

BENEFITS OF COMMUNITY GARDENS IN PROMOTING FOOD SECURITY AND FOOD JUSTICE

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Introduction

Community gardening is a micro level approach that aims to reduce food insecurity, susceptibility to diet-related diseases, and environmental impacts. The local level intervention addresses these issues by providing an accessible space for low income Canadian households to grow whole foods that are beneficial to physical health and the environment (Egli et al., 2016).

Food insecurity is a common issue among low income individuals across Canada who face health inequities as a result of unreliable and inadequate access to nutritious and high quality foods (Government of Canada, 2020). Health inequities can be defined as the systematic differences in health status resulting from the social conditions that an individual grows, lives, works, and ages in (WHO, 2018). The disparities in health can be attributable to low income and financial difficulties which influence the type of foods that are available to them.

Consequently, these individuals are more prone to diet-related conditions such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, hypertension, and nutrient deficiencies (Li et al., 2018). Essentially, the consumption of unhealthy and highly processed foods can lead to the development of diseases, exacerbate existing conditions and increase the risk of mortality (Li et al., 2018).

Introduction

Another issue that community gardens aim to tackle is climate change and environmental degradation (Mrówczyńska-Kamińska et al., 2021). To be specific, food production facilities and transportation vehicles emit greenhouse gases and fossil fuels that contribute to air pollution particularly within urban areas where most low-income individuals tend to reside (Mrówczyńska-Kamińska et al., 2021).

Unfortunately, air pollution has negative implications on physical and mental health. Specifically, it can exacerbate pre-existing conditions and lead to the development of respiratory illness, cardiovascular disease, anxiety and depression (Costa et al., 2020). However, community gardens seek to address these issues pertaining to food justice and health equity by providing equitable access to nutritious foods for low-income individuals.

Essentially, community gardening takes an environmentally friendly and sustainable approach to combat health disparities for marginalized populations. This photo essay showcases how community gardening is an effective approach in mitigating food insecurity among Canadians.

Food Insecurity

A local resident harvesting fresh and nutritious vegetables from plants and vines in a community garden located in Scarborough, Ontario. The purpose of community gardens is to mitigate issues pertaining to food insecurity, susceptibility to diet-related diseases and environmental impacts.

These images illustrate how community gardens can help provide low income households with an equal opportunity to access healthy foods thereby diminishing food insecurity.

Approximately four million Canadians experience food insecurity which significantly impacts their physical and mental health (Ke & Ford-Jones, 2015). However, the implementation of community gardens is a beneficial tool in promoting health equity and food justice since it provides low income individuals with fair access to fresh fruits and vegetables on a daily basis.



(Benedict Anton, 2021)



(Benedict Anton, 2021)



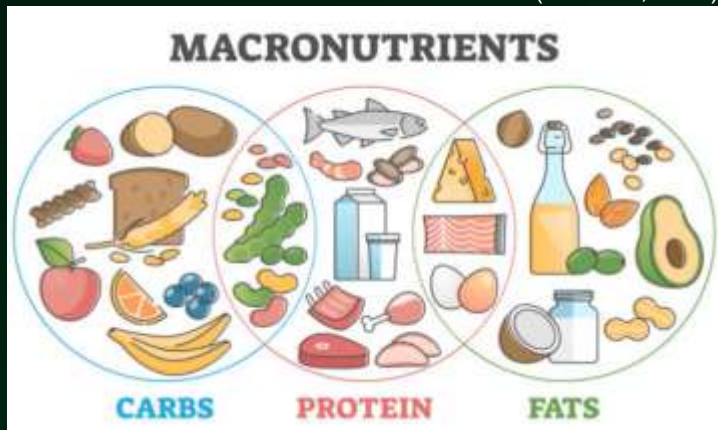
(Benedict Anton, 2021)



Shutterstock



(Stevens, 2020)



