New Brunswick Charter School

Young student pay close attention while Master Gardener Rina show them how Milkweed pollinates by the currents of wind...

URBAN SCHOOL GARDENS
FoodCorps Case Studies
# CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who is FoodCorp?</td>
<td>2-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FoodCorp Case Studies</td>
<td>4-18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trenton</strong></td>
<td>4-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isles Inc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grant Elementary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mott Elementary School Gardens</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Newark</strong></td>
<td>7-13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater Newark Conservancy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Court Street Garden</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawthorne Ave. Farm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Philip’s Academy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Camden</strong></td>
<td>14-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center for Family Services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H.B. Wilson Family School</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>New Brunswick</strong></td>
<td>16-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jones Ave. Farmers Market</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater Brunswick Charter School</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>20-21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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In 2009, with a focus on school children and community health, the nationwide FoodCorps project was established under AmeriCorps. Since then, this young organization has grown to create 145 garden sites in 16 states and Washington D.C. The service members of FoodCorps are devoted to connecting children with fresh food and teaching them about healthy living by using school gardens. Each service member’s job is to “give hands on lessons about food and nutrition, build and tend to school gardens, give cooking classes, and change what is on their lunch trays.” They have been extremely successful in changing children’s attitudes towards fruits and vegetables by letting them plant, care for, pick, and eat the end product (for more information, see foodcorps.org). By decreasing the barriers that schools encounter in attaining local, fresh food, FoodCorps is improving the quality of life for individuals in these communities of NJ. In the hands of these committed service members, visible and exciting progress is being made.

As a class, we were able to see the work that our NJ FoodCorp do first hand during our trips. We also learned many sobering statistics, and saw several things that demonstrate the real need for FoodCorps in urban societies to bring about changes. Our colloquium had the opportunity to see that through the use of urban gardening, educational tools can be extremely effective in improving school children’s attitudes towards healthy, local food. Watching the service members, volunteers, teachers, children, and the community members connect with each other through this process has been just one of the many great experiences that we have had this semester. The following information in this report is a summary of the many things we have learned between our school visits, observations, numerous interviews, and information gathered online.
OUR VISION

“We are creating a future in which all our nation’s children—regardless of class, race, or geography—know what healthy food is, care where it comes from, and eat it every day. Through our work, future generations will grow up to lead healthier and more productive lives. We are creating a future in which all our nation’s children—regardless of class, race, or geography—know what healthy food is, care where it comes from, and eat it every day. Through our work, future generations will grow up to lead healthier and more productive lives.”

The FoodCorps team first came together in California on Earth Day 2009, the day President Obama signed the Kennedy Serve America Act into law. This legislation signaled a new opportunity to engage AmeriCorps in building a more sustainable, healthful, equitable food system.

Rather than being designed from the top down, FoodCorps sprang from the grassroots up: a national initiative that thousands of local voices shaped according to their needs... FoodCorps drew strong support from the communities we are now serving. Monthly open conference calls each attracted 45-190 participants. An initial 40-person Planning Summit grew into 300 volunteers actively participating in developing our current model.

FOUNDING SUPPORTERS

A federation of organizations stepped up to support the emerging FoodCorps effort:

• Occidental College and the National Farm to School Network: (an umbrella organization working on behalf of 2,000 Farm to School initiatives nationwide)
• Slow Food USA: a 200-chapter volunteer network working for integrity in food and farming
• The National Center for Appropriate Technology: operators of a model program in Montana
• Wicked Delicate: the documentary and advocacy firm founded by the co-creators of King Corn

THE CHALLENGE

1 in 3 CHILDREN BORN IN THE YEAR 2000 ARE ON TRACK TO DEVELOP TYPE II DIABETES

2% OF CHILDREN EAT ENOUGH FRUITS & VEGETABLES

1 in 4 YOUNG ADULTS ARE TOO OVERWEIGHT TO SERVE IN THE MILITARY

100% OF OUR CHILDREN ARE GROWING UP IN A FAST FOOD NATION

100% OF KIDS DESERVE TO GROW UP IN A HEALTHY SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

