



All People's Church garden educator Susan Holty picks collard greens at a garden stand at the corner of North 2nd and West Clarke streets in Milwaukee. The stand offers free produce grown on-site as well as donated food items. MARK HOFFMAN / MILWAUKEE JOURNAL SENTINEL

Urban farms in Harambee became a vital food option

Black and Latinx neighborhoods already limited in healthy options hit hardest by empty shelves during disruption from pandemic

La Risa R. Lynch

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel
USA TODAY NETWORK - WISCONSIN

When COVID-19 began developing last year, Victory Garden Initiative, an urban farm in the Harambee neighborhood, pivoted.

The 1½-acre farm nestled between Concordia Avenue and Townsend Street went from being for members only to allowing access to anyone who wants fresh vegetables that are grown on the site.

It has operated as a community supported agriculture farm since 2017 when the initiative acquired the land. People pay a yearly fee to receive a share or box of the farm's harvest.

"We pivoted on that with COVID and decided to give it to our neighbors," said Michelle Dobbs, who became executive director of the 12-year-old organization in 2020. "Part of it is keeping food in the neighborhood. It didn't feel right to export the very best away from the neighborhood when people around us were hungry."

During the pandemic, Dobbs said shelves at the few stores serving Harambee went empty. And compounding the community's food access is a lack of affordable healthy food options, a plight shared by many Black neighborhoods. Corner stores that sell more liquor and canned foods, instead of fresh produce, proliferate Black and Latinx neighborhoods.

Urban gardens or farms like Victory Garden Initiative have increasingly stepped up to fill the food access void, providing fresh fruits and vegetables as the pandemic drags on. They've become pivotal in countering food insecurity.

The nonprofit Feeding America describes food insecurity as a lack of consistent access to enough food for everyone in a household to live an active and healthy life. In 2020, the projected food insecurity



Michelle Dobbs, executive director of Victory Garden Initiative gardens, at the farm nestled between Concordia and Townsend in Milwaukee. When COVID-19 hit, the farm went from a crop share model to allowing anyone who wanted or needed fresh vegetables to access food from its farm. MIKE DE SISTI / MILWAUKEE JOURNAL SENTINEL

rate for Milwaukee County is 14.9%, according to the nonprofit's Map the Meal Gap. For children, the rate is 26.6% compared with 19.9% nationally.

"Good food is a privilege," Dobbs said.

That privilege is based on whether people can afford it and have a quality grocery store in their community, she said. That is often not the case for low-income communities of color, Dobbs added.

In some cases, having a reliable car to get to a quality grocery store is also a challenge.

And in areas like Harambee, which Dobbs

See **URBAN**, Page 14A

Urban

Continued from Page 3A

described as a "food swamp," a lack of food isn't the problem. The issue is the food that's available here is more processed and less nutritious.

"The food system is flawed, and we're left out of it," she said. "But there are people who are lobbying and legislating and fighting to get that gap closed. But in the meantime, the people of the neighborhood still deserve nutritious food."

The answer for Dobbs is self-sufficiency by teaching individuals to grow food in their own backyards until the gaps in the food system are corrected. On a small piece of land, she said,

people can feed their entire family for the summer or for the year.

She is not advocating seceding from the food system, but using urban farming or "agrihood" to serve as backups.

Her organization created several services to ensure neighboring residents have access to nutritious food.

Last year, it established a farm stand, a 10-foot table filled with crops harvested from the farm where residents can choose what they want at no cost. Last weekend, the farm stand gave out 200 pounds of food, which Dobbs said was gone within a matter of hours.

The farm's crops are grown based on resident surveys and are culturally specific like collards, turnips, mustards, carrots,

beans, and corn. Residents can pick their own vegetables. They also are taught canning and preserving apples, pears, peaches, plums and raspberries that are grown in the farm's "food forest."

Since many neighborhood residents, especially senior citizens living on fixed incomes, don't eat regular meals, the organization began serving garden-inspired hot meals from its "10-go-window."

The free meals are served on Wednesdays and are prepared by a volunteer retired chef. The meals are Southern comfort dishes like chicken and waffles or oxtails and gravy. They also provide snacks for kids leaving school.

"If we are putting out hot and nutritious food, people are going to have a taste for it," she said.



Susan Holty holds a bucket of freshly picked produce from the hoop house at a garden stand at the corner of North 2nd and West Clarke streets in Milwaukee. MARK HOFFMAN / MILWAUKEE JOURNAL SENTINEL

"That might be a lever we could push in moving that needle in terms of the health disparities in our neighborhood."

"People in my neighborhood are three times more likely to die of a COVID-19 infection because of the co-morbidities. We got the high blood pres-

sure, heart disease, diabetes," Dobbs added.

Reducing those health disparities begins with access to nutritious and affordable foods, something urban farms and gardens can provide, she said.

