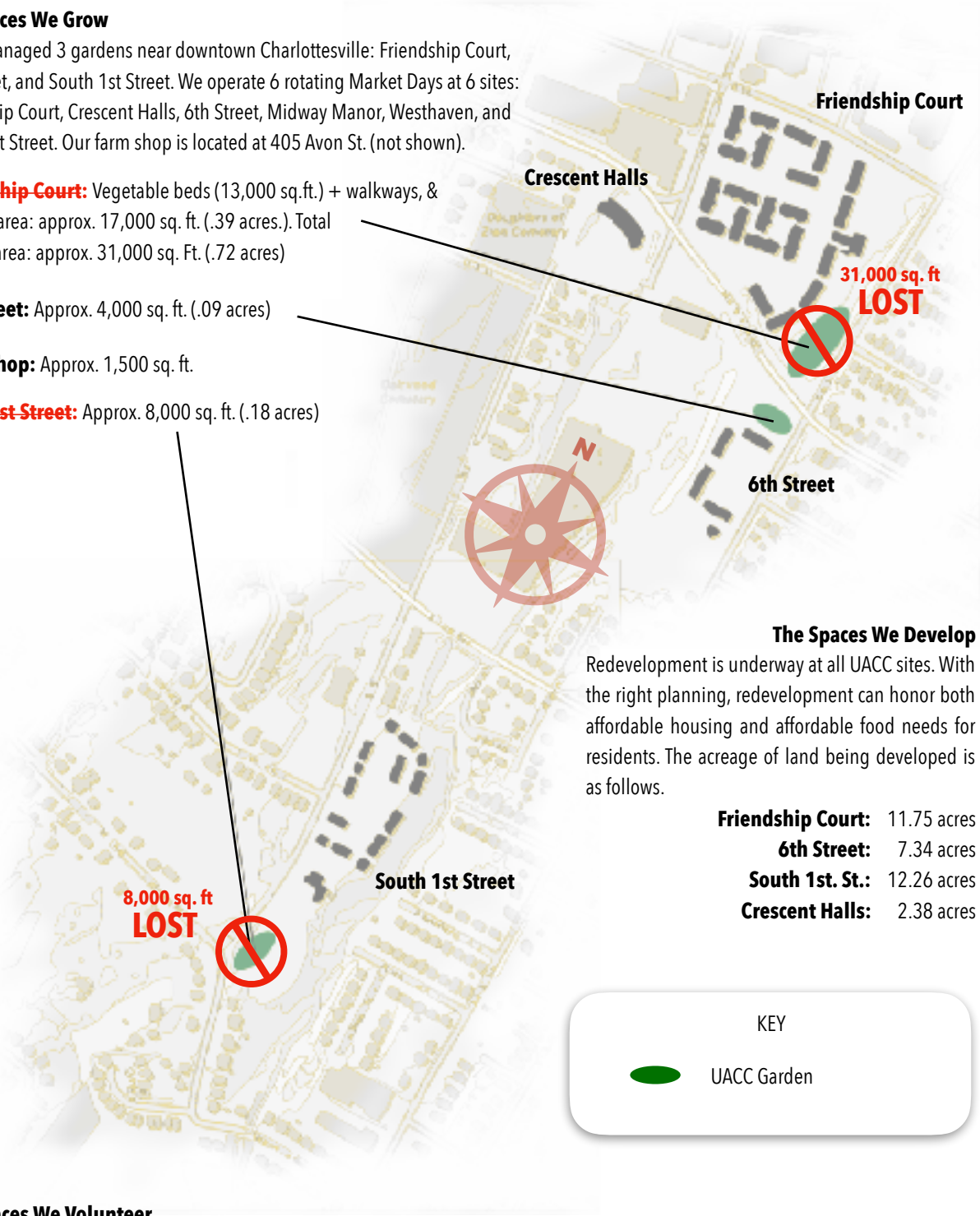
UACC managed 3 gardens near downtown Charlottesville: Friendship Court, 6th Street, and South 1st Street. We operate 6 rotating Market Days at 6 sites: Friendship Court, Crescent Halls, 6th Street, Midway Manor, Westhaven, and South 1st Street. Our farm shop is located at 405 Avon St. (not shown).

**Friendship Court:** Vegetable beds (13,000 sq.ft.) + walkways, & staging area: approx. 17,000 sq. ft. (.39 acres). Total garden area: approx. 31,000 sq. Ft. (.72 acres)

**6th Street:** Approx. 4,000 sq. ft. (.09 acres)

**Farm Shop:** Approx. 1,500 sq. ft.

**South 1st Street:** Approx. 8,000 sq. ft. (.18 acres)



**Friendship Court**

**Crescent Halls**

**31,000 sq. ft LOST**

**6th Street**

## The Spaces We Develop

Redevelopment is underway at all UACC sites. With the right planning, redevelopment can honor both affordable housing and affordable food needs for residents. The acreage of land being developed is as follows.