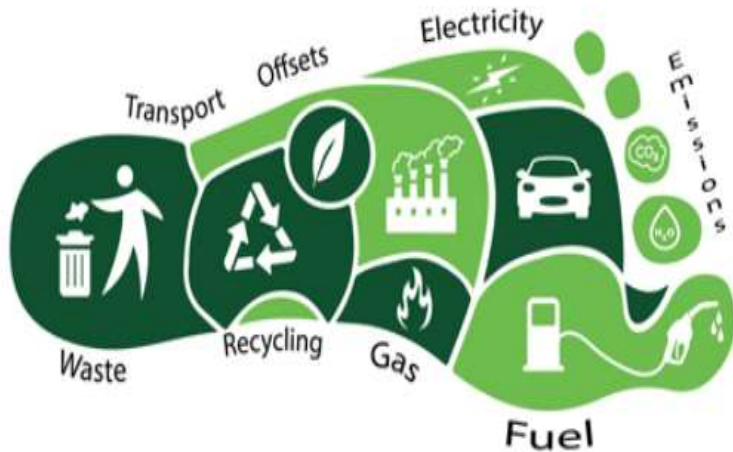
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Increased Susceptibility to Diet-related Diseases

A series of images depicting diet-related conditions including cardiovascular disease and diabetes which are prevalent among individuals who consume foods that lack essential nutrients. Many low income individuals have financial difficulties that prevent them from purchasing nutritious foods. As a result, they opt for processed foods that are inexpensive and high in fat and cholesterol.

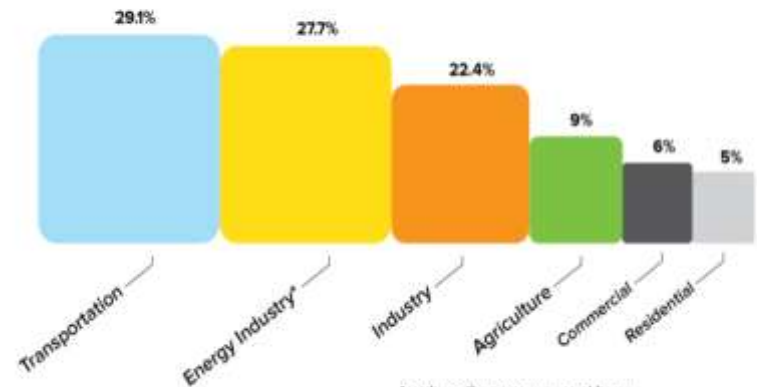
Consequently, such diets can increase the risk of developing cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and hypertension thereby leading to mortality (Statistics Canada, 2020). The significance of these images is that it portrays the importance of community gardening in mitigating diet-related non-communicable diseases by providing access to nutritious foods that are vital in maintaining adequate physical and mental health.

What are the environmental impacts of food transport vehicles and food production facilities? How do community gardens reduce the carbon footprint on a global scale?



(EcoMatcher, 2019)

Greenhouse Gas Emissions by Sector

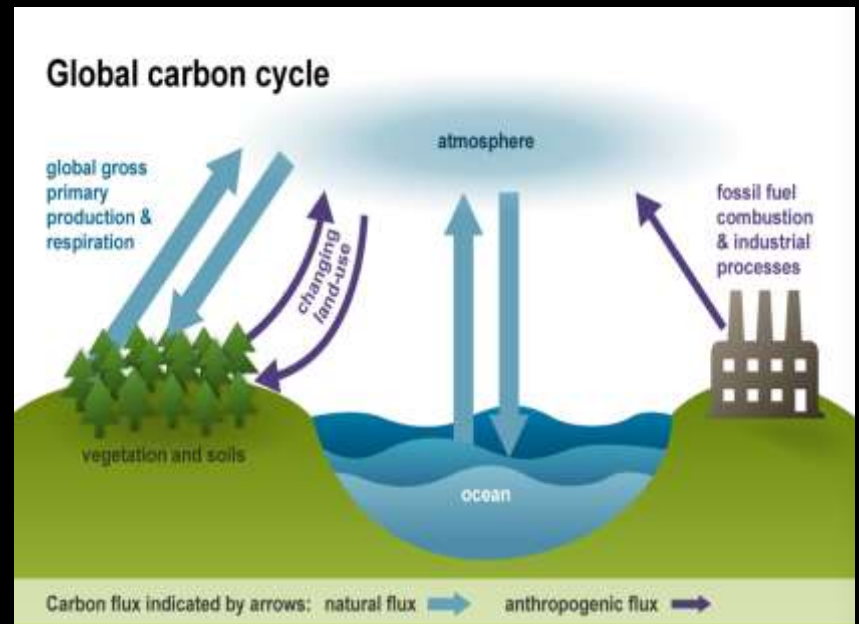


Source: US EPA Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Sinks: 1990-2017 (2019)