THE ROLE SCHOOLS & SCHOOL GARDENS CAN PLAY

16 Million CHILDREN DON'T HAVE ENOUGH TO EAT

32 Million CHILDREN EAT SCHOOL FOOD EACH DAY

15% REDUCTION IN SCHOOL ABSENCE WHEN KIDS EAT NUTRITIOUS LUNCHES

Slow Food USA NCAT wd
The Isles program has been committed to helping its local community since 1981. They provide several types of services that lead to one goal, "The Bettering of Trenton". Isles' most important service to the city of Trenton is its Urban Agriculture program, which reaches out to all types of local residents. The Isles urban agriculture program benefits the community in several ways. For those in need of fresh nutritious food, there's the produce that comes from the Isles gardens. For people who need to learn, they offer learning opportunities about Agriculture and urban land utilization. But most important of all they offer children a place to be and something to do after school, keeping them off of the streets and allowing them the opportunity to do something useful and rewarding with their free time.

When on the tour of the Isles gardens with Jim, he mentioned that Isles receives most of its funding from private organizations and donors, Americorps and FoodCorps, government grants, and aid from such educational institutions as Rutgers University and The College of New Jersey. During the tour we visited 4 gardens, 33 tucker st, Perry st gardens, the children's garden and Gandhi garden. These 4 gardens were similar in that they were all amidst an extremely urban city and that they all brought something of a natural beauty to their settings.

The following week we toured the TCNJ college garden and had the opportunity to interview Dr. Michael Nordquist. Dr. Nordquist went on to explain to us that the college garden was only about a few months old, it was a second shot at a college garden since there was another one before it that was established in 2010 that did not work out very well due to lack of water access, adequate fencing, and fertile soil, that was later shut down. The new garden was started in 2014 and is now surrounded by a fence with a locking gate that helps protect the crops from the local deer populations as well as local students who use to go to the garden and leave without closing the gate thus allowing animals to get in. College garden gets all of its financial support from TCNJ. All the gardening is done Dr. Nordquist himself along with volunteers from the Bonner institute. All the food collected from the College garden goes to the Mercer Street Friends Food Bank to be distributed amongst soup kitchens and those in need of fresh food. There is also a small area in the garden that has several tree stumps to serve as chairs in a circle that is the hopeful future site of what Dr. Nordquist described as "Green Stock" for social interactions with students. During the one season that this garden has been operating, the volunteers were able to cultivate and donate 650 pounds of food to the food bank, this is a great indicator of how even a small young garden can make a big difference. The college garden portrays to us a theme of selflessness and generosity. A lot of hard work goes into this garden, and at the end the produce goes to those in need, this display is not one often seen in this modern world we live in, so it’s a great thing to see exist today.
GRANT ELEMENTARY

In the city of Trenton FoodCorps has a multitude of functions. From renovating old worn, down gardens, to teaching the youth about planting and healthy eating as well as everything in between. FoodCorps, along with Isles and Americorps work to beautify Trenton in several aspects. They renovate gardens, turn old unused lots into gardens, help keep kids off the street by giving them an alternate schooling option so they can get GED’s. They also send individuals into different levels of school from preschool to high school. When they visit they bring with them different foods, games lessons, and maybe even stories about planting and vegetables for the younger kids.

The schools we visited with Christina, the FoodCorps representative were Grant elementary and Mott elementary, both of which are in Trenton. Of course they work with several other schools and programs besides these two schools as well.

The grant elementary garden was actually located behind the parking lot and was actually a lot bigger than we expected. The school which was once pre k to 8th grade is now pre k to 5th grade. Since the 8th graders used to tend the garden it is now up to the 5th graders of Ms. Depompo’s and Ms. Lee’s classes to run the garden. FoodCorps and Isles partner up also and come in sometimes during the year to help as well as in the summer to maintain the garden when school is out. Isles and the grant elementary school administration are the ones really behind the funding of the school garden. Isles provides many supplies as well as in class help. They have two Master Gardeners who volunteer to help maintain the garden and teach the students every week. But Mrs. Depompo is the one who spearheads the garden and overlooks what happens with it.