<b>Friendship Court:</b>	11.75 acres
<b>6th Street:</b>	7.34 acres
<b>South 1st. St.:</b>	12.26 acres
<b>Crescent Halls:</b>	2.38 acres

KEY

 UACC Garden

## The Spaces We Volunteer

The UACC gardens were created, not just to feed the hungry, but to provide a gathering space to bridge the social, cultural, and economic divides that fragment the city of Charlottesville. To that end, the gardens have been very successful. While our resident customers skew toward middle-age in the 56 - 65+ cohort, our volunteers cover a much broader spectrum, anecdotally

clustering in the 20 - 40 age range. The economic range of our volunteers includes college students, young professionals and families, and retired residents. The UACC Farm Gardens are one of the few places in Charlottesville where such a broad swath of the populace can meet and work toward a common goal.

# Case Study: Washington Park, A place for Charlottesville residents to grow food and community, together.

Working with residents, UACC creates opportunities for everyone to have access to fresh produce. **Booker T. Washington Park** has a history of serving the African-American community and is ideally situated as a potential site for a new urban garden. Its central location,

parking, and proximity to diverse neighborhoods ensure that a Washington Park Garden can become a gathering place for residents from across the socio-economic spectrum. A place for people to come together to grow and share healthy food.



Washington visualization



Washington visualization



UACC Market Day



## Gardens provide....

- greens-space for residents
- places for residents to grow and share
- incubators for entrepreneurs
- Job training zones
- Opportunities for self determination
- support for food equity
- opportunities for stronger communities
- fresh fruits and vegetables

No-one should have to choose between housing and food  
**when they can have both.**

Charlottesville Neighborhoods by the Numbers



**57%** students  
qualify for free and reduced price meals.

**37%** 3rd & 5th graders  
classified as overweight/obese.



Black residents are  
**4 times**  
more likely to die  
of diabetes.

Charlottesville Food Insecurity by the Numbers

**82%** free/reduced  
Lunch eligibility at Ridge St./10th & Page



**15%** or 1 in 7  
children are unsure of their next meal.

**160%** increase

In SNAP benefits  
btw. 2001-2016



**Farm Gardens SUPPORT**  
Neighborhoods, residents, families  
**PROVIDE**  
Workforce training & education  
**BUILD**  
Healthy communities

**380** residents  
and their families  
served.



Over **8 tons**  
of fresh fruits/vegetables grown.



Over **100** volunteers  
Racially & economically diverse.

UACC by the numbers in 2017

**in 40 sq. ft.**  
UACC can grow...

**640** carrots  
or radishes



**100 lbs.**  
of sweet potatoes

**200 lbs.** tomatoes



**UACC** Farm began as a community action in 2012. It grew out of the 2007 QCC Farm initiative. For 11 years, we have partnered with residents to grow good food and healthier neighborhoods. The **South 1st. Street garden** is an example of that resident-led partnership. In resident surveys, UACC has maintained strong community support.

*"We believe that working together to grow and share healthy food helps cultivate healthy communities."* #CVilleGardens2020



**Gardens also grow...**

- Youth leadership
- Places for community gatherings
- Food equity for everyone
- Connections with our history
- Community pride
- Active living and exercise



A way forward.  
**What Charlottesville can do.**

## ShortTerm

Cultivate food equity within urban spaces by growing and sharing food in food insecure communities and across the city.

Cultivate food equity within urban spaces by promoting and preserving permanent land dedicated for growing and sharing food in neighborhoods slated for future housing redevelopment.



increase community resident self determination by creating equitable processes for renting city owned community plots.

Integrate food equity practices such as urban agriculture, edible landscaping, and water conservation into city policy including the City's Comprehensive Plan, City Council Strategic Plan and Vision Statement and the Parks and Recreation Strategic master Plan.

## LongTerm

Utilize a community-based approach that leverages public and private partnerships as well as resident leadership in conducting an urban agriculture land availability assessment, prioritization and preferred usage.

Update public land policy to require a percentage of land be reserved by the city for urban agriculture and affordable food market vending for communities with food insecurity.

Hire a City of Charlottesville Urban Agriculture Director to manage the intersection of land use, food access and urban agriculture.



What do residents have to say  
**about urban agriculture in Charlottesville?**

**BeatriceClark**

Resident and UACC Volunteer

"I pick up and deliver vegetables to several of my elderly friends...Some of them have said, 'I can hardly wait until Friday to see what goodies I will be receiving.' "

Gardens Build **Compassion**

**DhanSubba**

Resident and Farmer/IRC New Roots

"Gardening is a way to maintain my health and be a part of a community."

Gardens Build **Community**

**URBAN  
GARDENS  
BUILD  
EQUITY**

**JeniferMinor**

Resident and UACC Farm Manager

"In my future I'm thinking about running my own garden, managing my own garden, and my own co-workers. That's my future thought. To get my own garden going, where I can sell my produce and make money off my produce."