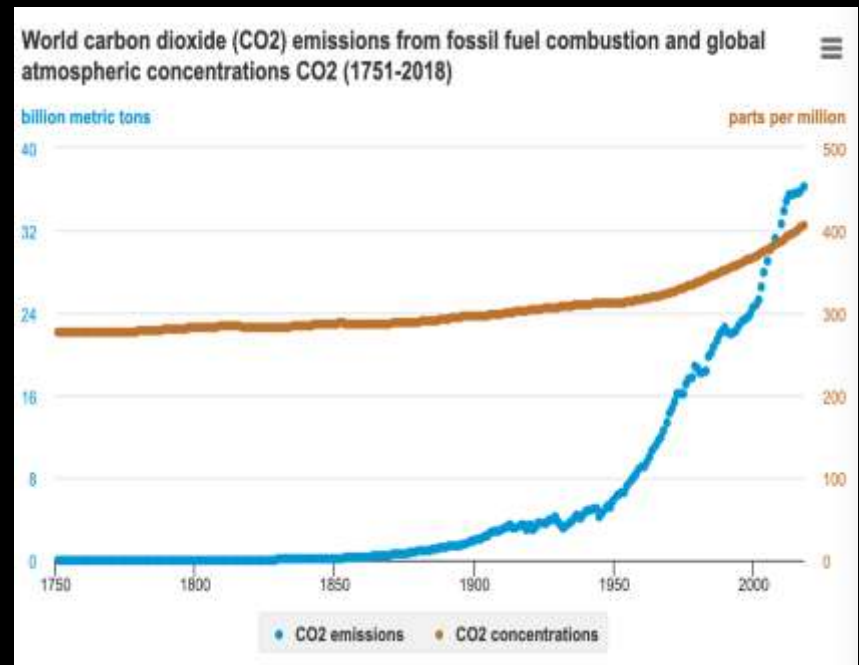
(Lund, 2020)

Environmental Impacts

A set of images highlighting the impact of food production facilities and food transport vehicles on climate change. The images are significant since it demonstrates the amount of greenhouses gases being emitted within urban regions which include carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide, and sulfur dioxide (Chen et al., 2007). These emissions are potent and can have severe consequences on physical and mental health among low income households (Government of Canada, 2021). The most common impacts on climate change include air pollution which is responsible for approximately 15,400 deaths per year across Canada (Government of Canada, 2021). Not only is air pollution deadly but it can also lead to the development of chronic diseases and exacerbate depression and anxiety (Costa et al., 2019). However, community gardens can help decrease greenhouse gas emissions and contribute to positive changes within the environment. Essentially, by limiting the use of vehicles to transport food and grow perishable foods locally, it can help to reduce the carbon footprint from food production facilities and transportation vehicles.



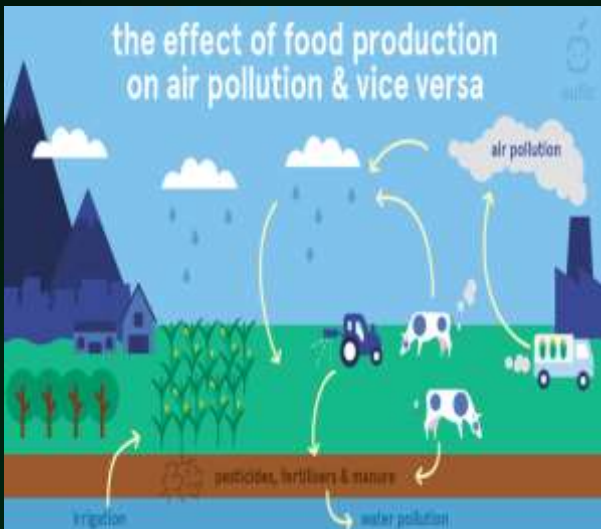
(EIA, 2020)



(EIA, 2020)

Conclusion

To conclude, community gardening is a beneficial tool to mitigate the detrimental consequences of food insecurity, diet-related diseases and environmental impacts. Evidently, these issues are known to exacerbate mental and physical health which is why it is imperative to identify effective solutions that can be implemented at a national and global scale. Importantly, community gardening promotes food justice and advances health equity by providing fair and equal opportunities to disadvantaged groups with regards to accessing fresh and nutritious foods.



(European Food Information Council, 2020)



(Michigan State University, 2015)



(Farm Project)

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