



SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY GARDEN NEEDS ASSESSMENT

April 2023

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Introduction

UC Cooperative Extension has supported school and community gardens through several different iterations over the past decade plus. This included working with various stakeholders including Marin Municipal Water District on an irrigation pilot project, overseeing regular check ins with school and community gardens including distribution of seeds and starts, and ongoing coordination with the UCCE Master Gardeners. The most recent 2022-2023 focus during the pandemic linked to some grant funding to help leverage sites to grow food for those in need and focused on specific assessment projects and collective impact initiatives. This included the “Captain Planet” grant funded project that paid workers to grow food in the summer in school gardens and donate the produce to those in need. The Master Gardeners also came together on a “Grow and Extra Row” campaign to help motivate home and community gardeners to grow extra food for those in need. “Grow and Extra Row” Gardeners grew plant starts and distributed them to sites around the county then supported broader food donations of the resulting fresh local produce. Coming out of the pandemic and into a Measure A potential funding opportunity for school and community gardens, the UCCE team supported a survey and review of specific community needs. This complements the public working sessions held by the Department of Parks in the initial planning of the Measure A grant programming as well as ongoing collaborative work across the region.

Methodology

The garden needs assessment was conducted by UC Cooperative Extension and Innovative Health Solutions. Electronic, phone, and site visit surveys were completed between February and April 2023 to gather information on the services that gardens value from the UCCE team, their ongoing needs, and information about potential partnerships and integration opportunities across the county. There were 40 garden responses with some individuals submitting a single response for multiple sites and others submitting multiple responses to provide independent data for each of their sites. Because there are multiple parties involved in some gardens, there were a few sites with information from more than one respondent.

Garden Update Survey

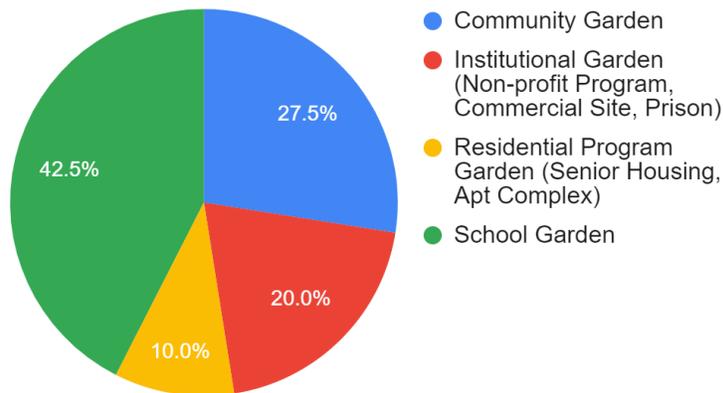
The survey was sent using a google survey form to an email mailing list of 179 individuals who represent contacts that the UCCE Master Gardener team has identified as connection points for the 151 gardens in the community. UCCE also promoted the survey through their social media accounts. There were 40 total responses, 30 of them came in through the initial request for completion and the other 10 were gathered in direct interviews. The responses represent 50 sites, a 33% response rate.

The survey team conducted 5 site visits to gather additional information and discussion on several of the early survey responses that represented large sites with broader community potential. The site visits were done to help better understand both the interests of the larger sites as well as the services those sites currently provide. In addition to the site surveys and in depth interviews, the team participated in the initial Measure A community meetings, Marin

Food Policy Council, the HEAL Collaborative (Healthy Eating, Active Living), and the West Marin Food Systems Group. Garden needs and insights are often mentioned in these additional discussion forums so while the survey stands alone as a research tool, some of the recommendations in the report branch off from other discussions happening around the community about school and community gardens.

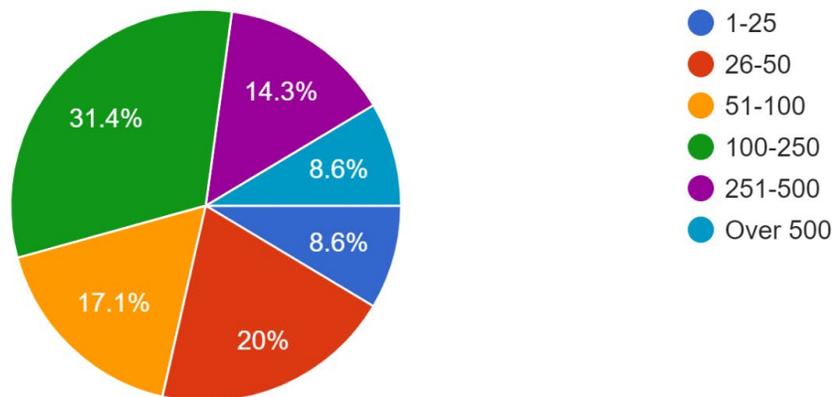
The 40 completed surveys included insights from **34 respondents** with updated information on a total of **50 garden sites** that serve approximately **6,755 community members** interacting with the garden sites. Schools with their larger population and ability to engage with numerous individuals onsite reach the largest number of community members. Residential and institutional sites provide a much valued local opportunity for residents and program participants (many of whom have limited ability to get out in nature otherwise) to interact in a natural garden setting. There are also several sites, mostly at the institutional level that provide targeted food production for specific community members in need.

