Roots Down Deep:
A look at Wasatch Community Gardens' first twenty-five years

Historical Report
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

Community gardens, food distribution programs, and community involvement are at the heart of Wasatch Community Gardens' evolution over the last twenty-five years. Their efforts have addressed hunger issues in Salt Lake County while empowering individuals regarding their food choices, accessibility, and consumption patterns. This paper researched the key milestones, hurdles, barriers, and successes Wasatch Community Gardens faced while strengthening both individual and community assets. Those milestones include becoming a non-profit organization with official 501(c)(3) status, developing a program to serve at-risk youth, making substantial organizational changes by dissolving the fish co-op program resulting in a change to their mission and name, phasing out of some gardens while taking on major capitol campaigns to purchase necessary gardens and build a greenhouse, focusing on internal development as an organization, and empowering others in the community to create community gardens beyond the managerial oversight of Wasatch Community Gardens. Research, review, and analysis of Wasatch Community Gardens' history suggests an organization that is scrappy, grassroots, sacrificing, and organic, resulting in roots down deep in the community, creating a noticeable and substantial public benefit for Salt Lake County.

INTRODUCTION

The Executive Director saw a young man from the youth corrections program violently clawing the dirt with a cultivator hand tool. Concerned about his safety and of those in the garden with her, as well as concern that he would puncture a hole in the drip line she repaired earlier that day, she went over to him, asked him to stop, and then assigned this young man and two other young men the task of turning the compost pile. The dog-days-of-summer sun beat down on the asphalt parking lots that surrounded the Fairpark Garden creating an inferno with dry dust breathing out of the compost pile each time they touched it. Even though the young men were *volunteering* in the garden because of their unfavorable behavior, turning the compost pile was a job she would not have wished on her worst enemy.

As she worked side-by-side with these three young men, she started small talk. She asked them if they could be doing anything they wanted to do that day, they were out of school and they were not in this program, what would they do? The first young man said something about going to California and doing some illegal substances. The second young man said something about riding a motorcycle. The third young man said, "Die." She did not know how to respond, but she knew the best option was not to respond with some *you don't mean it* answer. She knew these kids from the youth correction program shared the same experiences: harm, uprooting, waiting, and lacking hope. These kids likely experienced neglect, abuse, drug addiction, alcohol abuse, criminal activities, and trouble from gang association. A white, educated woman certainly did not have the ground to stand on and say, "You don't mean it."

A little while later, she questioned the young men again, but this time what would they do if they had an infinite amount of money. The first two young men elaborated on their answers because now they had

money. The third young man again responded, "Die." Again, she did not respond to his answer, but instead she just let him continue working the compost pile, dig in the dirt, and water the plants.

At the end of the day, the director asked the youth if anyone had any questions. The third young man's hand shot up and he asked, "When do we get to come back here again?"[1] This story illustrates the impact gardens have on our community. This young man began the day without any hope of a future or life, however, by the end of the day, he at least held on to the hope that he could come back to the garden.

Tasked to report on Wasatch Community Garden's history over the last twenty-five years, I have found a history like the many layers of an onion – Each layer dependent on the previous layer, making the entire onion flavorful and complex, nurturing those who consume it. Wasatch Community Gardens in its current form is a complex and flavorful organization that only exists because of the people that built the infrastructure, provided the tools, outlined and delivered the visions, and paved the way for Wasatch Community Gardens to continue when it seemed like it could not go on. This resulted in roots down deep in the community, creating a noticeable and substantial public benefit for Salt Lake County.

Words used to describe Wasatch Community Gardens include scrappy, grassroots, sacrificing, and organic as they developed who they are and what they wanted to accomplish. When I asked people to clarify what they meant in using these words, they explained that Wasatch Community Gardens made sacrifices in order to continue being an influential organization that served the needs of the community. The organization made large impacts with little resources. Through this sacrifice over the last twenty-five years, they have a clear mission that works - ***To empower people of all ages and incomes to grow and eat healthy, organic, local food.***

IN THE BEGINNING THERE WERE FISH AND THERE WERE GARDENS

Jeff Fox was Executive Director of Crossroads Urban Center in 1985, when the Fish and Garden Project started as a program of his organization. Fox remembers his staff supported the idea of community gardens because it provided inexpensive and accessible food to low-income individuals, and they were dealing with an abundance of hunger issues at that time. The State of Utah denied individuals with no food and no income expedited Food Stamps, Native Americans living on reservations experienced a lack of food accessibility, Utah County refused to allow WIC distributions in its county, and child care programs lacked food distributions to low-income children. People in Utah were hungry. Community gardens empowered people to grow their own fresh and healthy food so that it limited the reliance on other bureaucratic food sources. They reasoned that all Crossroads Urban Center needed to do was secure underutilized or vacant land, create small garden plots, and invite people in the neighborhood to start gardening. In the meantime, Crossroads Urban Center would expand the support of this program by involving partnering organizations and find on-going sources of funding. This idea sounded simple enough, but little did they know how difficult sustaining this idea would become.[2]

