

SC 3 - Creating an Edible Landscape



Project Lead:

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Description: In Minnesota, 1 out of 10 people don't have enough food. According to the organization Feeding America, 8.2% of Scott County households reported in 2010 being food insecure (defined as "unable at times during the year to provide adequate food for one of more household members because the household lacked money or other resources for food"). For children, this percentage increased to 12.6% in 2010. A growing body of research indicates that children in food-insecure households are at greater risk for adverse physical and mental health outcomes.

To reach the most vulnerable populations and better understand their needs, Scott County staff undertook a targeted community engagement effort as part of its 2040 comprehensive plan update and conducted a Health Equity Data Analysis. From this, the County learned that individuals, when given the choice, would prefer to eat more locally grown healthy food options.

Community design, the built environment, planning, transportation, and public health all influence the accessibility of healthy food options in our communities. As a component of community-based agriculture under the Statewide Health Improvement Partnership (SHIP), Scott County would like to explore the feasibility of and begin planning for a "food forest" or other edible landscape project at a city or regional park or other publicly owned land to address gaps identified through resident engagement and the health equity analysis. Ideally the edible landscape would support a low-maintenance, sustainable, plant-based food production and agroforestry system, incorporating fruit and nut trees, shrubs, herbs, vines, and perennial vegetables that are adapted to Minnesota's climate and that yield edible, nutritious, and culturally appropriate products.

Key Issues, Questions, and Ideas for Exploration:

- Starting with the successful Beacon Food Forest in Seattle, research case studies in Minnesota (e.g., the Meridian Garden Food Forest in the Bancroft neighborhood of Minneapolis) and elsewhere to identify best models and practices for creating a food forest or edible landscape on public land.
- What evidence is there to support the health, social, economic, and environmental benefits or impacts of a community food forest or edible landscape?
- Using GIS analysis and existing data from the food access map the County recently created, produce a "food desert" map for Scott County that identifies areas where residents have limited access to fresh and nutritious food.

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- Using GIS analysis or other approaches, identify suitable locations on public land in Scott County for development of a food forest or edible landscape. What criteria are most important in identifying appropriate locations?
- Using one or more specific sites located in existing parks or on other public land, create alternative designs concepts for a food forest or edible landscape.
- Given the twin goals of creating a “low-maintenance, sustainable, plant-based food production and agroforestry system” and producing “edible, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food” fit for human consumption, what fruit and nut trees, shrubs, herbs, vines, and perennial vegetables are most appropriate for inclusion?
- Develop information or programming to familiarize residents of all backgrounds with food foraging in a northern climate, as well as healthy food preparation methods.

How Will Student Work Be Used to Build Community Resiliency?

This project aligns with SHIP’s goals to create healthier communities across Minnesota by expanding opportunities for active living, healthy eating, and tobacco-free living. Student deliverables will directly inform County efforts to engage the community around the idea of a food forest, draft potential plans and site concepts for a food forest, secure additional funding to support the initiative, and provide ongoing support and maintenance to make this a sustainable effort. There is both staff capacity and monetary support to move this work forward.

Students will have ample opportunity to engage with stakeholders, community members, and decision makers around this topic.

Existing Plans and Reports:

- 2040 Scott County Comprehensive Plan (draft)
- Scott County Delivers: Healthy Food Access
- Scott County Community Health Assessment (CHA)
- Scott County food access maps
- Seattle’s [Beacon Food Forest](#)

Potential Stakeholders and Partners:

- Scott County Statewide Health Improvement Partnership (SHIP) and Community Leadership Team
- Minnesota Department of Health
- Scott County–Three Rivers Park District Partnership
- Food Shelf Networking Group
- Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community (SMSC)
- City of Shakopee

To learn more about this project or discuss how to integrate it into a UMN course or an individual student project (such as a culminating experience, capstone, master’s project, or independent study), please contact Sarah Tschida or Mike Greco with the Resilient Communities Project at rcp@umn.edu.