

Growing Gardens – Success Story

A youth operated organic market garden project, ¡Cultiva! is all about nourishment. In learning how to grow, maintain, harvest and market our gardens, our young participants build knowledge, leadership skills, respectful work ethics, business sense, and numerous other, invaluable life skills and opportunities. Alongside the phenomenal personal growth which takes place for each and every individual, our program strengthens community, and fosters protection of, and greater appreciation for, our environment. Until 2006, however, although we were selling our produce, we lacked systems for tracking orders, success and demand for various crops, or revenue over time. Thus, in spite of our impassioned commitment, we were unable to truly reach, or recognize, our potential. Working with SVP changed that.

Our SVP partner, Dennis Berry, helped us to create a tracking system for our Farmers Market produce. Further, his support and leadership was crucial in the development of a business plan aimed at increasing our sales. What's more, in working with us, Dennis took our mission and vision into account every step of the way, thinking creatively to devise resources that fit well with our established structure and goals. Kids were empowered to help with record-keeping, for example, through simple tracking sheets which they could fill out at the garden, during the harvest, and at the market. On Dennis's suggestion, we began weighing and counting all our produce as we packed our coolers for the market. Later, we'd repeat the process with our leftovers, providing concrete data of what sold well. Additionally, we started monitoring time of day in relation to key events, such as when crops sold out at the market. When we were able to view all the data later, we had tangible, useful information, such as which varieties sold out early each week, and which were consistently left in surplus. These records allowed us to evaluate at the end of the growing season, better positioning us to make judgments about the next year.

Now, when planting time comes around, we can sit down with our Youth Leaders and map out a cohesive plan based on our previous year's sales records. Since our partnership with SVP, each year we have been able to celebrate sales increases. In year two of our SVP collaboration, inspired by the success of Dennis's initial business plan, we used the principles that were established and applied them to include honey from our beehives. We began weighing, recording, and tracking honey sales, discovering amazing potential for more honey production and sales which we wouldn't have previously expected. We subsequently increased our hives, tripling them from 6 to 18, and are still experiencing greater demand than we have the capacity to meet!

In addition to the incredible business plan and guidance he delivered, our SVP partner aided the practical organization of our garden, too. He advised us to make a detailed map of the garden each year, including a count of the number of plants in, and length of each row. Not only does this simple activity allow us to determine how much each row of plants is producing, it is a fun opener for our youth participants during their first week at ¡Cultiva!, allowing them to really take ownership and connect with the land, as well as one another.

We are immensely grateful for our SVP partnership. Through it, we have been provided with an accessible business plan. Moreover, we've been able to take the principles we've learned and apply them to other areas, expanding site sales as well as seeing continued growth at the Farmers Market. SVP's dedicated help enabled our staff to track the progress of our entrepreneurial efforts, and was an integral part of providing lifelong, priceless skills to our youth.