While gardeners were expected take on the responsibilities of weeding, watering, harvesting, and cleaning their plots, Crossroads Urban Center took on the majority of the administration of the gardens' functions including providing seeds, tools, site preparation, and technical assistance to plot gardeners for six gardens they managed.[3] And then there was the responsibility of making sure gardens were watered properly. PVC pipes attached to household faucets or a frost-free hydrant watered five gardens, while the garden on 9800 S. 1800 E. in Sandy watered with irrigation water. Originally, the ditch that held the irrigation water used a leaky plywood headgate to back water up into the furrows. Crossroads staff built a permanent concrete headgate with a steel top to prevent leaks and be less hazardous for children that played in the irrigation water. Additionally, Fox remembers Crossroads Urban Center staff taking turns waking up at 3:00 a.m. during irrigation to lift the gates. The garden required watering for three hours and five minutes every seven days. [4]

Some of the gardens succeeded and some of the gardens failed. A 1987 garden evaluation recommended that three of the six gardens continue in the future – the common factors of success included good soil, gardener participation, and technical assistance from Crossroads Urban Center. Additional successes include securing in-kind donations to meet the needs of the gardens. In 1985, Crossroads Urban Center secured funding for tillers and a small farm tractor.[5] They also hired AmeriCorps volunteers to help manage the gardens. [6]

As for the fish part, no one really remembers how the fish idea started. Crossroads Urban Center employees from that era agree that they were probably sitting around a table brainstorming on how they could provide protein to low-income individuals. They came up with a simple idea to set up some kiddie pools, stock them with fish, and provide individuals with inexpensive, abundant, and culturally familiar fish. Patrick Poulin, Crossroads Urban Center Hunger Advocate at the time, recommended starting with Tilapia[7], because he had read that organizations were effectively farming it cheaply and sustainably. Poulin contacted the Department of Agriculture and Food and was informed that Tilapia was considered an invasive species and it was illegal to bring it in to the state. They had to move to Plan B.[8]

Nearly everyone in the world eats carp. Only Americans consider carp a *trash fish*, however, to Salt Lake County's hungry population, many of whom at the time were refugees from Vietnam or immigrants from Eastern Europe, carp was a familiar food source that they considered a delicious and protein-rich diet staple. These populations could benefit from a readily available, affordable source of carp.[9] In the 1800's, settlers in Utah introduced Carp to Utah Lake. Today, 7.5 million carp make up 90% of the fish population in the lake. In 1986, local fisherman Bill Loy Jr. and his crew contracted with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services and the State of Utah in the June sucker Recovery Program, and he begun mass harvesting carp from the lake.[10] Crossroads Urban Center saw this as a great opportunity to sustain the fish project, so they purchased carp from Loy for pennies per pound.

Seining for the carp was an incredible experience. There was not a lot of common language between the individuals working the nets. Some spoke Russian, some spoke Spanish, others spoke Khmer, and everyone was up to their waists in marsh water trying to coordinate catching the fish all shouting in

different languages.[11] Poulin recalls, "The waters would be calm and then all of the sudden the water would start bubbling up with all the carp being hauled in. If you did not know any better you would have thought they were pulling in a whale."[12] Jane Torrence, Executive Director of Wasatch Fish and Gardens from 1991-1992 said, "You haven't lived until you've caught wild carp while they're spawning – that's Wild Kingdom!"[13] After they hauled in the carp, they would throw the fish in the back of a truck on a tarp and transport them to Salt Lake City. Later they created a makeshift holding tank from two fiberglass troughs.[14, 15]

Once they arrived at Crossroads Urban Center, they would dump the fish into small kiddie pools in the back of the building. Three to four additional kiddie pools were set up in the backyards of some individuals from the Mon Community, primarily in the West Valley City area. They would call a handful of key individuals who would then call people in their communities, and in no time, individuals from every country would show up, form a mob around the truck, and start yelling or pointing to get some fish.[16]

Eventually the fish co-op charged a lifetime membership fee of $1. This membership allowed individuals to purchase carp $.18 a pound, and staff from the time recollects that the membership record was 1,000 people. [17]

THE BIRTH OF WASATCH FISH AND GARDENS

In 1987, Crossroads Urban Center hired Nick Hershenaw to direct the Fish and Gardens project. He spent the next two years forming a board of directors, and in 1989, he spun the project off into its own official nonprofit with 501(c)(3) status.[18,19] This organization adopted the name Wasatch Fish and Gardens, later to become Wasatch Community Gardens. The development of Wasatch Fish and Gardens into its own nonprofit organization was a huge success for Crossroads Urban Center as their goal for most projects was to spin them off into sustainable organizations.[20]

In 1991, Jane Torrence joined the Wasatch Fish and Garden team as the next Executive Director. Torrence did not know what a board of directors was or even what they did. She had no experience being an executive director, writing grants, or collaborating with government agencies. However, this lack of experience was unnoticeable compared to Torrence's ability to bring people together regardless of their culture or socio-economic level, and the larger community begun to see the value that Wasatch Fish and Gardens was contributing to the community.[21] Individuals could lease a plot of land in the gardens for $10 a growing season. In return, these individuals accessed the land, seeds, tools, and knowledge to grow their own food. Additionally, the gardens brought people from various countries and cultures together to learn from one another. Torrance says that people from other countries, alongside their native-born neighbors connected with land, and that is a powerful experience.[22]

Of course, the integration of culture and diversity did not go without its unique experiences. Erik Kingston, Executive Director of Wasatch Fish and Gardens from 1992-1994, remembers one evening while working in the garden, he discovered a two foot tall marijuana plant in a garden plot.

