

WORKING CAPITAL

SUMMER 2011

LISC
Chicago

The Newsletter of the Chicago Program
of Local Initiatives Support Corporation

GARFIELD PARK HOOP HOUSE PROMOTES HEALTHY FOOD, HEALTHY LIVING

With support from the Kraft Foods Foundation, LISC/Chicago is working with 10 neighborhoods this summer to promote urban gardens and encourage more residents to use farmers markets to increase access fresh and healthy food to all segments of the community.

One example is in East Garfield Park where a consortium of businesses and community leaders will build and manage a Hoop House – essentially a greenhouse that is available for year-round production of vegetables. The project offers community residents access to fresh-grown vegetables throughout Chicago’s four seasons – from the scorching summer months through the deep freeze of the winter season.

The Hoop House also aims to promote community gardening throughout the neighborhood as a way to build a hands-on appreciation of the agricultural path that nutritional foods take from new seedling to supper plate.

Children and young adults get the opportunity to take practical responsibility for a product – healthy food – that shows the value of disciplined effort over an extended period, and the benefits these efforts create.

Local residents, helped by Openlands, have been growing seedlings in the Community Greenhouse at the Garfield Park Conservatory since 2006, allowing more than 20 community gardens in East Garfield, North Lawndale and Humboldt Park to start food crops for very little cost. These gardeners grow fresh vegetables and fruit for personal consumption as well as to share with their neighbors – a direct, affordable way of providing healthy, free, fresh food to residents in an informal manner that also builds community relationships and leaders.

But this year, programmatic and space needs at the Conservatory made using its greenhouse impractical. The year-round Hoop House tackles this issue, offering a community resource for seed



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starting in late winter, and year-round growing and sharing of cool season crops such as lettuce, spinach and radishes. Food from the Hoop House will be locally distributed and eaten.

The urban land trust NeighborSpace owns lots near Lake Street and Kostner that host the Fulton Street Flower and Vegetable Garden, and the Hoop House is being constructed on space on one of these lots. Besides providing the land, NeighborSpace will also provide water and other resources for the garden. The Fulton Street Garden team will oversee day-to-day maintenance and help organize local community gardeners to use and care for the facility. Some of these community gardeners live directly adjacent to the Hoop House space - putting eyes and ears on the ground to ensure the safekeeping of the project.

The crews and leaders of the Safer Foundation Department of Environment are constructing the Hoop House. Christy Webber Landscapes is assisting Safer with garden design training and overseeing the installation. The City of Chicago Department of Environment's Greencorps Chicago program has been working with Openlands and the East Garfield Park Conservatory Alliance's local community gardens for many years, and is helping build the wooden benches for seeding and planting and installing raised beds within the Hoop House.

Efforts are also underway to bring on a partner to offer healthy cooking and nutrition classes for community residents that focus on cooking with fresh produce from participating community gardens.

The East Garfield Park Land Use and Open Space Committee, a group of community residents and service providers, came together in 2005 through the NCP quality-of-life planning process to focus on greening and building a safe, healthy community. They'll use the Hoop House for seed starting and possible 'overwintering' of plants, giving them a chance to survive the winter deep freeze in relative shelter and bloom again in the spring.

Seed-starting for cool-season crops and transplant distribution for in-ground planting is scheduled to start this month.