



## Urban Garden:

# A Growing Experience for Social and Economic Development Strategy

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## Challenge

Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death for Pacific Islanders in California. In 2004, cardiovascular disease was determined to be the cause of 28% of Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (NHPI) deaths. California's NHPI communities also have alarming rates of overweight and obesity, with 7 in 10 NHPI adults classified as overweight and obese. NHPIs are also more likely (10%) to be food insecure compared to Whites (5%).



Guam Communications Network's (GCN) involvement with community gardens began with one plot at the Growing Experience Urban Farm in Long Beach, California. Within a year's time, the garden expanded to three plots with crops harvested given to local community members, social clubs, and Guam Medical Referral patients staying at the Weingart Guest House in Los Angeles. This expansion led to the promotion of community gardens, home gardens, and urban farming in San Diego, California, as well as the start-up of the Chamorro Urban Farming Collaborative. The expansion also served as a starting point for discussions on creating a sustainable farming enterprise that offers employment opportunities.



"We have a relationship with the plants of the land. We give respect and they produce their fruits. They provide nourishment to us and we cultivate the land and stimulate its' growth. This is how Life is. The wholeness of life is reflected in this reciprocal relationship of People and Land through giving and receiving as well as bearing fruit and sharing the harvest."

- Tan Tona Castro

## Solution

Connecting farmers and low-income communities can promote communities' access to local, healthy food, and expanding local food systems in a community has shown to increase employment and income in both the local community and region. GCN has spread the word to the Chamorro community in Southern California about community gardens as a way to improve access to culturally relevant, healthy, and affordable foods. Community gardens have been shown to deliver a variety of physical and mental health benefits by providing opportunities to eat healthy fresh fruits and vegetables and engage in physical activity. The presence of community gardens has even decreases violence in some neighborhoods, as well as improved social well-being through strengthening social connections.

## Results

As a result of GCN's outreach to their local constituents in various events and meetings, including the Native Hawaiian Pacific



Islander Youth Health and Fitness Fair at the University of California, Los Angeles, community members signed on to support community gardens as a way to increase access to healthy and affordable foods. With increased awareness and

interest on community gardens, GCN and its partners started the Chamorro Urban Farming Collaborative that aims to increase communities' access to farm-fresh local produce.



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## Sustainable Success

The primary strategy in sustaining success is for the Chamorro Urban Farming Collaborative to take the lead in developing a business plan for the Sustainable Farming Enterprise. The Collaborative will facilitate community outreach to assess existing and untapped assets, along with developing partnerships and identifying funding resources.



## Your Involvement is Key

Community/Urban Gardens provide a unique opportunity for community involvement and inter-generational participation to not only promote healthy eating, but also active living with the use of mind and body as tools to plant and grow crops. Most importantly, with discussions already initiated through Sustainable Farming Enterprise there are opportunities for capacity building within the Chamorro community for business ventures to improve the social and economic environment of the local community.



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