The curriculum utilizes the garden in several ways. For example in health they speak about the importance of healthy diets, in science they speak about how plants grow and their processes, in math they use the garden to learn about perimeter and area using the dimensions of the plots. Also there isn’t an official recess built into the day however every now and then there is a structured recess in which the students go outside and partake in a fun but educational activity with a purpose. The children absolutely love being in Mrs. Depompo’s class because they actually have the privilege of using the garden. They finish the broccoli before the even leave the raised beds! The children love being able to interact with the plants and the soil and just experience nature especially since Trenton isn’t very rural. Grant elementary school garden was actually featured in the local Trenton newspaper when they had their corn harvest. The stalks of the corn were huge and the paper thought it worthy for a story entitled “Children of the corn”. They paper came and took pictures and wrote
a story comically ending it with the fact that the students planned to have a big popcorn party when they left.

**MOTT ELEMETARY SCHOOL GARDENS**

When we visited Mott elementary we experienced Christina our FoodCorps rep teaching a special needs class about apples, their origins, flavors, sizes, colors, etc. The passion with which she interacted with the children was truly a sight for sore eyes. She made them laugh, learn and love to do so. The special needs class that Christina works with is the one that actually tends the garden under the direction of Mrs. Pullian. Mott elementary has two raised beds in their playground area. They have been using their garden for at least 9 years and love doing it. The kids love learning about all the different things they grow and above all eating them! They harvest all of the goods from the gardens and make things such as salads and applesauce and many other healthy alternatives to junk food. Isles generously donates goods, and offers aid to assist in maintaining the garden.

With a class like this that may need extra help, working in a garden is truly eye opening in many aspects. The children thought that apples spontaneously materialized from super markets. The kids need this experience because it teaches them not only where fruits and vegetables come from but just the simple fact that in order for there to be an output, an input is necessary. Isles FoodCorps, and AmeriCorps are all contributing in ways that are truly life changing. They are providing Trenton with a love for agriculture and an appreciation for knowledge that will never wilt.
When we first walked into the Greater Newark Conservancy we were amazed with what surrounded us. It was a lush oasis right in the middle of one of New Jersey’s largest cities. Plants that looked like they belonged in a tropical forest were visible, along with traditional plants seen throughout the state. We were truly mesmerized…it seemed like the perfect escape for a resident of Newark.

Before we began our interview with Jamie Bruno, the center was concluding a workshop with an Urban Habitat program. We were fortunate enough to see school children from the Newark area touring the conservancy, while participating in hands on activities, such as planting seeds and stimulating their senses in the “Sense Garden.”

Our meeting began with Jamie Bruno, a now FoodCorps member for about a month. Jamie began telling us about her prior experiences, and she was fortunate enough to have lived in Korea, where she worked with children teaching them art. After several years abroad, Jamie returned to the states where she took a farming course touring the country, and followed that up with farming in urban gardens throughout Newark. Prior to joining the Greater Newark Conservancy, she worked in several gardens throughout Newark, and still has connections with them today. Jamie mentioned that she feels fortunate to be able to commit herself to farming/gardening while incorporating it with teaching children. As an art major, she sees farming as an art form.

The size of the Greater Newark Conservancy is approximately 2-3 acres, with trails through numerous different styles of gardens. The property also includes numerous murals, and a large building which was formally a synagogue, and is being transformed into learning space for the community. The garden space has a greenhouse that is approximately 1000 square feet, where lavish tropical plants such as the banana plant could be found. The Greater Newark Conservancy also composts on site. Since the Conservancy is a Non-Profit it is open to all residents of Newark. Additionally, they work with numerous schools through programs on site as well as at the schools. Here are a few programs in place: Living Laboratory

The Greater Newark Conservancy provides Newark schools with the tools and equipment needed to build an “outdoor garden classroom.” The overall maintenance is provided by workers from the conservancy, but the schools are heavily involved with maintaining the garden as well, through weeding, planting, and cleanup. Once the outdoor garden is established, the Greater Newark Conservancy provides two monthly lessons, which are intended
to be interactive and hands on. The purpose of this program is to have students gain insight about environmental awareness, and sustainability.

MONTHLY OUTREACH LESSONS

This program works with the same schools on a consistent basis. The idea is to help enhance traditional curriculum (math, science, and reading) while integrating the environment into the context of the material.

EXTENDED CLASSROOM EXPERIENCES

The day-to-day maintenance and activities are completed by hired workers who are paid a salary. We were fortunate enough to meet the Horticulturalist expert, Greg, who oversees the growth and production of the crops/plants located at the facility. The conservancy also accepts volunteers to help with maintenance, but Jamie made it clear that the majority of operations of watering, weeding, and planting are completed by paid workers.