A similar effort is being repeated nearly a mile

and a half away at an urban garden operated by All People's Church. They too operate a free farm stand three times a week stocked with items harvested from its garden as well as donated produce and dry goods from local grocery stores.

"Before Pete's (Produce) came, we were absolutely a food desert which means it is more than two miles to any grocery store where you can get fresh produce," said Susan Holty, the church's garden educator. "The exception is these mom and pop [stores] but they tend to have really old produce so the vitamins are basically not there anymore."

Located at Second and Clarke streets, the garden occupies two city lots and grows a variety of greens, beans, melons, squash, snow peas and cherry tomatoes.

The garden's goal is not only to provide fresh vegetables but introduce residents to new foods, like kiwi, eggplants or pattypan squash and the different ways to use them. She relies on generational knowledge from older residents on how to cook or use certain foods.

"When you start doing that you get a lot of them start telling you how they were raised rhubarb or eggplant or kiwi," Holty said, noting that a lot of people remember growing up on these foods.

"So, it is almost more reminding people that they have this in their histories. I don't ever want to be the white woman troubadour that comes in to fix your eating habits."

Holty said she just wants people to get comfortable with the idea of trying different foods. Since it is free, she said, it is a better gamble than paying a lot of money for something that someone may not like. The hope is to break the cycle of popping something in the microwave or pouring something from the can, especially for the younger generation, who are filling up on junk food, Holty said.

"It gives people a sense of being full but provides no nutrition," she added.

The garden's mission has evolved since it started 25 years ago with 10-12 raised beds or boxes. It now has 40 raised beds, nine accessible boxes, 2 hoop houses and a grow room. It first started to serve church members and to introduce gardening to youth so they can gain employable skills.

But in 2014, the church opened the garden to the neighborhood because they were growing more food than the congregation needed.

"We saw a need," Holty said.

That need has increased since the pandemic. Holty has reached out to local grocers to provide additional produce to meet the demand. One of their Lutheran sister churches coordinated with gardeners and smaller farmers in Oconomowoc to bring in crops to help supplement their food give-a-ways.

This year, the garden has served about 2,500 individuals, as well as providing cases of produce to two elementary schools. The farm stand on average serves about 120 families a week.

"When you garden with your family and see something go from seed to fruit, it is really exciting for children and people of all ages," Holty said. "They are much more likely to try food from their own garden than any produce that's picked way too early in order to make it to store shelves."

HOBBY LOBBY

FIND A LOCATION NEAR YOU OR SHOP ONLINE AT HOBBYLOBBY.COM
STORE HOURS: 9 A.M. - 8 P.M. • CLOSED SUNDAY
PRICES GOOD IN STORES MONDAY, OCTOBER 25 - SATURDAY, OCTOBER 30, 2021.
PRICES GOOD ONLINE MONDAY, OCTOBER 24 - SATURDAY, OCTOBER 30, 2021.
SOME ADVERTISED ITEMS NOT AVAILABLE ONLINE. SALES SUBJECT TO SUPPLY IN STOCK. ALWAYS REFER TO THE ADVERTISED ITEMS.



Glass Decor
Glass Department and craft glass containers
Does not include craft stained glass

Ceramic, Resin & Pottery Decor
Does not include "Your Price" items

Decorative Lanterns, Birdcages & Terrariums

HOME DECOR 50% OFF

FEATURING TABLE DECOR Categories Listed

Does not include Seasonal Department or items labeled Wall Decor and Gifts

Wicker Department
Decorative storage, boxes, trays, metal & cloth

Metal Table Decor
Enamel & galvanized decor
Includes Crafts Department

Decorative Table Clocks, Spheres & Globes

Lamps

Floral Containers & Vases
Ceramic, glass, pottery, resin, wood & metal
Does not include "Your Price" items

Wooden Table Decor & Plaques



Summer and items labeled The Spring Shop® are not included in Home Decor sale.

REWARD POINTS ARE DELAYED AND INCONVENIENT DISCOUNTS. WE HAVE THOUSANDS OF PRESENT-TIME DISCOUNTS EVERY WEEK.