> *I was there working on the drip system and I see this plant growing. It had obviously been recently transplanted. Bush One is in office, it's zero tolerance time. I'm sweating bullets. I figured that some teenagers just decided they found a great place with plenty of water. I ripped the plant out and chucked it. A couple of weeks later, I see a couple dozen pot seedlings coming up in the same plot. I'm thinking, we can't afford trouble like this. I'm not making a judgment, but if someone else finds this, we're screwed.*

As Kingston made his discovery, he noted that some of the community gardeners happened to be there.

> *There's this Russian granny, Maria. She was 83, a fixture at the garden. I'm with my stepmom who's Russian, so I ask her to translate and we ask Maria if she has seen any strangers around, any bad teenagers, that kind of thing, because someone has begun growing marijuana in her garden plot. She starts jumping up and down, yelling and screaming, steam coming out of her head, and my stepmom tells me that she's saying, 'Yes, yes, I keep planting it and people keep pulling it up!' Turns out, she was an herbalist in her village back home. Someone had mailed the seeds to her from Ukraine. She used them for making a salve and for tea.*
>
> *I explain to her – if we get caught, they could shut down the garden, we'd be fined, we could be arrested. If I find it again, you'll have to leave the garden. She says ok. My stepmom tells me that she thinks Maria will keep growing it because back home, when the police come, you give them 10 rubles and they go away. I think Maria was finally asked to leave the garden, maybe for assaulting someone with her water bucket. I used to walk around singing, How do you solve a problem like Maria?* [23]

Wasatch Fish and Gardens began hosting fundraisers to pull in the mainstream community to their cause. One such event was *Revel with a Cause*. It was a night of carp eating – different ethnic groups from one side of the world to the other – Vietnamese, eastern European, Japanese, everyone made wonderful carp dishes. There was a giant fish ice sculpture, a klezmer band; it was a good time.[24] Danny Potts who was on the Wasatch Fish and Gardens Board of Directors at the time remembers Mayor Deedee Corradini and County Council Member Randy Horiuchi there supporting the fish program and eating carp alongside everyone else. Meanwhile Potts was in the back, grilling up the carp, and sneaking bites here and there because it is such a delicious tasting fish.[25]

Torrence also made some crucial sustainability changes. In the early days of the community garden program there was much enthusiasm on the part of the staff to start as many gardens as possible in order to serve the greatest number of people. In 1991, the program swelled to nine gardens, but most gardens had only five to ten gardeners. A small number of people benefited from a program that was

extremely time-intensive for the staff (weeding, plumbing, administration, general maintenance). Since the gardens were never very full, weeds were a major problem. City officials received complaints and were becoming wary of the program. To solve the problem of too many gardens, too few gardeners, and limited resources, in 1992, Wasatch Fish and Gardens decided to limit the number of gardens while working to increase the number of gardeners.[26, 27]

BEGINNING OF THE YOUTH GARDEN PROGRAM

The common consensus among Wasatch Fish and Gardens was that it needed grant and sponsorship money in order to sustain its mission. There was also a common consensus that gardening possessed therapeutic qualities and could help some of Salt Lake's most troubled youth.[28] By spending meditative time tending and caring for a plant, helping it succeed and watching it grow, youth could take ownership over something, and this meant empowerment. The leadership of Wasatch Fish and Gardens agreed that they would be able to secure funding for the organization by starting a youth program.

In the spring of 1993, Wasatch Fish and Gardens employee Tom Johnson began designing the first season of the youth program. His vision was to get youth to grow produce that would then be sold in the first Downtown Farmer's Market in Pioneer Park. They would then divide the proceeds between the youth participants according to the number of hours worked.[29] Once Johnson designed the details of the youth program, he needed to find the youth. He got permission from West High School to set up a table and recruit students to join his program.[30] Approximately ten students signed up that first year, and they came from all walks of life, but the one thing that connected all the youth together was that they did not fit in anywhere else. Amy Jordan, a participant in the first year of the youth program says that some of students were very smart, some were hippies, and others, like her, had a very difficult home life and needed a place to escape. She credits the Youth Gardening Program for changing her life – Life was challenging, but Jordan would enter into the Grateful Tomato Garden and sit down to weed. The cars became the sound of an ocean. It was soothing and relaxing. She could leave her mental garbage at the gate and come into a space that she calls sacred. The Youth Garden Program leaders encouraged the youth to be creative and try different solutions to solve a problem, while empowering them to find their voice and opinions.[31]

The experience of the Downtown Farmer's Market was much different from what people think of today. Wasatch Community Gardens was only one of five vendors that participated that first year. Jordan recalls that somehow, each of the youth participants would find a ride to the park on Saturdays and they would stand around waiting for everyone else to show up. Because of the nature of Pioneer Park, it was a scary experience for a young girl.[32] Nonetheless, it was an exciting time for these youth – They were able to till the land, plant the seeds, harvest the crops, take it to market, and sell the produce for money. It was a great sense of responsibility and accomplishment that many of these youth never knew until they joined the Youth Gardening Program.