One of the more unique experiences at the conservancy has to do with shoes. Throughout the conservancy are shoes filled with soil and a variety of wildflowers growing from them. When our group was walking with Justin Allen, he pointed out one particular pair of shoes, which happened to be some all black Air Jordans; nice shoes to say the least. Well, when the workers at the conservancy were planting into the shoes, one found a pair of those Air Jordans and thought they were part of the project, so she went ahead and planted them. Later that day, Greg, the GNC’s horticulturist started asking around if anyone had seen his shoes since he left them inside before putting his work boots on. It turns out that those Jordans belonged to Greg, and they still grace the conservancy today!

COURT STREET GARDEN

The garden was 100% a production garden. They hold farmers markets weekly there, along with supplying other farmers market throughout Newark. Along with that, they supplied to many soup kitchens in Newark with the produce grown there on site.

One of the “Extended Classroom Experiences” ending. This program brings schools, activist groups, youth programs, religious organizations, etc. to the garden where students are able to interactively tour the site and participate in hands-on activities. Each plant is labeled with its common name, as well as its Latin name. Additionally, the specific gardens have descriptions for those wanting to acquire further knowledge. With the demonstrations, FoodCorps and the Greater Newark Conservancy intend to inform individuals how to garden and grow vegetables at their own homes.

According to Jamie, the role FoodCorps plays is to promote awareness and educate on healthy living. Much of the food grown at the garden is donated; but they do also have a farmers market on Friday evenings. It was indicated that the current Marketing of the organization is rather lackluster, and one of Jamie’s current objectives is to “spread the word” to try and get more people on board. Jamie also noted that it is pretty tough getting teachers on board with the gardening programs. She indicated that you can’t go into schools and tell teachers “here is what we need to do!” but you must rather approach and tell them “here is what we have, these are our resources and our objectives, so what would you like to see/do?” Essentially this issue goes beyond educating students, but teachers and parents must be educated on the program and the overall intentions.

During our visit to the Greater Newark Conservancy, we witnessed one of the “Extended Classroom Experiences” ending. This program brings schools, activist groups, youth programs, religious organizations, etc. to the garden where students are able to interactively tour the site and participate in hands-on activities. Each plant is labeled with its common name, as well as its Latin name. Additionally, the specific gardens have descriptions for those wanting to acquire further knowledge. With the demonstrations, FoodCorps and the Greater Newark Conservancy intend to inform individuals how to garden and grow vegetables at their own homes.

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Courtland Street Farm

Production farm
Chickens and Composting
Farmer’s Market
Community Greening
Job training
Greenhouse
Mini Hoop Houses
Satellite Farm of GNC
Honey Bee hives

Hawthorne Ave. Farm creates
Acess to healthy foods
Job training
Educational Programs
Environmental awareness
Community gardening
Donations to soup kitchens
Produce for farmer’s markets

Hawthorne Ave. Farm Supporters

Grants
Donations
Rutgers Ag. Dept.
School, students
Community Farmers
Food Corp
Newark Conservency
Volunteers

What Hawthorne Ave. creates

Access to healthy foods
Job training
Educational Programs
Community gardening
Donations to soup kitchens
Produce for farmer’s markets

Courtland Street Farm is a community farm that offers a variety of initiatives including job training, honey bee hives, and community greening. It supports local schools and volunteers, and it provides fresh produce to farmer’s markets. The farm aims to improve access to healthy foods and promote environmental awareness.
HAWTHORNE AVENUE FARM

This relatively large vacant lot has tons of potential for the future farming of Newark. It is the 2nd major urban farm in the city of Newark. Hawthorne Ave. Farm features dozens of community plots; fruit tree tunnels, a grape trellis, a blueberry patch, as well as a permanent farm stand. As we entered the vast plot we could see a group of older women tending to the lush green plots of vegetables. Meeting with Justin Allen and Jamie Bruno a Food Corps member I was able to get a fully guided tour of the Hawthorne Ave Farm. It was awesome to pick red raspberries with them as we walked around the farm looking at all it provides and learning what its mission is towards the Greater Newark Conservancy.

