

Project Name: Operation Grow Food Sovereignty

Big Idea: Food Desert Oasis

Essential Question: How do we help members of our community to gain access to healthy, organic fresh produce, while educating them about the environment?

Team Members: Joselyn D., Kaison M., Xandra X., Ziona F, Danielle G., Jasion D., Fraikyn A., and Nickolas C.

Organization Name: Operation Grow Inc.

Location: East Orange, NJ USA

Engage:

What challenge does your project address? The Challenge that we are addressing is the lack of fresh, local produce in East Orange, NJ.

Why did your team select this topic or challenge? We have been learning about Food Sovereignty and how urban agriculture can be a form of Climate Action. We noticed that our community has too many junk food establishments, with insufficient places to get real food.

How is it a real world problem or concern? East Orange, NJ is a Food Desert, with only one garden in the city, that does not provide any real engagement with the larger community. This lack of Healthy Food access has a deadly impact of the health of residents in East Orange, NJ that result in chronic diseases.

Investigation:

Through text and images, tell us the story of what your team learned and discovered as part of your investigations.

We researched some of the major issues in our community and found that East Orange, NJ does not have an Environmental Commission, no Office of Sustainability, nor an active Sustainable Jersey Green Team. Based on the lack of enough supermarkets and local fresh food markets, we have correlated our findings with data about East Orange residents showing these deficits have contributed to negative health risks and illnesses.

East Orange, NJ Diet Related Health Issues and other Factors that contribute to the challenge

*There is a 35% Obesity rate in East Orange among residents, compared to an overall state average of 29% obesity in adults & limited access to nutritious food

*Over 70% of residents report eating fruits and vegetables less than 5 times per day

*These and other health statistics contribute to residents being at higher risk for chronic diseases like Diabetes and Heart Disease at a level of over 25%

Source: NJ.gov

*The median income in East Orange is \$35,523 and 14% of the population is unemployed, which negatively impacts the purchasing power for healthy food

*The demographics of East Orange out of an approximate population 79K residents are 88% Black, 10% Hispanic, less than 4% white, and less than 1% Asian

*Environmental Health impacts are poor based on elevated blood lead levels, air pollution, lack of air monitoring, poor stormwater management, and the Heat Island Effect

Action:

Our team's solution concept for the challenge we identified and actions we have taken so far to address this challenge are researching and learning about Food Sovereignty as a means of solving Food Insecurity and taking Climate Action. We have grown food in soil as well as Hydroponically and experienced learning about ways to help pollinators and help to purify the air to produce better air quality.



Action: Continued

Our Digital and technological infusion: Students plan to further use Smartphones and digital tools to document growth of plants, track harvest data, and share educational videos about Food Sovereignty, Healthy foods, Food Culture, and Environmental Stewardship. We have been growing food in soil and Hydroponically as a technological method, so we have the experience of growing, and we know the importance of solving Food Insecurity in our Food Desert. Digital Storytelling is a strategy that we will continue to use, in order to inspire others to eat healthy produce, learn about the environment, and take care of the environment