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### Cherry Hill Urban Community Garden

The Cherry Hill Urban Community Garden is a beautiful community space dedicated to promoting sustainable urban agriculture and improving access to healthy, fresh food in the Cherry Hill area in Baltimore, MD. The garden is built on over an acre of land and is committed to developing models of food production that lead to improved access to healthy, tasty, and affordable food. Cherry Hill Urban Community Garden holds a strong belief that “healthy, affordable food is a basic right,” and this innovative space has set an example for urban sustainability efforts throughout the city. For this case study, Cherry Hill Urban Community Garden was directly contacted via email with questions regarding the garden’s mission, operations, and impact.

In 2010, 73-year-old Juanita Ewell decided to start a garden with the goal of providing a solution to the significant need for fresh, healthy food across Baltimore. At the time, 20% of Baltimore City residents lived in a food desert, defined as an area with little access to nutritious food. The Cherry Hill neighborhood is located in a food desert, and one neighborhood resident was tired of seeing her community suffer from the consequences of inadequate access to healthy food. Ewell’s goal was always to “save the community.” Her vision has since flourished into a multifaceted project that helps address food scarcity and uplifts the community’s spirits. She purchased a 1.5-acre site on unused city property leased from the Baltimore Housing Authority (BHA) and converted the abandoned lot into a community space where fresh produce was grown

and sold to neighborhood residents. Additionally, the garden was a hub for teaching the community to “Eat Health, Live Healthy.”

The mission of the Cherry Hill Eat Healthy Live Healthy Urban Garden is to provide Cherry Hill residents with easy access to fresh produce at affordable prices. In addition to growing fresh produce, the organization hosts a variety of programs regarding urban agriculture and healthy eating, promotes health and fitness, creates opportunities for youth, and fosters pride in Cherry Hill. These programs encourage members of the community to adopt healthier lifestyles by empowering residents to make nutritious choices. Overall, the organization helps to strengthen community bonds and contributes to the overall health and well-being of Cherry Hill’s residents.

The garden is operated by a small team of staff members and assisted by community volunteers. Cherry Hill Urban Community Garden greatly relies on the help of volunteers and local organizations such as schools, churches, and the city government. The staff manages the garden on a macro level, doing day-to-day operations, organizing events, and overseeing maintenance of the garden. Meanwhile, volunteers help on the micro level by planting, harvesting, and upkeeping crops. Since 2010, the growing space has expanded to twenty-four raised beds, sixteen 50-foot rows, one high tunnel, five mobility boxes, and a sensory herb garden. Today, over 4,000 square feet of land is used for intensive vegetable production, yielding a wide variety of crops all year, including carrots, beets, radishes, tomatoes, and apples. The high tunnel allows for extended growing seasons, ensuring fresh produce is available even during the off-season.

Cherry Hill Urban Community Garden is funded by a mix of grants, donations, and community contributions. The garden receives support from local businesses, foundations,

and government programs focused on urban agriculture and food security. Additionally, the staff holds fundraising events and accepts donations from individuals and organizations who believe in their mission. In addition to raising capital for funding the garden's operations, these fundraising events engage the community and raise awareness about the garden. Since 2010, Cherry Hill Urban Community Garden has built strong connections with local schools, nonprofits, and environmental groups, expanding its reach and resources. By diversifying its funding sources, the garden ensures resilience, allowing it to continue its mission of providing fresh produce and educational opportunities to the community.

Cherry Hill Urban Community Garden has made a tremendous impact on its local community. The garden sells its produce on-site every Saturday, helping to address food insecurity in the city of Baltimore. The garden provides local residents access to fresh, healthy food, ensuring everyone can enjoy a tasty, nutritious meal. The garden also educates residents about how they can grow their own food, which can help them become more self-sufficient. These efforts to teach self-reliance are vital in ensuring long-term food security and economic empowerment in the community. As a member of the Farm Alliance of Baltimore, Cherry Hill Urban Community Garden also sells produce at the 32nd St. Farmers Market and to wholesale customers.

In addition to selling food, the garden engages with its community by offering educational workshops and volunteer opportunities and serving as a community space, fostering a deeper connection to the land and sustainable agricultural practices. Through collaborations with local organizations, the garden not only addresses food insecurity, but also promotes environmental stewardship and healthy living.

When asked how the role of urban community gardens will evolve, Cherry Hill Urban Community Garden responded, “The role of urban community gardens will continue to grow in importance as cities look for sustainable solutions to food insecurity, environmental degradation, and social isolation... As climate change and urbanization increase, these gardens will be essential in creating resilient communities that can produce their own food and improve overall well-being.”

The most significant challenge that Cherry Hill Urban Community Garden faces is securing consistent funding. As a community-driven organization, the garden relies heavily on grants, donations, and community contributions, which can fluctuate from year to year. To address this issue, the organization consistently pursues multiple income streams by applying for grants from local government programs and environmental organizations, holding fundraising events, and partnering with local businesses. Diversifying funding sources has helped the garden maintain financial stability.

Another challenge that the garden faces is community engagement. As mentioned previously, the Cherry Hill Urban Community Garden depends on volunteers to keep the garden operational, especially during the off-season. To keep volunteers engaged year-round, Cherry Hill Urban Community Garden regularly hosts events such as educational workshops and community-building activities. The garden also communicates with its volunteers through newsletters and social media, highlighting opportunities to get involved and sharing updates on the garden’s progress. They also use social media platforms and flyers to spread the word about upcoming events, volunteer opportunities, and the benefits of participating in the garden. This has helped the garden grow its volunteer base and engage more residents in its mission.

Additionally, Cherry Hill Urban Community Garden faces environmental challenges such as weather, unpredictable rainfall, and poor soil quality, which can impact crop yield. To combat these challenges, the organization has adopted many sustainable agricultural practices. One practice is rainwater harvesting, where rainwater is collected and stored for irrigation, reducing reliance on municipal water sources and ensuring water availability during dry periods. To further enhance soil quality, Cherry Hill Urban Community Garden uses organic compost made from food scraps and plant waste.

The Cherry Hill Urban Community Garden model has promising potential for replication in other urban areas. A key factor contributing to its success is strong community engagement. Community engagement is crucial to ensuring long-term sustainability, as demonstrated by similar projects like the Michigan Urban Farming Initiative in Detroit, which successfully transformed vacant lots into urban farms through community involvement. According to the USDA, over 13.5 million Americans live in food deserts, highlighting the urgent need for solutions like urban gardens. Cherry Hill Urban Community Garden addresses food insecurity by providing access to fresh produce in food deserts, and its model could be replicated in other metropolitan areas across the nation. Lastly, Cherry Hill's reliance on diverse funding sources offers a flexible approach to resource acquisition in different cities. Overall, the Cherry Hill Urban Community Garden model, which utilizes community involvement, addresses food security and has many sources of income, makes it easily replicable and offers an impactful solution for other cities. #BmoreFoodJust

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