



Meadowood Victory Garden Report

Winnipeg Food Council

2020

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The Meadowood Victory Garden started at the St. Vital Centennial Arena this summer was tended by the Winnipeg Food Council and produced food for neighbouring residents.

Project Rational

In spring 2020 COVID-19 began impacting the food system with real repercussions for Winnipeggers. The Winnipeg Food Council issued a statement acknowledging food system disruptions, including empty grocery store shelves and impacts for temporary farm workers and meat processing plant employees. We urged Mayor and Council to act quickly and decisively on food security issues due to the pandemic, and into the future¹.

Due to disruptions in the food system and supply chain, Canadians began paying closer attention to our food supply. As concerns increased and people were strongly encouraged to stay home to stop the spread of COVID-19, interest in gardening, growing your own food, and buying local food increased dramatically. A victory garden mentality sprang up similar to what was experienced during wartimes and the Great Depression. The concept of a victory garden

¹ Winnipeg Food Council. (20 May, 2020). COVID-19 Statement.
<https://winnipeg.ca/clerks/boards/WpgFoodCouncil/pdfs/WinnipegFoodCouncilCOVID-19Statement.pdf>

suggests that during times of crisis or uncertainty people plant gardens as a real means of feeding themselves. Indeed, during the second World War it is estimated that victory gardens accounted for 40% of fresh vegetable consumption in the United States from 20 million gardens located on empty lots, rooftops, backyards and fire escapes².

In response, as the growing season was already underway, the Winnipeg Food Council decided to act immediately, starting the Meadowood Victory Garden in just a few days to raise awareness of the victory garden mentality, and encourage others to produce food in Winnipeg to feed our ourselves and our communities.

“I thought everything was an amazing idea and a very good experience – shows how much care went into the preparation and kindness that came out of sharing food in our community.”

▪ *end of season survey response*



One week of harvest in August at the Meadowood Victory Garden, packed and ready to fill good food boxes.

² Rao, T. (25 March, 2020). Food supply anxiety brings back victory gardens. New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/25/dining/victory-gardens-coronavirus.html>

The Meadowood Victory Garden was a new urban agriculture project growing produce on site at the St. Vital Centennial Arena. Vegetables from the garden were harvested for food boxes distributed in partnership with a local housing co-op to neighbouring residents during the 2020 growing season. On a site formerly filled with gravel, the Meadowood Victory Garden grew an assortment of vegetables, including lettuce, spinach, beets, peas, Swiss chard, zucchini, parsley, basil, dill, cucumbers, tomatoes, peppers, carrots, and beans in 630 square feet of growing space.

The brainchild of our Chairperson, Councillor Brian Mayes, the Meadowood Victory Garden was also supported by the St. Vital Minor Hockey Association and Lawson Sales.

Establishing the Garden

The St. Vital Centennial Arena site is bordered by Meadowood Drive to the north and St. Anne's Road to the east. The St. Vital Skate Park is directly to the east of the arena building, and a large parking lot sits to the south. To the west of the arena is a baseball diamond. The Arena faces east and features two large raised beds along the front of the building.

The beds are raised approximately 2-3 feet off the ground and are enclosed by 6"x6" pressure treated beams, which are slightly damaged and heaving in some locations and may need to be replaced within a few years but functioned suitably for the 2020 growing season.

The raised location of the beds along the building helped increase heat units and deter some unwanted pests. These beds face primarily east, receiving morning sun, but are slightly angled



Tracy Jensen with Lawson Sales along with a volunteer remove gravel from the raised beds at the arena in preparation for installing garden soil.

to the north. While this is not an ideal southern exposure, the beds do get the minimum 6 hours of sunlight required for vegetables.

The two long, thin beds offer 658 square feet of planting space. The north bed is approximately 39' x 8' and the south bed is 45' x 8'.

When we started the project, the beds were covered

with about 5" of crushed limestone over landscaping fabric with soil below. The limestone was weedy and contained quite a bit of garbage. We removed the limestone and landscaping fabric and laid down approximately 5" of fresh 4-way mix garden soil, making an ideal planting bed.

At the beginning of the project we identified an outdoor water tap using a sillcock key a few feet around the corner on the south side of the building which we could have used for watering,

however the tap was broken, necessitating access to the building for watering purposes.



Levelling the garden soil to create a garden bed for planting at the Meadowood Victory Garden.

This year, the Meadowood Victory Garden was maintained by the Food Council Coordinator. This allowed for quick start up and operation of the project, as well as easier weighing and tracking of produce harvested. In future years, with the benefit of time for planning and engagement, neighbours will be involved as the garden transitions to a community garden model.

The Partners

Winnipeg Food Council Chair Councillor Brian Mayes championed the idea for the victory garden, identifying the site and appropriate partners, and providing the funding needed for the garden. This included funds for 15 yards of garden soil, plants and seeds, and stakes and signs for the project.