In 1994, the organization formed a partnership with Youth Force, a Salt Lake County-based program for at-risk youth working in the community. Youth Force agreed to provide transportation for approximately forty young people to participate in the Youth Gardening Program. The program continued to look for youth agency partners and expanded quickly. By 1996, the newly-named Experiential Education Program was in full swing with the following collaborating agencies: YWCA's Girls to Women Gang Prevention Program, Valley Mental Health's ARTEC, Salt Lake Neighborhood Housing's Youth Works, Boys and Girls Clubs, Central City Community Center, Neighborhood House and Northwest Multipurpose Center. This new arrangement with the Youth Gardening Program served over 350 young people in 1997.[33]

GOODBYE OUR BELOVED FISH CO-OP

The fish co-op originally was staffed by AmeriCorps volunteers until Wasatch Fish and Gardens secured enough funding to hire longtime volunteer Sengtek Tan as the fish co-op manager.[34] As a refugee from Cambodia, he had already experienced so much. He watched the Khmer Rouge gun down two of his children, and he lost two other children in the refugee camps due to illness. Sengtek, his wife, and their three remaining children made their way to Salt Lake City to start again. Words used to describe him included generous, serene, and conscientious with a wonderful kind of energy about him. One person remembers how Sengtek always brought Cambodian snacks on their fishing expeditions, these wild homemade treats. Sengtek would maintain the nets, outreach to refugees and immigrants, and coordinate fishing expeditions with Bill Loy.[35]

In the summer of 1993, Sengtek was in a car accident and determined he would not be able to return to work. Some Wasatch Fish and Gardens staff took over the fish co-op and continued fish distribution intermittently and on a smaller scale. Meanwhile the gardens were growing and the youth program was flourishing, and data suggested that the fish co-op was not serving people in the community effectively enough to justify the costs. Fish co-op members either found their way to economic prosperity or their taste in food had embraced a more American diet and interest in the program was dropping. They had difficulties getting members of the fish co-op to help fish for carp that had to be done regardless of the weather.

Staff member Johnson conducted an analysis of the fish co-op. They learned they were spending $2.25 per pound to sell the carp for 18 cents. Erik Kingston, Executive Director at the time, and Johnson concluded there were more efficient ways to help the low-income community. While they could write a few grant proposals to raise some funds for the fish co-op, it would be cheaper to give people chicken from Smith's and not risk the lives of staff or waste time where members were not really contributing to the over-all sustainability of the program. The board made the decision to refocus on community gardening and the co-op ceased fish distribution in late 1993.[36]

A year later, Nini Rich, Executive Director of Wasatch Fish and Gardens from 1994-2000, hired a part-time co-op manager in an attempt to revive the program. After several months of intensive outreach to

the Southeast Asian, Eastern European, Russian and other refugee communities and twice monthly carp distributions, it was clear that interest in the program had waned as the refugee populations integrated into the area and were no longer in need of an agency to provide them with carp.[37] With so much emotion around the fish program, Rich needed to make sure that it was not ending just because no one knew how to carry on without Sengtek. Rich says, "I kind of did mouth-to-mouth on the carp but it had already expired."[38]

They attempted to find a new home for the fish co-op but there was little interest in the venture. In late 1997, the Salt Lake Fish & Game Association purchased the fish tanks and equipment from Wasatch Community Gardens and donated them to the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources to use in an aquatic education program for youth.[39]

Luckily, the focus on community gardening was finally firmly in place. Just in time.[40]

SAVING OF THE GRATEFUL TOMATO GARDEN

Times were changing at Wasatch Fish and Gardens. The organization was ready to move to the next phase, which the director did in several capacities. In an effort to keep the community at the heart of the mission, the board consisted of a homeless man, youth who had participated in the Youth Gardening Program, and non-native English-speaking individuals; however, moving forward, the organization focused on strategically recruiting new board members who could help solidify its reputation and financial sustainability. Additionally, the organization's name clearly mentioned fish, even though they dissolved the fish co-op. After months of consideration and a board retreat in the spring of 1995, the board and staff of the organization created a new mission statement and voted to change the name of Wasatch Fish & Gardens to Wasatch Community Gardens.[41]

While this change was taking place, the organization had another serious issue to address – the potential loss of one of their most valuable gardens that existed on the corner of 800 South and 600 East, named the Grateful Tomato Garden by volunteer gardeners. From the beginning, the family who owned the land had it on the market to sell, but interest was light, and they leased it to Wasatch Community Gardens for $1 per year. By 1995, the real estate market changed and houses throughout the neighborhood were being bought and renovated. By then, the asking price for the lot was $70,000, and the seller gave the group an option to buy it for $65,000. The family's realtor was supportive of the group, too, and he told Rich, "Start raising money. I'll give you as much notice as I can if I get a serious buyer."[42]

They explored several options. *Catalyst Magazine* was looking for an office at that time - They put money down to buy the Grateful Tomato Garden with the understanding that they would build an energy-efficient office to house their operations and they would deed the rest of the land to Wasatch Community Gardens to continue as a community garden. Unfortunately, the City would not give *Catalyst Magazine* the necessary zoning variance for the office space. [43]

Catalyst Magazine printed the following in the March 1995 issue:

> *Grateful Tomato Garden Needs You. On the corner of Eighth South and Sixth East is a beautiful community garden. But it has recently sprouted a realty sign. If you believe in the value of community gardens, the importance of healthy outdoor contemplative activity in an inner-city setting, and saving a bit of land already recognized for its social, cultural, and spiritual value, then you must act now. You are desperately needed. . . . Stop what you are doing and write out a check . . . Mention this project to your friends. Discuss it with your colleagues, your kids, your church group. Together we can be the community that bought a garden for Earth Day 1995. An additional pleasure of this project is that you'll see exactly where your money goes. And it will stay there forever and ever."*[44]

Donations started coming in. The University of Utah's Bennion Center volunteers held a concert and raised about $2,000. Then a most unexpected source in the community lit a fire of support. Lincoln Elementary, one of the poorest schools in Salt Lake, had been regularly walking over to the garden for field trips. When they found out about the plight of the garden, a handful of six-graders hatched a plan to lead the entire school in a three-day fundraiser. The kids set a goal to raise one thousand dollars. They wanted the different grades to compete against each other to see who could bring in the most amount of money in spare change. Wasatch Community Gardens' staff thought this effort was very touching, cute, and not possible since nearly all students in this school qualified for free lunch. The class invited ED Rich to come and meet with them to kick off the project. She offered to give a pizza party to the winning grade. As the word got out about this effort from this passionate group of students, First Interstate Bank said they would match the thousand if the students raised it, and then an individual offered to give a thousand dollars even if the kids only raised twelve dollars. After the first day, the teacher called Rich and requested that she pick up the money. It was in tennis ball cans, fish bowls, industrial tomato sauce cans. It was mostly change – pennies, nickels, dimes, and quarters. Over the course of three or four days, Rich continually took these containers to First Interstate Bank and literally dumped them out on the manager's desk. Those kids accomplished what many thought was impossible- They raised twenty three hundred dollars in three days, but more importantly, they became a call to action to the rest of community- If the poorest school could do it, anyone could.[45,46]

Many individuals sent in fives and tens, though it was still a long way to $65,000. They were about $18,000 short of the goal in 1996 when the realtor called saying, 'I'm presenting a good cash offer tomorrow, and I think it will be accepted.'"[47]

A few days prior to receiving this phone call from the realtor, Rich received another phone call from a business owner offering to help. The business owner would not just donate the money to Wasatch Community Gardens because she felt if the community wanted something badly enough, they needed to all come to the table and pitch in, but she was willing to do what was needed to ensure the garden's future. Rich just needed to make her a proposal. Then Rich received the phone call from the realtor.

On the eve of losing the garden and after a solid year of fund raising, Rich called the businesses owner and said, "I need a $20,000 loan, interest free, in cash, the day after tomorrow. We'll pay it back in a year, on Earth Day."[48]

Amazingly, the woman agreed, and without so much as a written agreement or a signature, Rich picked up the cashier's check. "It was all on faith. We considered it quite a miracle. We eventually paid her back; it took a little longer than Earth Day." No one but Rich has ever known the identity of the woman.[49]

In a delightful coda to the story, Rich recalls, "After we got the garden, I was weeding there one evening, and a kid whipped by on his bike and called out, 'We saved your garden.' She just kept going and I hollered after her, 'thanks!'" From a distance she heard, 'You're welcome!'"[50, 51]

BUILDING SUSTAINABLE SYSTEMS AND THE PLANT SALE

After the purchase of the Grateful Tomato Garden, most of the organization's programming focused on the youth program and gardening plots, so administration efforts refocused on the internal structure of the organization. Staff shared one computer and one phone. Michael Mozdy, Executive Director of Wasatch Community Gardens from 2000-2003, recalls each staff had a time limit they were allowed to use the computer so the everyone could get some work done. Eventually, Wasatch Community Gardens moved to an office that offered separate work spaces, they purchased computers and a multiline phone system from the University of Utah's surplus, and they got their first website donated by XMission. Additionally, they created the organization's first official strategic plan, which included developing on online donor and plant database. This meant keeping and updating records in real time rather than hand writing information on paper records. This restructuring and focus allowed the organization to increase its staff from three full time positions to four full time positions, two part time positions, several AmeriCorps and VISTA positions, and 70-80 volunteers.[52]

One event that changed was the annual plant sale. Wasatch Community Gardens collaborated with Utahns Against Hunger for several years to put on a plant sale where they would take the left over greenhouse seedlings and sell them to the public. The problems they faced each year included hosting this event in July when the weather was extremely dry and hot, resulting in most plants dying before transplanting them to the ground. Additionally, the event required all hands on deck and some of the employees were required to stay up all night watering the plants and ensuring that no one took them prior to the plant sale. Of course, this was done with very little return on investment.[53, 54]

Wasatch Community Gardens began questioning if they should continue to participate in the plant sale, which led them to rethink the plant sale entirely. They decided to move in a different direction. The following year, they held the plant sale in May instead of July. They paid nurseries to start seedlings for the sale and transport the seedlings to the sale early the next morning. They invested in promotional materials and advertising. The first May plant sale was held at Garfield Elementary.[61] That day, the

weather refused to cooperate and it poured rain all day. Nonetheless, they still netted $14,000 from the sale. This is one event that many considered a huge success for two reasons: First, it provided a considerable amount of unrestricted funds to the organization, and second, it created a forum where Wasatch Community Gardens directly connected to the community.[55]