Gardens Build **Entrepreneurs**

Gardens Build **Families**

"It's been a great thing. Having access to healthy foods in our community is not always easy."

**TamaraWright**

Resident, PHA Volunteer, UACC Supporter

# What do residents have to say about urban agriculture in Charlottesville?

**Five members of the Board and Advisory Council participated in a focus group. Todd Niemeier was also present.**

## Focus Group Summary

Participants spoke of feeling hungry, relaxed, whole, and a comfortable vibe/sense of community when in the garden. They all spoke of learning about the techniques of gardening and plant care, including how to plant for pollinators, growing berries, growing native plants, and how to plant in this zone.

They also all spoke of eating more veggies, and one person said that she now works to make half her plate vegetables. She elaborated, saying that she was pleased to now know the difference between organic and manufactured food, and how you have to eat organic food more quickly before it spoils.

The participants talked the most about the meaning of the garden for the community, and how it represents the ideal in Charlottesville. They felt full of pride and like they were

**Two UACC garden apprentices were interviewed individually.**

## Interview Summary

One apprentice is a Sophomore at CHS and lives in Friendship Court. He has been a CAYIP apprentice for two summers with the AUCC garden. The other apprentice lives in Friendship Court with her four daughters. She has been a UACC Apprentice for three seasons.

He chose the apprenticeship because it was close to home, keeps him busy and out of trouble. She said it was important to her to give back to the community.

It is peaceful. It keeps him motivated because there's always something that needs to be done. He gets a sense of accomplishment and there's always something different to do. "I can go hours and not even know."

leading by example and providing inspiration in how to have backyard gardens, and that being in the garden represented opportunity, engagement, hope, and health. They felt they were more focused on educating people than actually on food production. One person spoke of expanding her professional/personal networking being in the garden. The members got excited talking about writing their vision down and painting a mural with it on the walls of the gardens. One person talked of her role in fundraising mailings and swooping in at the last minute to help out when needed, but most people were focused on knocking on doors and getting people out, being spokespeople for the garden and public awareness.

The members got excited talking about writing their vision down and painting a mural with it on the walls of the gardens. One person talked of her role in fundraising mailings and swooping in at the last minute to help out when needed, but most people were focused on knocking on doors and getting people out, being spokespeople for the garden and public awareness.

He likes that people in the neighborhood recognize him from the garden and ask him what's going on in the garden. It feels good helping people and being a part of the goodness. A lot of kids come out to the garden to play in the dirt. She can teach what she has learned to others and the kids. She feels confident, and can put her mind to the work. She can be independent and has recently become the assistant farm manager.

Both say the garden really helps the community, and means a lot to the community. Little kids come out to help a lot and parents know they are safe.

Both have tried new foods and learned about healthy eating. He has learned that the things he grows are a lot healthier than the food in the grocery and that most of the things in the grocery are not healthy. Both also look forward to the physical activity – and associated weight loss – that comes with working in the garden in the summer.

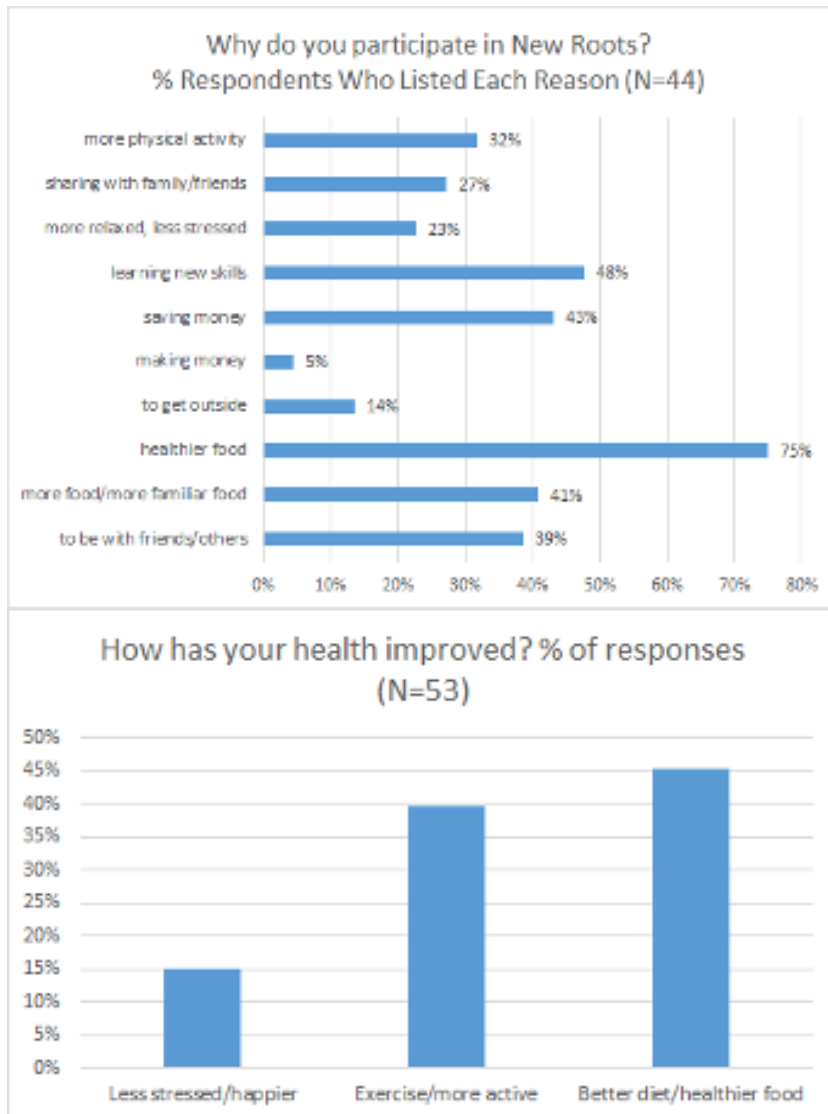
# Resident Feedback from an International Rescue Committee/New Roots survey from 2019.