Lawson Sales provided three staff, machinery, and machine operating expertise to remove the gravel and landscaping fabric from the raised beds and replace with garden soil. This includes expert knowledge of skid steer and backhoe machine operation. They also donated over half of the vegetable plants and seeds to the project.



*Meadowood Victory Garden partners and volunteers prepare for a photo with media.
L-R: volunteer Lindsay Smith, Councillor Brian Mayes, Don with the St. Vital Arena, the Winnipeg Food Council Coordinator, and Tracy Jensen with Lawson Sales.*

The St. Vital Centennial Arena staff provided access to the building, use of a water hose and spray nozzle, as well as canteen space, which included a large refrigerator, storage, tables, and commercial-style wash station for the duration of the project. (The canteen was not in regular operation due to COVID-19.)

The Coordinator of the Winnipeg Food Council has six years of experience as an urban farmer and brought this expertise to the Meadowood Victory Garden. This includes knowledge in growing over 30 varieties of vegetables, as well as packaging, distribution, and customer satisfaction. She also provided some of the vegetable plants and seeds for the garden, organic fertilizers, and enlisted several of the volunteers.

Volunteers contributed to the success of this project. A small team of volunteers helped install the garden, and a few volunteer hours a week helped with harvesting vegetables and compiling good food boxes.

The Growing Season

As the growing season was already well under way, the project came together very quickly in June, with approximately 10 days between confirming all partners and starting work at the site. After work began on site, the garden was installed, and planting completed, in three workdays.

Despite the lateness in the growing season, the warm temperatures of summer and extra heat from the building and raised beds, along with consistent watering accelerated seed germination and plant growth. As a result, approximately three weeks after planting the Meadowood Victory Garden was ready for its first harvest.



In just a few weeks the raised beds at the St. Vital Arena were transformed from gravel to lush vegetable gardens.

The Winnipeg Food Council Coordinator, with the help of a volunteer, did a rapid scan of the neighbourhood using the Winnipeg Food Atlas and identified several areas where residents might benefit from, and be interested in accessing, free fresh vegetables. In particular we wanted to identify social infrastructure and community serving organizations in the area to help identify families who could particularly benefit from the victory garden.



Community members arrive at the Meadowood Victory Garden to pick up vegetables harvested that day.

We reached out to the Village Canadienne Housing Co-op across the street on Meadowood Drive and asked them to spread the word among their residents. We ended up with 20 people interested in receiving produce from the Meadowood Victory Garden. Distribution of produce was set up on a week to week, first come first served basis, on Thursdays between 3:00pm and 5:00pm, with an optional pick up option on Friday morning.

Harvests throughout the summer took place on Wednesday or Thursday mornings. Produce was taken indoors to the canteen, rinsed and weighed, then bunched or



When there was an abundance of produce available in mid-August, we were also able to fill requests for produce from two organizations, including the North End Food Security Network for their Selkirk Avenue farmers market.

bagged according to how many people were picking up that week. We aimed to distribute 10 good food boxes each week. When there was an abundance of produce available in mid-

“Our North End Stay and Play appreciate the veggies. Most of our kids have never seen the whole veggie. When the kids help cut it up they are likely to eat it.”

▪ *North End Stay and Play*

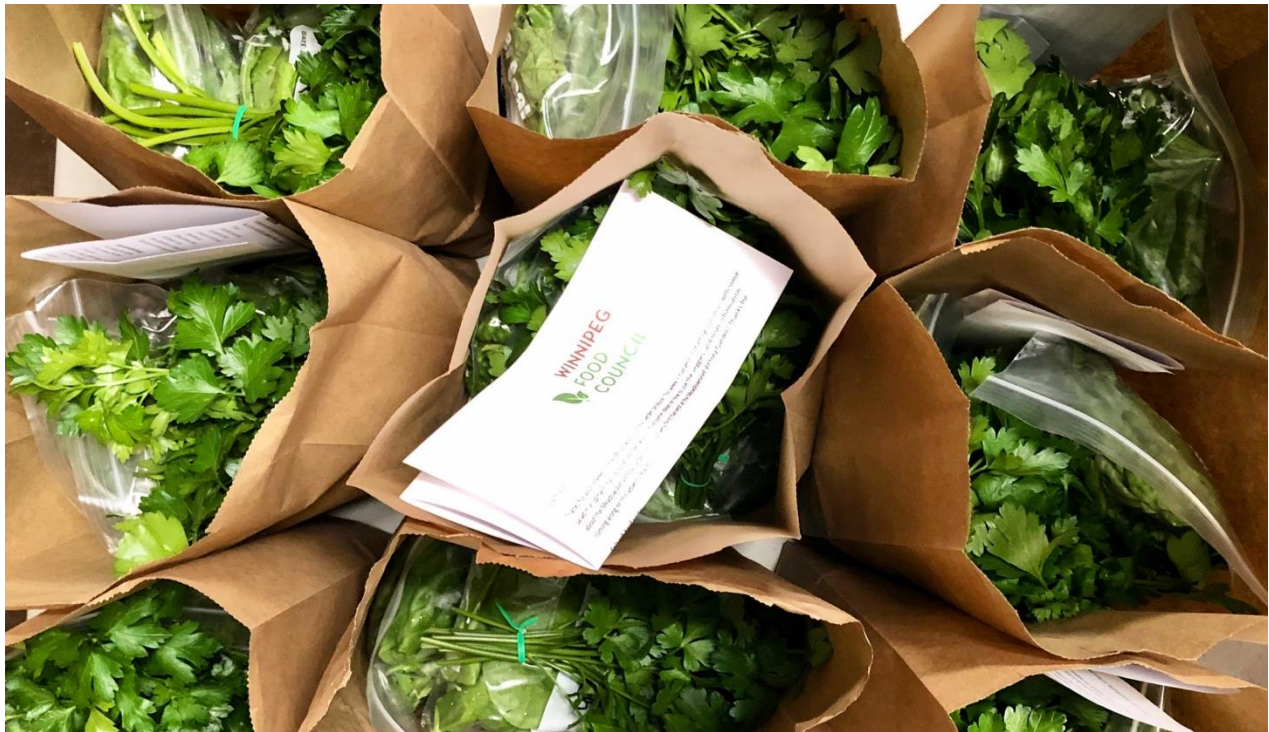
August, we were also able to fill requests for produce from two organizations, including the North End Stay and Play daycare, and the North End Food Security Network.