The overall size of the farm really stands out stretching from one side of the block to the other littered with elevated 6x6 ft. plots. Through help from people in the community, the Greater Newark Conservancy, Food Corps members, donations, grants, and Justin Allen the greening director of the Conservancy this farm is able to flourish during the growing season. It is very clear that this farm can really produce a substantial amount of produce for both the community and its permanent market on the side of the farm.

This Farm is very unique because it is focused on both a small production scale farming buy providing fresh produce for their Farmer’s Market and also it contains a designated area where the community can farm through the Adopt a Lot Program. Through this program, people from the community adopt a plot and are able to farm for themselves. Paying only $10 the first year and $5 for the upcoming years gets them all the tools they need to plant and grow their own vegetables. Having an element school directly a crossed from this farm will eventually allow for education programs to take place on the farm. The Hawthorne Ave. Farm plans to get the school involved in the spring of 2015 by establishing these educational programs. Through these programs they plan to educate young how to farm and prepare freshly picked vegetables. Through this students will learn where their food comes from and how it is grown right their in their backyard.
PHILIPS ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL

FoodCorps finds communities that lack nutritional opportunity. This lack of nutritional opportunity comes from a lack of ability to afford nutritious food, and a lack of ability to shop for nutritious food, this results when the only accessible food stores are corner stores with chips and rarely produce. This is common in low income communities. FoodCorps works to solve these problems as a part of AmeriCorps and receives funding from AmeriCorps. In addition to working AmeriCorps, FoodCorps works with a variety of organizations including many nonprofit organizations, State and local Governmental organizations, including public and private schools, with the goal of increasing nutrition throughout many communities.

FoodCorps works with a large variety of schools including; the Philips Academy Charter School, Greater Newark Conservancy, New Brunswick Community Farmers Market, Isles located in Trenton, NJPHK Camden, and Center for Environmental Transformation. The goal is to help provide this much needed nutritional opportunity for children and adults of these neighborhoods.

In addition to the schools listed above in New Jersey FoodCorps works with Cities all over the USA in states including Arizona, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Georgia, Hawaii, Iowa, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Mississippi, Montana, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oregon and Washington D.C. FoodCorps is an expanding organization involved in many different states all over the U.S.A.

The school garden for Philips Academy Charter School is located on the roof over the gym. The area is roughly about 100 by 40 ft. Rachel Terry a Teacher at Philips Academy Charter School as well as a FoodCorps Service member, explained that one of her main goals was to expand the garden to nearby lots. She explained how the city has so much potential and it would be a great way for the community to get involved. Unfortunately it is a difficult project to undergo because of town regulations and lack of community support.

At this point in time, the children and the teachers are the only ones to use the garden. The garden is incorporated in all aspects of the school and all classes’ progress at the same pace with the studies focused around the garden and what is being learned at the time. Along with Rachel’s goal for an expanded garden she also has a goal of the boarder community becoming involved. This would yield a large positive result because children only have so much purchasing power, it is the adults in the community that make the decisions on what stores to buy from and what they will buy. This would result in what the stores will sell. The main challenges of this goal as Rachel explained are a lack of support, this is mainly because of the lack of time the community members many of the people that live in Newark are working multiple jobs and gardening is simply not what they want to do in their small amount of free time. However FoodCorps has shown time and time again that when people are motivated to make a change even the most difficult goals can become possible with the right people involved.

Phillips Academy does not have any official partners, although they accept funding through donations from the support of friends, foundations and corporations. The state funds each student up to $12,500.00, based on their district and each student’s particular needs. Cost of education per student is roughly $17,250.00 annually in Newark.

Phillips Academy integrates the garden into school curriculum through the Ecospaces program. Ecospaces is a way to integrate farming, health and wellness ideas into the school’s curriculum. The core of the Ecospaces program is based around the idea of providing students with healthy, fresh, and pesticide free lunches. The Kitchens involvement is to align cooking to curriculum, stay true to the season, and to bring as much local produce into the kitchen as possible. The School aims to provide strictly non-GMO, and antibiotic-free meats. Through this the schools goal is to make students have a better understanding of nutrition and where food comes from. The
science curriculum of the school is based entirely around sustainable ecological processes in connecting environmentally friendly ideas with the reality of living in an area with a less than abundant fresh food source. Phillips Academy also strengthens the student’s ability to understand where food comes from, and how is it prepared before it is sold through the teaching kitchen. The teaching kitchen is an opportunity for students to be schooled in home economic practices, an opportunity which is losing its place in our educational system.

