

Watering Community Seeds
United States of America
Kalamazoo College, MI

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The Watering Community Seeds team provided irrigation infrastructure to community and school gardens across southern cities in Los Angeles, specifically at the I Heart Wilmington Community Garden in Wilmington, CA, the Queen's Learning Garden in Inglewood, CA, and seven school gardens at elementary and middle schools in Hawthorne, CA. We tended to overgrown gardens, assembled ten drip line irrigation systems, rejuvenated soil quality at five garden sites, installed vermicomposting bins and supplied seed libraries to each site.

The Idea for Watering Community Seeds came from Los Angeles County Master Gardener, Hawthorne School District Nutritionist, Hawthorne Parks and Recreation Commissioner, mother, mentor and friend, Danielle Marquez. When we heard about the Davis Projects for Peace grant, we immediately called Danielle and asked, "What would you do with ten thousand dollars?" Danielle informed us about her plans to install irrigation for the school gardens in Hawthorne. We learned about her struggle maintaining the gardens due to the intense labor they require as well as the lack of consistent institutional support from the district to invest in school gardens that introduce healthy foods to children. As a group of three students that are incredibly passionate about food and farming justice, we were thrilled at the thought of forming relationships with schools in our community and eager to extend our support to community gardens in Los Angeles County.

There are a plethora of issues where systemic processes to race and class intersect and create the health crisis in Los Angeles. The communities our sites impact are categorized as locations under food apartheid. Coined by activist and urban farmer Karen Washington, farmer and activist Leah Penniman describes food apartheid as "geographical areas and communities where people live in poverty and do not have access to fresh, affordable, culturally appropriate food grown with sustainable methods," ("Taking On Food"). Food apartheid recognizes that these are direct results of systems of inequity and segregation. Penniman also points out that food apartheid brings about life-threatening diet-related illnesses. Director of the LA County Department of Public Health Barbara Ferrer remarks in Hawthorne's Community Health profile that "These differences are particularly tragic because they are preventable. They arise to a large degree from the inequitable distribution of resources and opportunities that people need in order to be healthy" (2). Hawthorne's number of adults diagnosed with diabetes is 8% higher than Los Angeles County's best-performing city (10). Knowing that tens of thousands of Hawthorne residents struggle with preventable health issues when 30% of Hawthorne adults are uninsured is all in all a large fault to the poverty and exploitation that capitalism requires amongst Black and Brown communities (23). Poverty and displacement make up the backbone of Los Angeles' workforce and it is killing our communities. Community access to gardens not only starts the process of mitigating that harm but provides an opportunity for community members to regain autonomy by investing in our community.

Sustainability and reliability was our biggest priority in deciding the location of our project. Basing Watering Community Seeds in the South Bay of Los Angeles was the best decision for our team because not only do we personally know the people who can maintain these spaces for years to come, but it is our home. Working in our hometown allowed us to engage closely with our communities. Thanks to Danielle, we were able to tap into a network of experienced growers in Los Angeles from all walks of life. Since our work called for many early mornings and labor intensive days, we called upon our siblings, parents, nieces and nephews, best friends, and acquaintances to work with us and tend to green spaces in our community. It was inspiring to see the intergenerational work that gardening holds space for. In a very

literal sense, our goal has been to ease the labor in watering systems for gardens. Yet, the scope of our work involves more than just watering: Like a seed, community and school gardens have the potential for enormous change that time, love, and care put into gardens will bloom.

Our largest challenge was our project timeline. While we had planned to complete each site one by one, we found that we had to go back and forth from sites to troubleshoot the systems, order site specific tools, and bring different materials. As we became more familiar with each garden space, our approach was centered on specific needs of the soil, plants and water sources. Flexibility was essential to our troubleshooting process. The largest challenge with communication was making sure everyone on the team was on the same page about managing the workload and other team expectations.

Our understanding of achieving peace is deeply rooted in community justice and autonomy. As community members under food apartheid, peace means creating strong inter-generational connections, developing food systems that our community determines, prioritizing our collective and individual needs, and working together to fulfill our common goals. Peace is growing our food and eating it together. Short-term, Watering Community Seeds contributes to peace by offering accessible food-based green spaces to the larger South Bay community. Moving forward, community members can choose to pursue a more integrated role with the garden spaces alongside harvesting food right down their street. At the Hawthorne school gardens, Danielle will have more food growing to continue taste testing food with students. Not only is our project an opportunity to feed families but incentivize more investment to expand these gardens and build the capacity of our local gardeners. The project has affirmed the way we want to impact our communities and make a difference to the legacies we are building.

It is impossible to think of peace on an empty stomach; By tackling the root, the presence of community gardens become the foundation for radical systemic change.

- Samantha Rodriguez, Nicholas Davis-Sipaque, and Gi Salvatierra

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