<p>FALL DECOR, PARTY, FLORAL & CRAFTS Arrangements, bushes, wreaths, garlands, swags, stems, picks, ribbon and fabric</p> <p>50% OFF</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">Does not include floral custom designs, candy or food</p>	<p>CHRISTMAS DECOR</p> <p>50% OFF</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">Includes fabric. Does not include needle art, candy, food, light sets, light accessories or Scotch® tape</p>	<p>CHRISTMAS TREES</p> <p>50% OFF</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">12 in - 12 ft</p>
<p>CHRISTMAS FLORAL Arrangements, bushes, wreaths, garlands, swags, stems, picks and ribbon</p> <p>50% OFF</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">Does not include custom designs</p>	<p>CHRISTMAS CRAFTS</p> <p>50% OFF</p>	<p>CHRISTMAS PARTY & TABLEWARE Gift bags, sacks & boxes, gift wrap, tags & boxed cards, paper plates & napkins, bows & trims, cookie & candy tins, dishes, linens and more</p> <p>50% OFF</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">Does not include candy, food or Scotch® tape</p>
<p>WEDDING 50% OFF</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">Categories Listed</p> <p>All Items Labeled Studio His & Hers® Invitations, toasting glasses, ring pillows, bouquets and more</p> <p>Ribbon & Trims by the Roll Ribbon, bows, tulle & deco mesh in our Wedding, Floral and Fabric Departments</p>	<p>CHRISTMAS LIGHT SETS & ACCESSORIES</p> <p>25% OFF</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">Includes Mini Lights, C7, Net Lights, LED Lights and Battery Operated Light Strands</p>	<p>ALL YARN</p> <p>Every skein, brand, color and size</p> <p>30% OFF</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">Does not include thread and floss</p>
<p>WEARABLE ART</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">Always 30% off the marked price*</p> <p>30% OFF</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">Includes Youth and Adult Short-Sleeve T-Shirts, Baseball & Long Sleeve T-Shirts, Sweatshirts, Infant & Toddler T-Shirts and Creepers Does not include Citicou® brand apparel</p> <p>Bandanas 99¢ As Priced</p> <p>All Tulip Products 40% OFF</p> <p>Boas 3.99</p>	<p>BEST-SELLING BOOKS</p> <p>Bibles, Devotionals, Gift Books and Children's Books</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">ALWAYS 40% OFF - 50% OFF THE MARKED PRICE*</p>	<p>PARTY</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">Does not include Seasonal Department</p> <p>Streamers 200' Roll 99¢</p> <p>Solid Color Tissue Paper 8 00000 99¢</p> <p>24 oz Fondant 5.99 per lb</p> <p>All Paper Napkins, Cups & Plates Solids & Prints 50% OFF</p> <p>White Fondant 5 lb Vanilla 15.99</p>
<p>FRAMES 50% OFF</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">Categories Listed</p> <p>Wall Frames Poster, document and portrait frames with glass</p> <p>Shadow Boxes, Display Cases & Flag Cases</p> <p>Photo Frames Our entire selection of basic & fashion table frames and wooden photo storage</p> <p>Ready-Made Open Frames</p>	<p>CRAFTS 30% OFF</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">Categories Listed</p> <p>Candle Wax, Candle Gel, Soap Blocks & Bases</p> <p>Leather and Leather Kits Priced \$4.99 & Up</p> <p>Krylon® Spray Paint</p> <p>Mosaic Tiles, Gems, Chips & Stones</p> <p>Individual Diamond Dots® Includes open stock & sampler pack</p>	<p>ART SALE</p> <p>All Master's Touch® & Fine Touch®</p> <p>50% OFF</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">Single & Packaged Brushes, Artist Pads & Sketch Books, Art Canvas & Panels, Tube & Jar Paints, Mediums and Art Tables & Easels Does not include "Your Price" items</p>
<p>PAPER CRAFTS 40% OFF</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">Categories Listed</p> <p>The Paper Studio® & Citicou® Vinyl Single Sheet, Ruled Vinyl & Iron-On</p> <p>Sizzix®, Momenta® & Spellbinders® Die Cutting Products Does not include machines</p> <p>Tim Holtz® Products</p>	<p>JEWELRY MAKING 50% OFF</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">Categories Listed</p> <p>the jewelry Shoppe™ Findings, hair accessories, nickel free and sterling silver</p> <p>Bead Design Co.™ Bulk beads & gems in a variety of materials</p> <p>Fairy Tale™ by Bead Treasures® Pendants, charms and beads for a grown-up happily ever after</p>	<p>Master's Touch® Art Sets 50% OFF</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">Acrylic, Oil, Watercolor, Pencil & Pastel</p> <p>Super Value Pack Canvas 6x10 - 10 pack ALWAYS *Market price \$19.99 11x14 - 7 pack 12x12 - 7 pack 16x20 - 5 pack</p> <p>FABRIC</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">Categories Listed</p> <p>Scissors & Rotary Cutters Fiskars® and Singer®</p> <p>Sewology® Sewing Notions</p> <p>Home Decor Pillow Covers</p> <p>Ribbon, Trim & Tulle Spools Does not include tulle sold by the yard or Seasonal Department</p> <p>Home Decor & Apparel Trim by the Yard</p>
<p>CUSTOM FRAMES 50% OFF</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">Always 50% off the marked price* Applies to frame only. See store for details.</p> <p>Compare our prices to our competitors' prices. FREE QUOTES</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">See our Great Selection. Satisfaction Guaranteed.</p>	<p>FURNITURE</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">ALWAYS 30% OFF THE MARKED PRICE*</p>	

*Discounts provided every day; marked prices reflect general U.S. market value for similar products. No coupons or other discounts may be applied to "Your Price" items.