Which type of garden are you associated with?



Approximately how many individuals does your garden serve each year?
(Gardeners as well as event attendees or visitors who enjoy the garden)

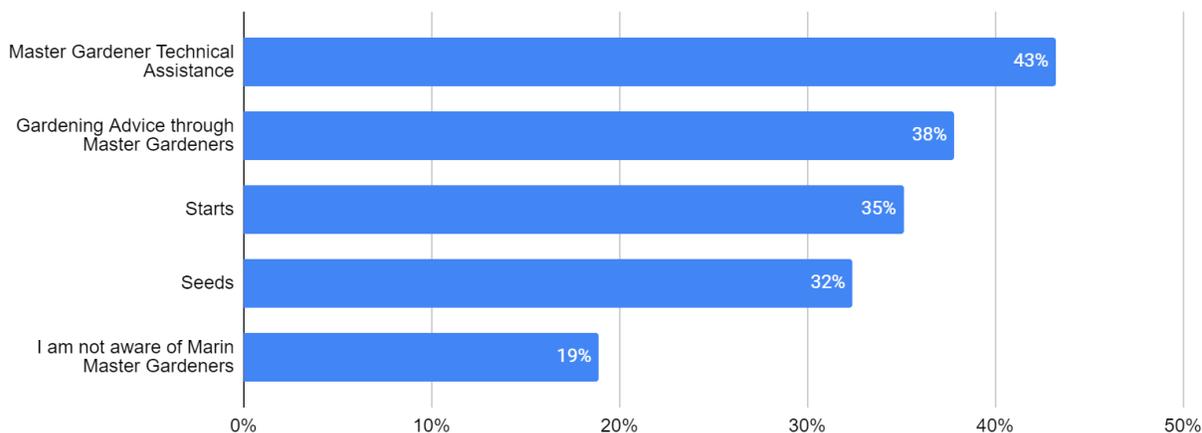
35 responses



Support from UCCE Master Gardeners or Other Follow Ups

UCCE Master Gardeners have provided not only starts and seeds to gardens, but also technical support and guidance.

Have you received support or resources from Marin Master Gardeners or UCCE Marin in the last three years?



Some specific support that participants mentioned as being particularly valuable include:

- Pruning classes as well as annual pruning support from the pruning guild
- Classes that Master Gardeners provided to support teachers at schools (supported through Marin Child Care Council for pre schools and other avenues for K-12 teachers)
- Training session from Sanzuma (not part of the Master Gardeners' offering, but a valued community program that in 2021-2022 was funded through a California Department of Food and Agriculture Grant)

Plant donations have been made available to gardens from individual master gardeners through 'Grow an Extra Row' (a pilot program with Marin Master Gardeners that ran during the pandemic), generous retail garden stores, Indian Valley Organic Farm, and numerous other community organizations. During survey interviews, it was noted that some of the key players who have supplies they can donate are not sure who best to contact to provide plants. The Master Gardeners School and Community Garden committee can help facilitate these connections and they maintain a contact database for all garden sites.

One of the biggest challenges with maintaining the connections between a wide set of garden sites and the resource teams is that both sides of the connection often face personnel transitions, rely on volunteers, and may not be able to effectively pass along resource linkages over time. This is evident in the relatively large number of individuals who responded to the survey who indicated they were not aware of the Master Gardeners. Since the survey received responses from a subset of gardens, we can infer that many other individuals are not aware of the resources or opportunities to connect. Past efforts through the UCCE team with dedicated staff supporting collaboration across sites have enabled ongoing tracking and coordination and may be an added resource to consider reactivating for the future. This level of ongoing