BUILDING OF THE STRAWBALE GREENHOUSE AND A BATHROOM

With Wasatch Community Gardens having streamlined their processes and stabilized their systems, the organization felt the next big move was to build a greenhouse at the Grateful Tomato Garden. Wayne Bingham, an architect who specialized in strawbale and earthen plaster construction joined the board to help this vision become reality. The original idea was to create a community center in the garden that would permanently house Wasatch Community Garden's office. This space would also include learning space available for the youth program and community workshops, and even possibly a kitchen for demonstrations, and of course, this center needed to be built with very little money and run into very few bureaucratic barriers. Wayne helped the board and staff quickly realize they were nowhere ready to take on this large of a campaign, but they certainly could do something smaller in scale. Wayne asked them what they really needed at the Grateful Tomato Garden and the consensus was a bathroom.[56]

Wayne did not see a problem with providing a bathroom in the final structure, which would be a greenhouse made out of straw bales with a timber-framed pergola area used for to provide shade and protection from the weather for the youth classes and for community gardeners. The straw bale greenhouse would also save Wasatch Community Gardens hundreds of dollars annually. The greenhouse would not require additional heating or cooling units as they could retain heat through the south-facing glazing, which a concrete block wall, lime, and earthen plaster would retain.[57]

Before beginning the construction of the greenhouse, Wayne researched styles of houses and buildings in the areas to ensure the greenhouse was esthetically pleasing to the neighborhood. They presented the blueprints of the greenhouse to the City Council and Community Council Committee to ensure they were satisfied with the new structure. Overall, the neighborhood supported the idea and construction of a greenhouse on the land.[58]

On October 1, 2004, the excavation began on a passive solar straw bale greenhouse and timber-framed learning center. Bingham saw the development of the greenhouse in the Grateful Tomato Garden as a perfect place to educate individuals in the art of straw bale construction and natural building techniques.[59] He held two workshops: The first workshop taught participants straw bale construction and earthen plastering, and the second workshop taught participants timber frame construction. On October 31, the building was up and the timber frame only took two hours to assemble. Additional interior work needed to be completed, but the building was essentially completed in one month.[60] While the participants learned valuable lessons from these workshops, Wasatch Community Gardens tapped into a valuable workforce that helped build the greenhouse.[61] The construction of the greenhouse is considered an exemplary demonstration of what can be accomplished when board, staff, professionals, and volunteers collaborate on a project.[62]

Having a structure owned by Wasatch Community Gardens was a huge step to solidifying its role in the community. This building allowed the Youth Gardening Program classes to continue in inclement or hot weather. Additionally, the greenhouse was a tangible reminder that it is both necessary and practical to garden in the City, and it raises awareness that food does not just come from a grocery store, but from the ground. It connects us to the ground, which is a sustainable solution for food production and accessibility for the future.[63]

THE LOSS OF MARMALDE AND THE SAVING OF THE 4TH EAST GARDEN

Wasatch Community Gardens needed to raise additional funds to complete the interior of the greenhouse and no one really had the energy to take this on. Don Anderson, Executive Director of Wasatch Community Gardens from 2003-2005, resigned shortly after construction of the greenhouse was completed and Emily Aaggaard stepped into the position from 2005 to 2008 and hired some new, innovative and energetic individuals, provided staff with clearly defined the roles and responsibilities, and created a new long-term strategic plan.[64] Up to this point, the philosophy moving the organization forward was to provide local food that was as accessible as possible to low-income individuals, which meant Wasatch Community Gardens staff did most of the work in the gardens to produce the food. Wasatch Community Gardens philosophy at this time evolved to more empowerment of gardeners, communities, and youth to grow produce on their own. They handed their four gardens, 4th East, Grateful Tomato Garden, Marmalade, and Fairpark, over to the community gardeners to run while they provided managerial oversight. Staff began to move out of the gardens and into the office where they could focus on administering the programs on a more professional level. Wasatch Community Gardens also focused on creating administrative checks and balances, developing bookkeeping systems, and creating outreach that was inclusive to all individuals.[65,66]

At this time, the tenuous nature of providing community gardens on privately owned land became very apparent. The Marmalade Garden sat in the front yard of an apartment complex that was sold by the property owner without warning. Wasatch Community Gardens offered the displaced gardeners plots in the Fairpark Garden, which had housed mainly plots for the youth garden program. This was a difficult neighborhood to sell a community garden to because the homes near the Fairpark tended to have large, private yards that could be used for gardening if residents desired to grow their own food. Wasatch Community Gardens focused on the idea of *community* as the benefit of gardening at the Fairpark Garden, which they did through the creation of the Salsa Party. It gave the neighborhood a reason to come out and meet each other as a community.[67]

In the same year, Wasatch Community Gardens also received notice that the 4th East Garden was being listed for sale. No one really remembers how or when this garden started, and many of the gardeners have been gardening in this location from the very beginning. These gardeners knew the role gardening played in developing community and it was a unique space that served low-income individuals from all ages and all cultural backgrounds.