The refugee and SIV community in Charlottesville is estimated at roughly 4000 people, though many of them have since become naturalized citizens. Many of these families, especially those from Afghanistan, Bhutan, Burundi, D.R. Congo, and Myanmar arrived with agrarian skills and desire to continue to exercise those skills for a number of reasons: as a matter of cultural identity; to save money on groceries; to access organic food and varieties of produce not readily available in local stores; and for social and mental health motivations. While

many grow independently at their own homes or those of neighbors, 68 families are active urban growers through the International Rescue Committee's New Roots program (IRC).

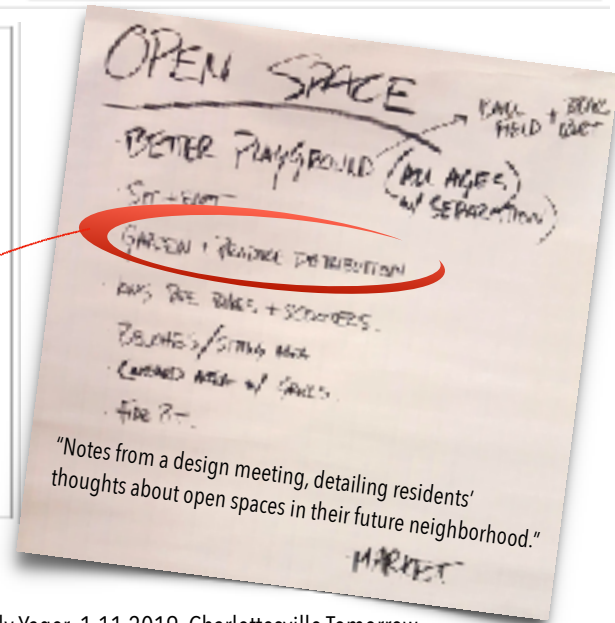
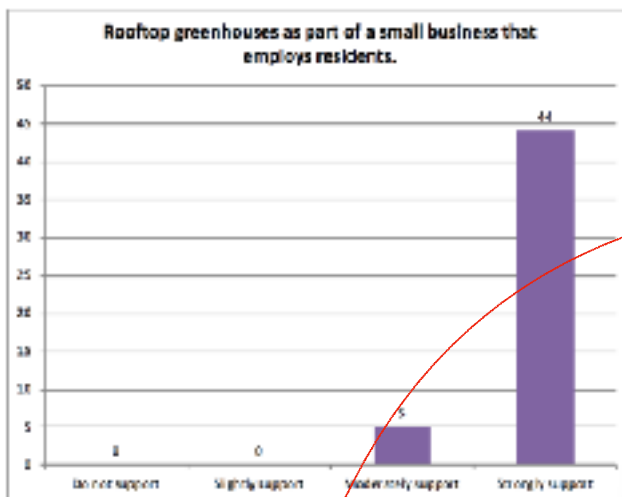
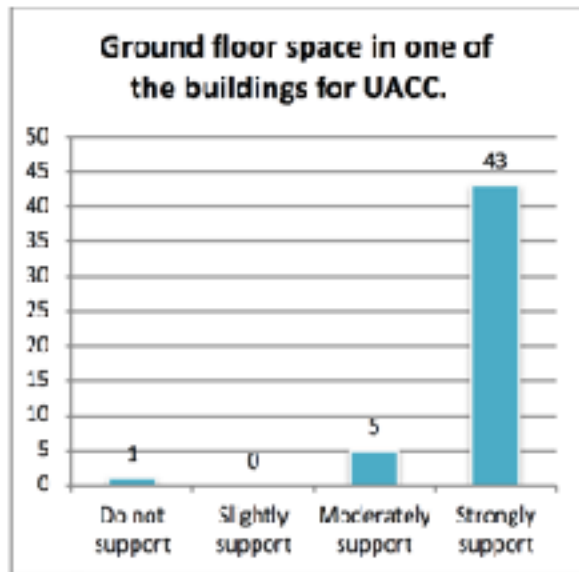
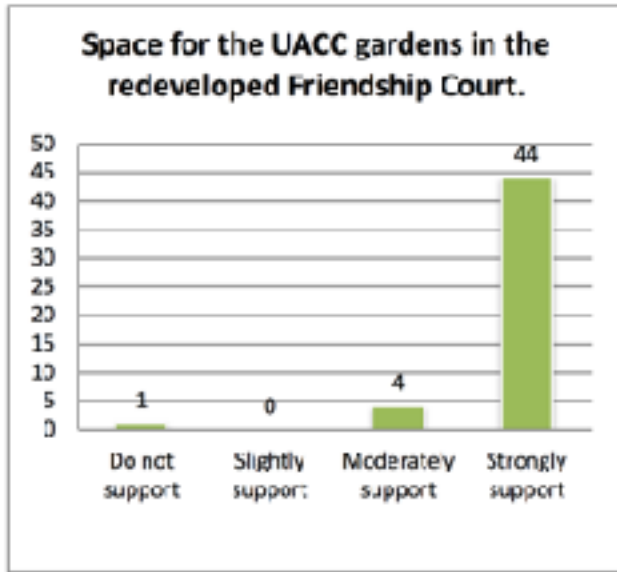
The IRC conducts programmatic evaluations each year to understand the value of land access and urban agriculture for its program participants. From the 2019 surveying of participants we learned:

- Respondents reported saving an average \$411 on groceries per household in the 2019 growing season through their gardens.
- The five "micro-producers" making sales through their gardens grossed nearly \$8000 from less than a half-acre of land.
- Accessing more healthful food, learning new skills, saving money top the reasons that growers participate in the New Roots land access programs (Community Gardening and Micro-Producer Program).



# Resident Feedback on Gardens at Friendship Court 2017 UACC Redevelopment Survey Results

In March of 2017, UACC asked 49 Friendship Court residents to rate their support for three ideas related to UACC's role in the redeveloped community. - Survey conducted by Todd Niemeier



"Notes from a design meeting, detailing residents' thoughts about open spaces in their future neighborhood."

Image comes from "The Reimagining of Friendship Court," by Jordy Yager, 1.11.2019, Charlottesville Tomorrow.

## UACC Friendship Court Redevelopment Survey

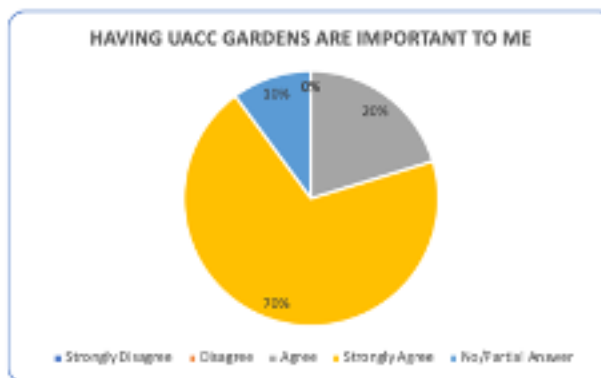