Frank Mentesana spearheads the garden at Philips Academy. Frank has a background in food industry as well as publishing. He was first hired in 2008 as a consultant, where he proposed to implement these programs into Phillips Academy and integrate initiatives with curriculum.

Parents are not too involved with the garden. Community and educational integration to establish outreach programs are a very strong way to impact any given community, and Phillips Academy Charter School hopes to provide a more integrated system involving parents as the school gains traction in the future.

Students of the schools have been
receptive towards this new way of learning. Students which respond best to visual learning exercises benefit very much from experiential learning opportunities provided through the Ecospaces program.

Through the progressive and innovative ideas of faculty and supporters, Phillips Academy is paving the new road for the local food movement of New Jersey. As Phillips Academy links with FoodCorp to provide the maximum amount of resources to the school’s transition, it continues to strengthen its unique approach towards prioritizing education and community vision.
This school is almost like a diamond in the rough compared to the surrounding area that is composed of vacant lots and buildings. Its students are made up of just preschoolers who will only be in the school for a year and then will move to another one. This school will be closing next year and they will be moving into a new location that is going to be much bigger. This school has a hospital like feel when you walk in since it is an extremely sterile smelling environment. Some of the faculty we saw were even dressed in scrubs. The green space that is composed in the compound like school is relatively small and is comprised of a small lawn with a play structure and in the corner is the schools garden. The garden consists of just three plots that are approximately two feet wide by about six feet long and are raised planters. In each planter is about five crops that are planted by the students. What’s interesting about this garden is that there are no tools used in planting or maintaining it, just getting dirty and putting your hands in the dirt. Next to the three raised beds are a few tires that have herbs planted in them. This garden is more of a learning experience than a production garden; it is meant to teach rather than being able to feed all of the students.

We interviewed a teacher from the school and she told us that FoodCorp was a great experience on teaching people how to be healthy and does it in a fun way for the kids. We learned that she is a diabetic and this program has really helped her in her own way so she can learn to eat healthier as well as eating healthy during the day at school. The school makes all meals in house and does not allow outside food in. Teachers and students are required to eat the same foods so that if the students seeing a teacher eating it they would be more inclined on eating it themselves. She really sees them eating more vegetables, which wasn’t really incorporated before food core. They were never involved with teaching students on eating vegetables. Now food core has created lesson plans for them. Something that has been a big success with this is the application of the “Two Bite Club” where the students are encouraged to try something new and must take a minimum of two bites of that vegetable and will receive a sticker or some other prize. In our first visit we heard that there wasn’t a lot of parents involved with the program but as we were told the second visit that for some students they will actually have the parents come in as support for them and they will eat the vegetables together. This has also been a collective effort in her eyes and has really made a difference to these children.

Tara who is in charge of the program at the school told us a little about the meal plan that the school as in place. Before her involvement there was no fresh food in the kitchen it was all canned and unhealthy. Food such as canned fruit, which is floating in sugary liquid. Now everything is fresh and made in house and served family style. The meals served are for breakfast, lunch, and an afternoon snack. Breakfast may be whole grain cereal or pancakes with a side of fresh fruit. Lunch might be chicken burritos, wild rice, vegetables and whole grains.
H.B. WILSON FAMILY SCHOOL

This school is much bigger than Center for Family Services and has a larger range of students that go from preschool through 8th grade. They have to go through prison-like security in order to enter. The garden was very large compared to the three plots at CFS but was neglected over the summer and was covered in weeds on our visit. There are plots with vegetables growing them but are just over run completely. They do have a composter, which is very useful for their garden. They are trying to get a $2,000 grant to improve the garden and have teachers take responsibility of the garden and make it their own unique place.

