



Anderson Farm County Park Community Gardens Annual Report

Prepared by Sheena Tesch, Director of Urban Agriculture, Rooted

Summary:

In April 2020, Rooted facilitated the placement of vegetable growers at Anderson Farm County Park. Twenty-three ¼-acre plots were disked, plowed, and tilled. Growers came from the Oregon and Fitchburg community, food pantry gardeners, and Hmong growers. Seventeen plots were tended by Hmong growers who either had lost land access or struggled to find land access due to limited lease agreements, high cost of renting or purchasing land in Dane County, and a lack of infrastructure and support. The season was hugely successful. Families were able to provide themselves with culturally relevant food during the COVID 19 epidemic, filling a great need for food security. Food pantry gardeners donated hundreds of pounds of produce to the Oregon Area Food Pantry and other pantries. Every gardener has expressed interest in returning for the 2021 season.

Quotes from Growers:

“Please tell the government to let us grow here forever. I love growing my own food. I didn’t have anywhere to grow last year; it felt like an eternity. I am very happy to have the opportunity to grow food this year.”

“Every year, when January is here, my hands and feet are itching to get into the soil. I can’t wait for the growing season to start again. Oh, how wonderful it would be if we are able to grow here forever.”

Progress Toward Performance Indicators:

Rooted staff recruited 23 growers using an ongoing waiting list prepared in 2018, a land access survey hosted on the Gardens Network website, and through a partnership with the Anderson Park Friends. Rooted staff also measured and marked all 23 ¼-acre plots, and worked with Dane County Parks Department staff and the previous farmer to maintain untilled land. With the help of Yimmuj Yang, Hmong grower and consultant, a COVID-safe spring orientation was held where rental agreements were signed and plot fees were collected. Plot fees will be used to further the progress of this project. Plots were assigned at random by picking names out of a bucket so as to avoid conflict over preferable placement.

A battery-powered string weed wacker and wheelbarrow were purchased for shared use, and a rototiller was donated by a member of the Anderson Park Friends. This equipment was housed in the small spring house on the property. A lock was purchased and user information and expectations were emailed to all growers, and Hmong growers received a phone call for clarity. Water was available, but



only through a single spigot near the farm house. Rules and agreements about watering and COVID safety were communicated with all growers.

Multiple spring meetings were held with Rooted staff, Dane County Parks staff, and Anderson Park Friends to ensure clarity and coordination on the project this season. Subsequent monthly meetings have accrued to coordinate efforts in 2020 and start planning for future seasons. A concept plan is a likely next step for these meetings; however, some long-term planning took a back seat to COVID-19 response this season. Sheena Tesch and Marcia Caton Campbell attended an Anderson Park Friends board meeting to strengthen the partnership and provide insight into the project going forward.

Conclusion:

The progress made in the growing space at Anderson Farm County Park this season is exciting and motivating. Access to substantial growing space offers families a dignified path to food security and food sovereignty that is often missing in local food systems. Strong partnerships between Rooted, UW Extension Dane County, Dane County Parks Department, and Anderson Park Friends, and continued communication with current on-site growers will guide us as we envision and plan for the future of this project.