The owner put the land up for sale for $250,000. Wasatch Community Gardens spoke with the owner saying they were interested in purchasing the land, and they began working on a capital campaign to raise the necessary funds. Just as they began this effort, they received word that the owner of the land sold the garden to Community Development Corporation of Utah, who wanted to build affordable housing on the property. Wasatch Community Gardens contacted the Community Development Corporation of Utah to see if they would be willing to sell the land. The Community Development Corporation of Utah generously offered to allow Wasatch Community Gardens to purchase the land for the same price they paid to the owner. Approximately six months later and with the help of matching grants, government funding, and private donations, Wasatch Community Gardens celebrated their new land ownership of the 4th East Garden.[68]

OUTREACH AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF COMMUNITIES

The two variables of financial stability and public attention to community gardening elevated Wasatch Community Gardens to the next level as a nonprofit organization.

Calls came in weekly from people asking Wasatch Community Gardens to start gardens in their neighborhoods. Not only could they not keep up with these requests, but they also lacked the resources to start new gardens with a hands-on approach. Wasatch Community Gardens made a conscious decision to not take on additional gardens, but rather teach communities to start gardens themselves.[69] They knew they made the correct decision when they created a workshop called *How to start a community garden* that would teach individuals fundraising, garden design, group management, decision making, volunteer and community outreach, land procurement, and private-sector.[70] This workshop attracted fifty applicants, twice as many as they could accommodate.[71]

Starting a community garden is a time-intensive process. One cannot just find a vacant lot, throw a bunch of seeds and shovels on it, and expect a community garden to grow.[72] Wasatch Community Gardens made two key changes at this point: First, the board created a new strategic plan that encompassed a new vision of building the capacity of others to create community gardens that would meet the needs of their individual and unique neighborhoods. Wasatch Community Gardens' role would be to provide the networking, tools, resources, and knowledge to ensure the potential for garden success.[73] Second, Wasatch Community Gardens created a new position to help provide technical assistance to individuals who wanted to start their own community gardens and called it the Wasatch Community Gardens Network. The public benefit of this movement quickly became apparent.

The Sorenson Unity Center participated in the first year of the Wasatch Community Gardens Network training. One of the gardeners, Angelica Botanos remembers gardening with her grandma as a young girl. "And I remember it being fun." She wanted to create the same kind of joy for her 4-year-old son, Ricardo. By the end of the first growing season, her plot flourished with tomato plants, green beans, and beets with leafy green tops. While she harvested, Ricardo picked and ate voraciously. "Kids will eat

anything out of the garden," Botanos said. From participating in the community garden, people learn self-sufficiency, healthy eating, educating children where food comes from, and connecting with neighbors. Utah's community garden movement ripened.[74]

Helping others organize gardens opened up an entirely different realm of challenges for Wasatch Community Gardens. Some people defined the leadership structure of community gardens in different ways, but those visions and approaches still needed to harmonize with Wasatch Community Gardens' best practices, including working alongside community members and creating a space where there is open dialogue, conversation, and collaboration. Susan Finlayson, Community Gardens Program Director of Wasatch Community Gardens, shares how she got a call from a family who wanted to start a garden so they could grow in larger scales than their personal property would allow and they were willing to open the garden up to their community. She met with the family to discuss the garden more in detail and quickly realized that the family wanted to organize the garden's leadership structure in a top-down approach. Finlayson worked with the family to come up with a design that would be welcoming to the community as well as acceptable to the family. The result of this collaboration was a co-operative model that no other gardens used, but it worked for this community.[75]

Becoming the go-to organization for community gardens helped Wasatch Community Gardens build its own brand recognition and increase its reputation, but also resulted in a surge of growth in other programing and outreach areas:

The youth program continued to grow – Wasatch Community Gardens held classes during the summer and after-school, and began to offer a summer camps in 2011 program that were fee for service to allow families not participating in after school programs with social service agencies to get their children into the garden. They piloted an intensive school project, but determined they did not have the capacity to carry the project on; however, through this pilot project they created a curriculum, which they shared with school programs and organizations that focused on youth.[76]

The Wasatch Community Gardens workshops on growing organically in Salt Lake City exploded as well. The workshop topics evolved through community requests and they ranged from the basics such as organic gardening, composting, water conversation, saving seeds, bean drying, and garlic growing, and specialized workshops including beekeeping, rainwater-harvesting, value of eating locally and seasonally, double digging, and chicken keeping. Wasatch Community Gardens looked for interesting things people were doing in the community that would support their efforts of education around eating local, sustainable, and organic foods.[77, 78] They also started charging for the workshops, while offering scholarships and waived fees to those who needed it.[79]

All this growth and public exposure required Wasatch Community Gardens to optimize up their volunteerism – partially because they needed additional help but also because people wanted to get involved with the organization's mission. They organized and sustained their volunteer efforts by hiring a volunteer coordinator.