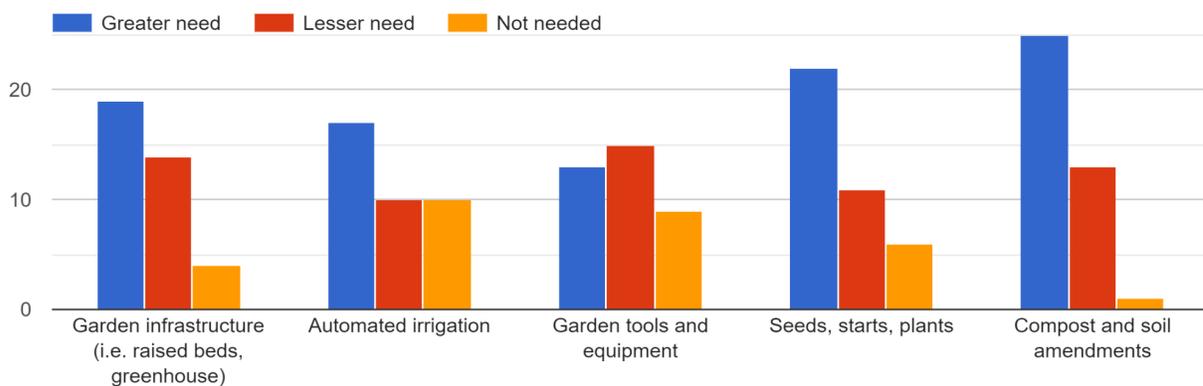
relationship support is necessary to create robust connections and is often more than what volunteer Master Gardeners can take on.

Needs

One of the primary goals of this survey was to assess a variety of garden needs to understand what the community is seeking around school and community gardens. Each participant was asked to rank the relative need in each of four categories. Descriptions of the recommendations that result from the insights follow each of the results graphs.

Which of the following do you see as a need for your site?

PHYSICAL RESOURCES



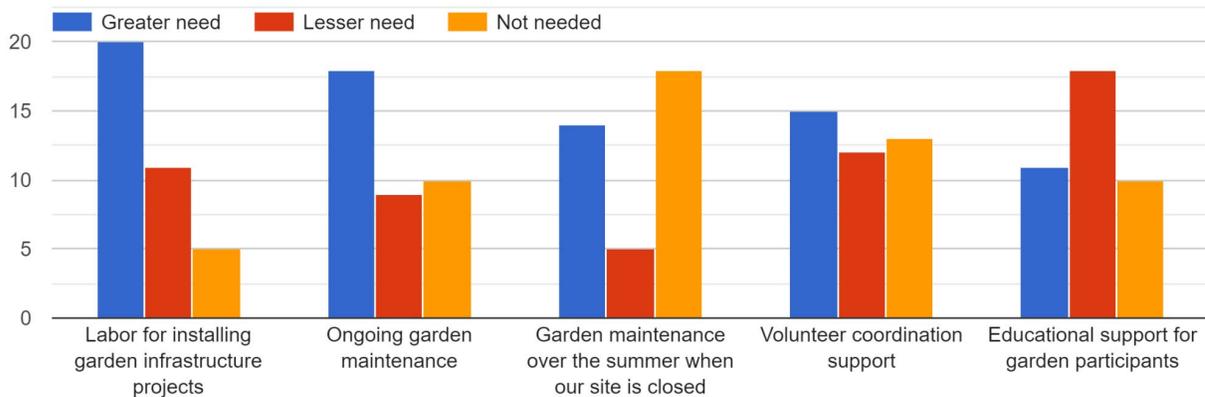
Physical resources: Compost is a relatively easy but necessary item that could be coordinated across the county if various sites were to be provided with a load (or partial load as part of a local route) of quality locally created compost. With growing SB1383 requirements to increase active local green waste composting, this could be a good opportunity to provide a much needed input and share information about community efforts. Using the model of “chipper days” that create a community resource in an efficiently scheduled process, a compost delivery could be offered to sites across the county in a way to facilitate a maximum sharing and use of compost on school and community gardens. This may be a relatively low cost option for supporting sites with Measure A or other funds and could provide a valuable educational opportunity.