Each good food box included information on what vegetables and herbs were in that weeks’ harvest, and some simple recipe ideas for how to use them.

“I dropped into the Friday market [on] Selkirk Ave last Friday and [the] group were so happy there were veggies to sell. Good price, 50 cents a bunch. They were all gone by 11am. Thanks for getting veggies there. It is such a wonderful thing for North End people to have fresh veggies.”

▪ *end of season survey response*

The Meadowood Victory Garden ran from June to September, with ten weeks of harvest. We harvested over 282 pounds of produce and distributed over 90 good food boxes. Nine volunteers worked on the garden over those three months. Many community members walking by or visiting the skate park next door stopped to express their support for the garden over the course of the summer.



Each good food box included information on what vegetables were available that week, and simple recipe ideas for how to use them.

The Season by the Numbers

- 10 weeks of harvest
- 450 square feet of planted space
- Over 90 good food boxes distributed to residents in the area & community serving organizations
- 282 pounds of produce harvested (plus some community harvest)
- 9 volunteers worked on the garden, from installation to final clean up
- 13 different types of vegetables and herbs grown
- \$625.00 was the out of pocket cost to establish the garden
- Approximately 210 hours were contributed to this project by volunteers and the Winnipeg Food Council Coordinator

End of Season Survey

Our end of season survey of good food box recipients showed the Meadowood Victory Garden was well received. The Winnipeg Food Council coordinator worked with members of the



The Meadowood Victory Garden produced over 282 pounds of produce in more than 90 good food boxes for neighbouring residents and community supporting organizations.

research and policy subcommittee to compile the survey, which contained 10 questions.

The survey had a 30% response rate. Participants were asked about their motivation for participation, how participation impacted their vegetable consumption and perception of urban food gardens, what improvements they would like to see for next year.

66.67% of respondents indicated their

vegetable consumption changed a lot, with 16.67% of these reporting their vegetable consumption changed a great deal.

83% of respondents had never heard of the term “victory garden” before but were familiar with it by the end of the season, indicating that our goal to raise awareness of victory gardens was successful.

“Thank you! The veg was delicious!”
▪ *end of season survey response*

Based on average weighted responses, before participating in the Meadowood Victory Garden, respondents listed support for urban food gardens such as victory gardens to be “average”. After participating in the Meadowood Victory Garden for just one season, the average weighted response of all participants indicated perception of urban food gardens had already slightly improved, and 66.67% of respondents reported their perception of urban food gardens to be “better” or “much better” than before.

Respondents were asked what improvements they would like to see for the Meadowood Victory Garden in future years. The majority – at 66.67% - would like to see the garden size increased. There is also some interest in planting different vegetables, creating individual garden spaces, and changing the pick-up times.

Looking Forward

The Meadowood Victory Garden is a great example of what can be done when motivated partners come together to build something of value for the community. Victory gardens, community gardens, and urban agriculture contribute to overall community health and neighbourhood vitality through the creation of healthy build environments, while building a sense of belonging and community pride, which has shown to have tremendous impacts on physical and mental health. These community food assets also increase access to healthy food



and build community food security while increasing climate change resilience in our city.

The Winnipeg Food Council is excited to build upon this year of success at the Meadowood Victory Garden to inform the next growing season, and assist others in developing victory gardens for the community in their own wards and neighbourhoods.

Victory gardens and other urban agriculture initiatives help increase community food security and climate change resilience.