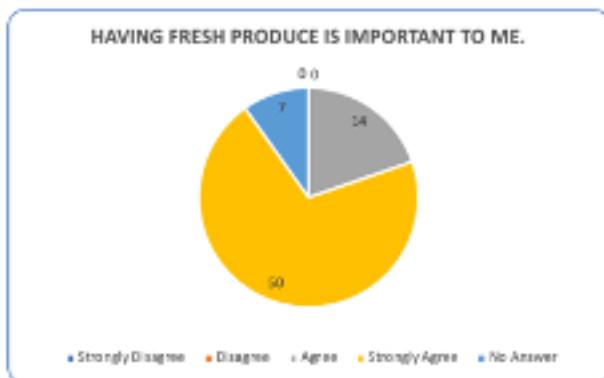
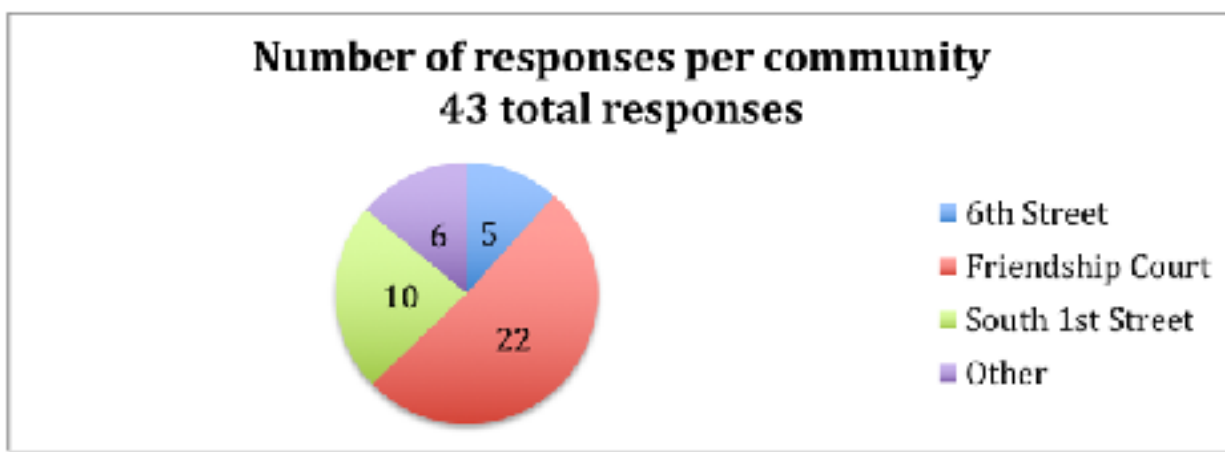
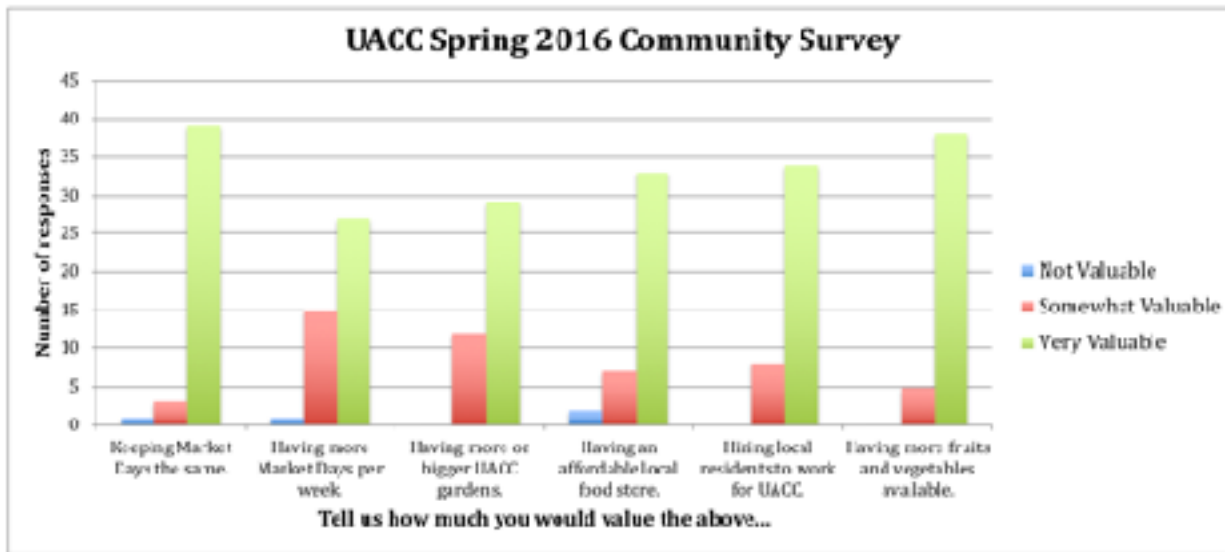
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As redevelopment approaches Friendship Court, UACC would like to know how best to continue to serve your community. Please tell us how much you support the following ideas about the future of UACC at Friendship Court.

0 = Do not support    1 = Slightly support    2 = Moderately support    3 = Strongly support

#	DATE	APT.	NAME (optional)	Space for the UACC gardens in the redeveloped Friendship Court.	Ground floor space in one of the buildings for UACC to store equipment, grow seedlings, and distribute produce from the gardens.	Rooftop greenhouses as part of a small business that employs residents.
				0 1 2 3	0 1 2 3	0 1 2 3

# What Residents Value. 2019/2016 UACC Survey Results.



Results of a 2019 Market Day survey of 71 resident-customers. 90% of people surveyed either agreed or strongly agreed with the above statements.