Wasatch Community Gardens began to evaluate the efficacy of their events and decided to continue only with those events that focused on the mission, had a return on the organization's investment, and connected them to the community. The fundraising gala started in 2005 called the Farmer's Formal was deemed too time intensive for staff and not mission-based while the plant sale grew, and they added the fall plant sale. They also created Tomato Days that added in the participation of local restaurants in selling culinary dishes that offered heirloom tomatoes with a portion of the proceeds benefitting Wasatch Community Gardens.[80]

During this time, the City of Salt Lake and Mayor Becker's administration was reviewing codes that would provide sustainable resources to its constituents, which included city codes for chickens, beehives, and community gardens. Wasatch Community Gardens collaborated with the City to determine the needs of the community and revise these codes so they made sense. Claire Uno, Executive Director of Wasatch Community Gardens from 2008-2012, recalls the city council meeting where chickens and beehives were the topic of the evening. "Record number of individuals showed up to the city council meeting. A few individuals disagreed with the changes primarily because of the noise, smell, and believing they were going to be a nuisance to the community, but support of changing city zoning laws to allow chickens, beehives, and community gardens by far outweighed these concerns."[81] This meeting gave birth to Tour De Coops and Chicken week. This event offered individuals a walking tour of urban chicken coops around Salt Lake City where they could learn tips on organic gardening techniques and watch chickens cluck around their pens. The first year hosted seven locations, but within a couple of years invited individuals to nearly twenty locations. The goal was to connect people to local food sources.[82]

Additionally, during Uno's tenure, the board continued to develop its professionalism. They moved away from being a working board to a governing and advising board. The infrastructure of Wasatch Community Gardens grew to include a more professional website, database, operating budget, and resources. Additionally, staff and the board continually analyzed the purpose and role that Wasatch Community Gardens played in the community. They faced the dichotomy of providing gardening resources and infrastructure to foodies and individuals who were consciously concerned about sustainable food and that of delivering inexpensive and reliable food to low-income individuals.[83]

Credit for this last substantial growth of Wasatch Community Gardens can only be given to the group vision of developing a new and innovative strategic plan coupled with the dedication and involvement from staff and board.[84]

RECOMMENDATIONS AS WASATCH COMMUNITY GARDENS MOVES FORWARD

As Wasatch Community Gardens moves forward into the next twenty-five years, there are four recommendations: First, Wasatch Community Gardens should continually have conversations with key community groups to identify the needs of these groups, how to collaborate and maximize resources, and adjust their own programs and services to meet the ever-shifting needs.

Second, Wasatch Community Gardens should continually be conscious of including diverse communities in their planning. In the research and interviews conducted for this paper, refugees and immigrants have been key players in the evolution of Wasatch Community Gardens, but continually face barriers in accessing garden space, services, and programs. Those barriers include time limitation – refugees and immigrants often work more than one job to care for their families and cannot sacrifice time to attend trainings, workshops, projects, and programs. They also lack transportation to and from the gardens. A Somali Bantu refugee interviewed for this project shared that every Saturday morning he picks up nine individuals and takes them to a community garden. He does this because of how important gardening is to these individuals in his community.[85] By keeping diverse communities in mind when planning their programs, services, and outreach, Wasatch Community Gardens will avoid exclusion of these populations.

Third, Wasatch Community Gardens should continually reassess and re-evaluate the role they play in the community and who they are as an organization. While they began their focus on providing accessibility of food to low-income individuals, more people, regardless of income, politics, religion, and education are becoming more aware of their food accessibility and consumption. This has resulted in Wasatch Community Gardens pairing down events, programs, and outreach that does not completely focused on their mission. This is a smart move as they move forward and continue to grow into the next twenty-five years.

Finally, Wasatch Community Gardens should continually dream large. No one ever dreamed about having a bathroom at the Grateful Tomato Garden, but that changed with the greenhouse. Who would ever think that a bathroom was such a beacon of hope, but the Grateful Tomato Garden's bathroom demonstrates anything is possible.

CONCLUSION: WASATCH COMMUNITY GARDENS IS IMPORTANT

Nini Rich summarized the organization best:

> Wasatch Community Gardens' staff and board held a common belief in grassroots work and everyone on the board was a gardener. Everyone believed and knew about nurturing the soil. It was not a group that believed in putting Miracle Grow on something to make it flashy with lots of flowers. It was a group that understood you needed to work the soil to send the roots down and to build the soil. And I think that is why Wasatch Community Gardens is still going today. It was a scrappy group and we really did work on sending the roots down deep.[86]

As a scrappy, grassroots, sacrificing, and organic organization, they certainly have roots down deep in the community, creating a noticeable and substantial public benefit for Salt Lake County. Wasatch Community Gardens empowers individuals regarding their food choices, accessibility, and consumption

patterns. They raise awareness that food does not just come from a grocery store, but from the ground, and in connecting us to the ground, we are creating sustainable solutions for food production and accessibility for the future. Wasatch Community Gardens supports diversity and integration of all communities. They bring people from various countries and cultures together to learn from one another. People from other countries, alongside their native-born neighbors connecting with the land is a powerful reciprocal experience. They foster leaders within the community through the Youth Gardening Program and the creation of community network gardens. They provide youth with hope for the future, if even long enough to see the seeds they plant grow.

Wasatch Community Gardens is socially conscious and responsible as a 501(c)(3) organization whose sole purpose has been to deliver services and programs that meets the needs of the community.[87] Throughout the last twenty-five years, the needs of the community has shifted, which often happens, and while they have lost gardens and gained permanent green space, ended their beloved fish co-op, changed their name and mission statement, and made necessary and progressive internal changes, their community has always been at the heart of these changes. Miraculously, they kept their doors open because they have embraced being scrappy, grassroots, sacrificing, and organic. In return, people of all ages and income are empowered to grow and eat healthy, organic, and local food.

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