Mrs. Mattie was a teacher from the school that we got to speak to for a few minutes before one of her meetings. She seemed very busy with everything she has to do just for school alone so it might be hard for teachers to really take full responsibility for the maintenance of the garden. When asked about her experience with FoodCorp she said that they are doing an awesome job with engaging the student’s as well as educating them. The FoodCorp made their garden better and is creating a real life experience for those involved. The teachers are really embracing this program and learning themselves about gardening. We also asked if Mrs. Mattie had any prior experience with gardening and while she told us that she did have prior experience, she is still learning as she goes. The last question we got to ask her was what needs to improve with the school and she told us that lunches need to continue to get better and get healthier compared to what they are now. So far, teachers are very open to involving healthy foods and gardening into the curriculum and enhancing the school lunch system by changing the menu and adding seasonal fruits and vegetables.
The New Brunswick Community Farmers Market is an initiative to contribute to the community of the city of New Brunswick. According to the website, the purpose of the New Brunswick farmers market is to: "...Support development of a sustainable community, Instill healthy eating habits, Improve access to fresh produce, & Empower and strengthen local farmers and businesses..." (About Us). Because of the past efforts of the New Brunswick farmers market, our group decided to reach out to a representative in order to arrange for an interview to gain a better understanding of the farmers market and their influence on the community at large.

JONES AVE. FARMERS MARKET

The 178 Jones Ave Farmers Market is a public community garden established on the unoccupied lawn that surrounds several Rutgers utility buildings. The front of the property features a main garden area, children's garden, one high and low tunnel, and a large exterior roof so that volunteers can set up the stand in the comfort of shade. The back of the property has two greenhouses, an apiary, vermicasting bins, and several compost bins made of wooden pallets.

The rear right area of the property has a large wooden high tunnel (currently used for growing marigolds) and is used as an area for experimenting with exotic plants.

On October 10th, 2014, Ms. Sarah Dixon (senior partner & coordinator of the New Brunswick Community Farmers Market) agreed to meet at the 178 Jones Ave location for an interview. Ms. Dixon’s duties as the senior partner & coordinator of the farmers market consists of organizing volunteers and planning events on behalf of the Food Corps. The community garden grows various types of flora, produce, and fruit-bearing crops. During our visit we saw tomatoes, marigolds, strawberries, melons, Tomatillos, morning glory, sunflowers, Bok Choy, Chard, Lettuce, lemon grass, Aloe Vera, and many other crops. The big floral crop for the 178 Jones Ave location are marigolds. During our visit, we saw two high tunnels that were dedicated to growing marigolds. According to Ms. Dixon, the marigolds are a popular flower used during Dia De Los Muertos. The marigolds will be made available for purchase by the bundle during the holiday. The proceeds of the marigold sales will be used in turn to support the gardening activities of the farmers market.

The Food Corps primary goal to bring healthy food into schools and educate students on where their food comes from seems to extend from public schools to major universities such as Rutgers. During the fall semester, the farmers market stand was relocated to Nichol Avenue on Cook Campus every Thursday. The decision to relocate was determined to be the most efficient manner to make the farmers market more accessible for Rutgers students whom depend on public transportation to move around campus.

The children’s garden is the core focus of the Food Corps objective to install a sense of healthy eating habits for young children living in the community. The children’s garden was initially planned to be an interactive area to teach children how to grow crops and various decorative flora. It’s the hope of the Food Corps that allowing children to understand where their food comes from will encourage them to be more active in growing their own food and volunteering in community gardens. For example, Ms. Dixon mentioned teaching children about the “three sisters” concept of farming as a method of encouraging pollination.

Sarah Dixon
(Sr. Partner & Coordinator)
social studies activity. Another concept that they have employed in the garden is associating certain activities in the garden with sounds. Volunteers fabricated a “sound wall” to both entertain and educate children who visit.

While work on the children’s garden has slowed down, the farmers market is still hopeful that they can finish what they have planned for the garden. Despite the delay on completing the children’s garden, local Girl Scout troops have made their own contribution by working in the children’s garden. However, both the children’s garden and the rest of the 178 Jones Ave property remains open for all who wish to volunteer their time.

The greenhouses found along the back of the property was originally the property of the Rutgers Entomology program. When the 178 Jones Ave location was acquired, the volunteers and Food Corps members encountered an issue with insects damaging the plants grown in the greenhouses. In more recent years, the greenhouses have become suitable for growing seedlings and more temperature sensitive flora. Ms. Dixon gave us a tour of the interior of the greenhouse that is used for growing Aloe Vera (which doubles as the classroom for volunteers). The back of the greenhouse will be used as a winter gardening site, where volunteers will be assigned their own section of the greenhouse tables.