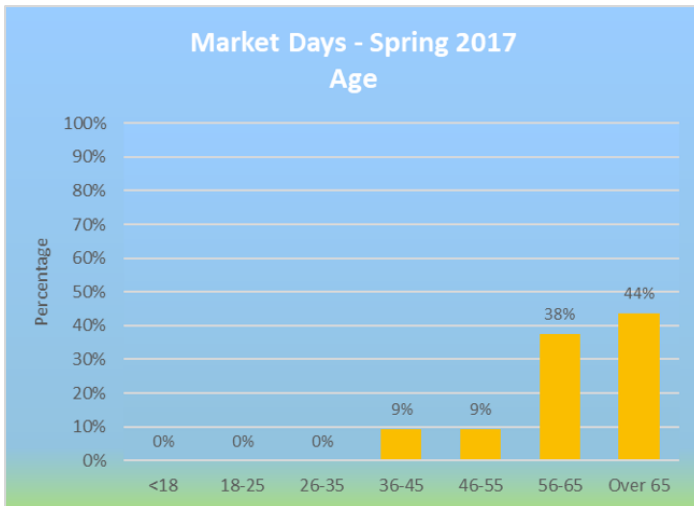
# Market Day Resident Survey Data

## The community speaks

### Market Day Data

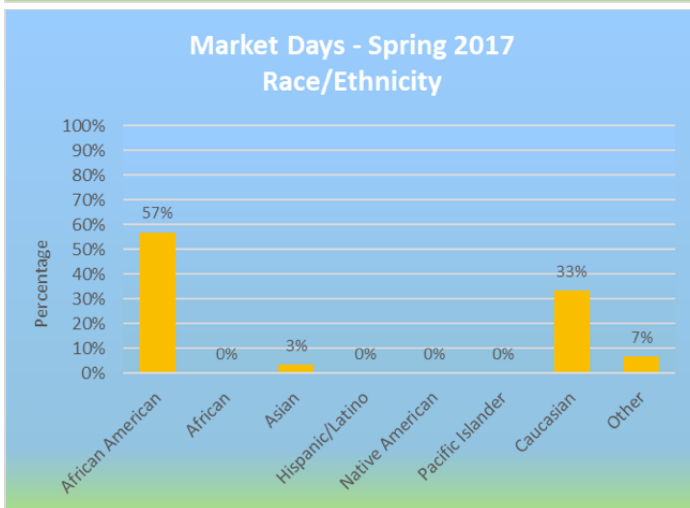
- Survey conducted by Todd Niemeier

There have been 21 Market Days between 5/12/17 and 9/29/17. In total 337 people have come to Market Days to receive food. 37 people completed surveys. All but one respondent was female. As a note, in March 2017, UACC went door-to-door in Friendship Court to ask folks their opinions about including a community garden in the redevelopment. **UACC collected 49 surveys, and 44 strongly agreed, and another 4 agreed, that a community garden should be included in the redevelopment.** Only one person said they strongly disagreed that a community garden should be included.



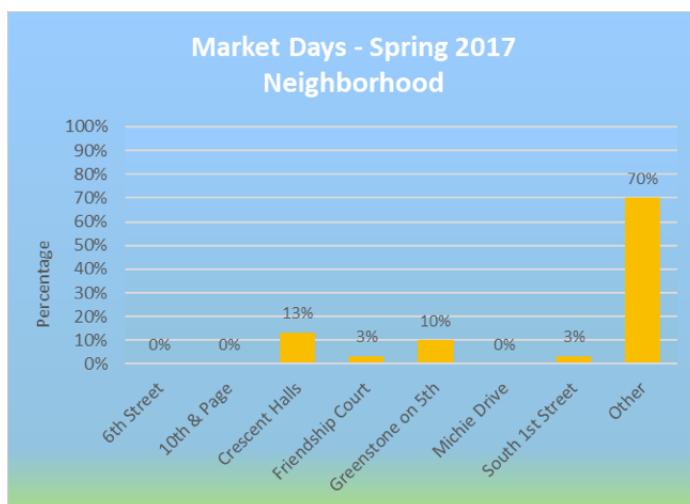
Graph Summary: Most people (825) completing surveys at Market Days are over the age of 55. When interviewed, UACC Board members said this graph reflected the age distribution, as they have seen it, at Market Days.

Flashback July-September 2015: People who come to Market Days tend to be 45 or older (80% 45 or older). The largest groups are aged 45-54 (29%) and over 65 (37%).



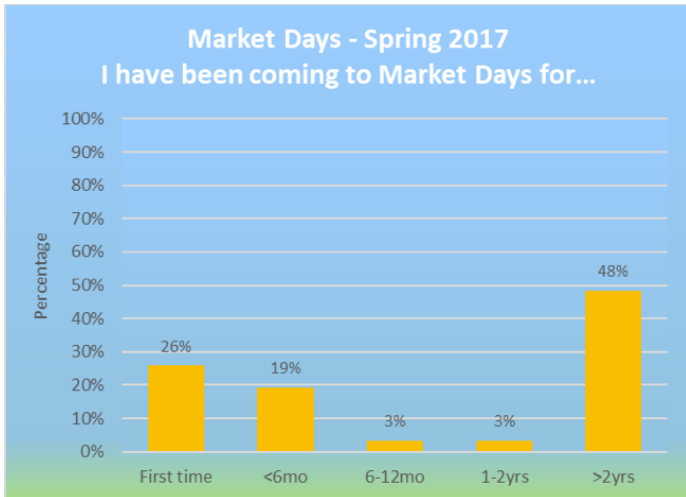
Graph Summary: More than half (57%) of Market Day survey respondents were African American and another third (33%) were Caucasian.

Flashback July-September 2015: People who come to Market Days are most often African American (57%) and White/Caucasian (29%).



Graph Summary: Most (70%) of Market Day survey respondents came from outside the core of the lower-income neighborhoods.

Flashback July-September 2015: 53% of Market Day survey respondents came from "other" neighborhoods.