The apiary and vermicasting bins can be found behind the greenhouses at the very back of the property line. The addition of 6 Langstroth beehives offers the unique addition of honey and beeswax as a product offered by the community garden. Not only has that, but the fact that honeybees are natural pollinators allowed for a healthy increase in cross-pollination amongst the various crops.
Hopefully this will mean stronger yields each year. Beekeeping equipment is stored in the greenhouses for use by volunteers who have experience working with beehives. Vermicomposting bins are a new addition to the property. The benefits of vermicomposting is that the practice is a method of composting involving the collection of worm castings. These castings are known as a highly concentrated nutrient that can be collected and introduced to the soil at a later time.

While the farmers market is supported by multiple organizations, the biggest challenge the farmers market faces is its dependence on a volunteer labor force. Ideally, the Food Corps would like to arrange for large groups of community volunteers to work the property on a regular schedule. However, volunteer workers have other priorities in their personal lives that does take time away from volunteering on the property. Another issue that the farmers market currently faces this year is a lack of staggered planting management. While most of the food was donated to the food bank and food pantries, the Food Corps members and volunteers were notably lacking the capability to process the large harvest of crops. This also poses an early end of the season for the farmers market. However, this issue can be easily remedied by introducing staggered planting at the beginning of the season next year. According to Ms. Dixon, FoodCorps members who work on the property will be utilizing that plan of action next year.

**GREATER BRUNSWICK CHARTER SCHOOL**

During our time at the Greater Brunswick Charter School, we met with Rena Jones who oversees the children and garden activities. The after school program, called “Ready, Set, Grow” consists of the children who choose to participate learning about plants, interacting by planting, and gaining knowledge about nutrition. We watched the children play with seeds that float in the air, make crowns out of berry bushes, and excitedly answer Rena’s questions about the biology of plants.

This school is an independent public school for K-8 students around New Brunswick, Edison, and Highland Park many of whom live in apartments. One thing that we took away from our visit, was that the reason these children loved this after school program so much was because they had no backyard of their own, and no experience playing in dirt and planting.

This program runs on a zero dollar budget, and solely depends on volunteers such as master gardeners and FoodCorps service members. This team works together in various ways, teaching the children about healthy living with cooking classes, the vegetable garden, and hands on learning. Behind the Charter School, near the playground were three gardens. One designated for vegetables, one for flowers, and one butterfly garden. The entire foundation of the school was surrounded with freshly mulched perennials and annuals, all planted and designed by the kids.

FoodCorps works alongside of the breakfast and lunch program to teach kids about healthy eating, gardening and cooking. The kids learn early on by using hands on with the service member, and are now have much healthier lunches. They encourage schools like GBCS to have gardens, but also to interact

Rina explains to the children how Beauty Berry seeds are planted
with service members, learning and changing for the better.

In conclusion, the New Brunswick Community Farmers Market and Greater New Brunswick Charter School offers a safe and educational experience that keeps giving back to the community at large. Should you be interested in volunteering your time, you may contact the New Brunswick Community Farmers Market at their website to arrange for a time to volunteer.

www.nbcfarmersmarket.com

References:
CONCLUSION

Our experience as a class this past semester has been overall both enlightening and overwhelming. Despite our backgrounds from all different majors and walks of life, each member of our class has walked away with a lot more knowledge and experience. We have found that the issue of unhealthy living is a much more complex situation than we all previously thought. We have learned a great deal about why these problems exist, and what is currently being done to solve them. Our preconceived notions about urban issues, such as childhood obesity were changed after we went out and saw for ourselves what is truly happening. Organizations like FoodCorps are actively transforming problems by targeting food desserts, school lunches, and the limited choices available, by implementing the simple concept of gardening to urban schools. We have been exposed to a lot of exciting changes that are being made in schools and cities around NJ that are seeking to improve the health and wellness of children, families and communities. At times, seeing these organizations attempt to tackle the problems in urban environments that include so many factors was discouraging, but their hard work is an important sign of hope. In the words of Michelle Obama, “The physical and emotional health of an entire generation and the economic health and security of our nation is at stake. This isn’t the kind of problem that can be solved overnight, but with everyone working together, it can be solved. So, let’s move.”