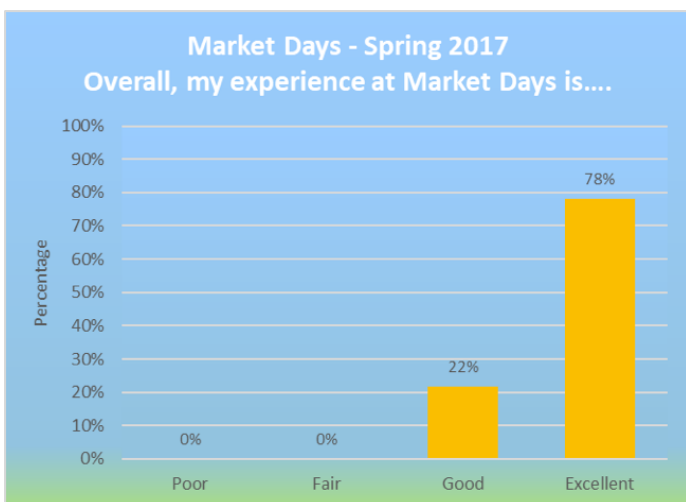
Graph Summary: People were most likely coming to their first season on Market Days (45% first time or <6 months), or had been coming for more than 2 years (48%).

Flashback July-September 2015: People who come to Market Days tend to come for less than 3 months (48%) or for years (44%). It seems like people come one season and then not usually again, or come season after season.



Graph Summary: 77% of people come to Market Days 3 to 4 times per month.

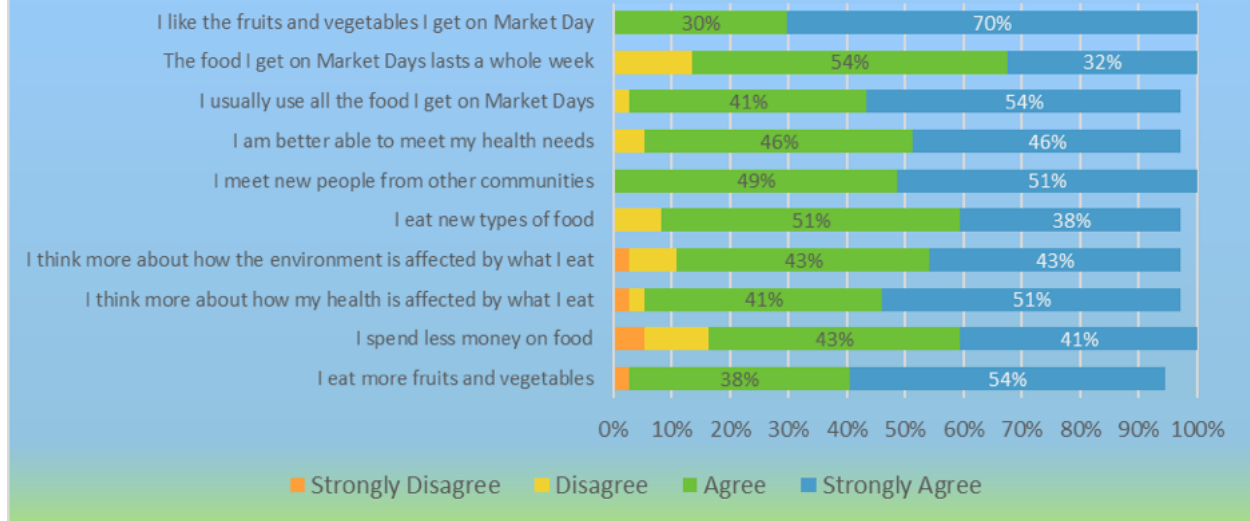
Flashback July-September 2015: Almost half of the people come to Market Days every week (47%).



Graph Summary: 78% of people have an excellent experience at Market Day, and another 22% rate it as good. No one reported having a fair/poor experience.

Flashback July-September 2015: The vast majority of people have excellent experiences at Market Days (78%). 95% have excellent or good experiences.

## Market Day Surveys Spring 2017



Graph Summary: Overall, there were very few negative comments about Market Days, with 100% of people saying they like the food they get. 92% said that it helps them eat more vegetables (89% say they eat new types of food), and 95% said that they eat all the food they get on Market Days. 86% said the food lasts them all week. 100% says that they meet new people from other communities on Market Days. 84% say that Market Day helps them spend less money on food, and 92% are better able to meet their health needs. Most people also think more about how their eating affects the environment (86%), and about how their health is affected by what they eat (84%).

Flashback July-September 2015: People report Market Days very often help them meet new people and eat more fruits and vegetables (75%). They also share what they get (97%), try new ways of eating the food they get (94%), and know more about how what they eat affects the environments (97%). They are better able to provide healthy food to their families (94%), and spend less on food (94%). At least 80% of people report eating less packaged and fast food, as well as eating new types of food. Everyone meets people from different races or ethnicities from themselves.