Gardens value receiving seeds and starts but the coordination of that relies heavily on volunteer support from the Master Gardeners to help connect individuals with resources. At times this has Master Gardeners making multiple site visits and carting plants and seeds around the county. The Master Gardeners have also planned pick up events to coincide with other community meetings. The master gardeners can provide the seed/start connection linkage, but in some cases the providers of plant starts are not sure how to distribute products that are left over so need to have a stronger ability to get a list of contacts or publish pick up opportunities. Growers such as Indian Valley Organic Farm and a number of non-profit or single event plant sales grow an excess of starts and have historically been very generous about donating extras to residential, school, and community gardens. These efforts of often fundraisers and growers are

generally maxed out on labor and space to expand their plantings so only make donations of unsold starts if their plants do not sell and then need to be planted. There could be a more centralized location that is paid to grow for school and community gardens that might help smooth the transfer process. Of particular note, many recipients report that there is often an overabundance of tomato starts and they would often like other plants besides tomatoes. Several sites such as the Homeward Bound farm are definitely in need of start support, although with an added greenhouse they could produce their own (and perhaps more to share). Master Gardeners offered materials (seeds, heat mats, containers) for interested volunteers to start seeds for community sharing as part of their Grow and Extra Row campaign and educated volunteers on how to time and optimize plant growth.

In 2023 the Master Gardeners worked with a school site to help set up a greenhouse on the site that the school can use for their own gardens. The site is then tasked with growing an abundance of starts that the school and community garden committee will help distribute to communal gardens across the county. This is in lieu of the more complex coordination of multiple volunteers growing plants at their homes. While some local growing is likely still happening, having a centralized process means there is a hub for distribution and gathering of additional plants. The centralized resource serves the site well and creates a better process at scale. The Master Gardeners supported the greenhouse installation to help get this program started.

WORKFORCE RESOURCES

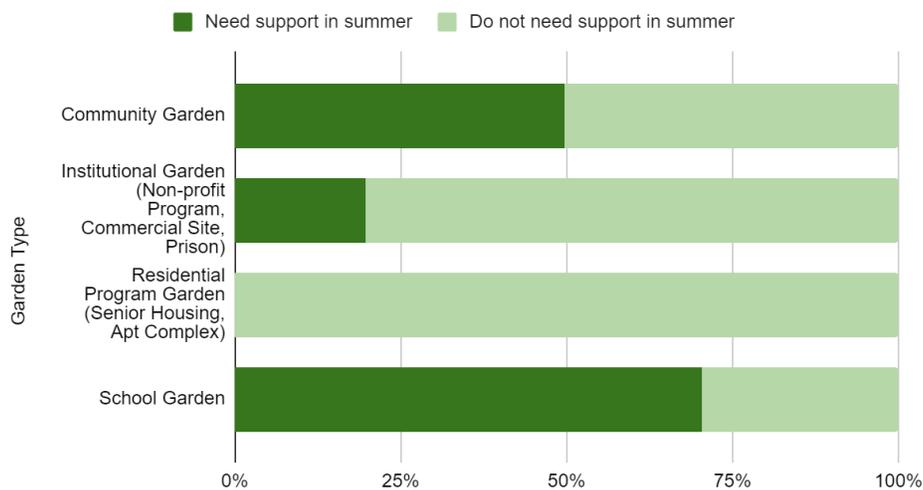


Workforce resources: A repeated commentary from individuals we spoke directly with, sites we visited, and the surveys submitted is that there is often funding for education in a garden but typically that same person is supposed to perform all garden maintenance as well. In some cases those are separately defined tasks that can be accommodated by one or more people. But more often, the maintenance and “farming” labor is under-recognized as a need and the lack of time and focus on that ends up leaving gardens in an iterative, sometimes repetitive state of boom and bust. In other cases, gardens are provided with funding to build infrastructure but then have trouble maintaining the resources to fund ongoing labor. Some gardens do have a good blend of paid site maintenance support coupled with volunteers or resident/community garden workers who maintain the garden.

With either a county wide or possibly regionally focused pooling of resources, it could be possible to support growing needs in more gardens from a central hub and spoke system. The team working on this survey helped set up such a model over the summer of 2021 through the Captain Planet Foundation Grant. That work included a comprehensive central coordination hub that helped support cross garden communication, data tracking, and reporting. Growers logged time at various garden sites in their “pod” and made donations of produce grown through direct local donations or through larger community sites like Community Action Marin’s central kitchen. The program was set up to have garden sites in each of the four areas of Marin that face the most significant levels of food insecurity and where there were gardens that the team could access in the summer. Having a central coordination resource to communicate with the various players, track impact, and keep contacts updated made this process possible.

While many residential, institutional, and community gardens don’t need special support during the summers when their residents or other community members are most active in the garden, school gardens are unique in that they definitely could be better used during the summer when they are closed and the sites would benefit upon the fall return with a garden that is in good shape and can easily be reactivated for learning opportunities. School sites notably indicate that they need more support over the summer. The Captain Planet Project directly supported that need in the summer of 2021.

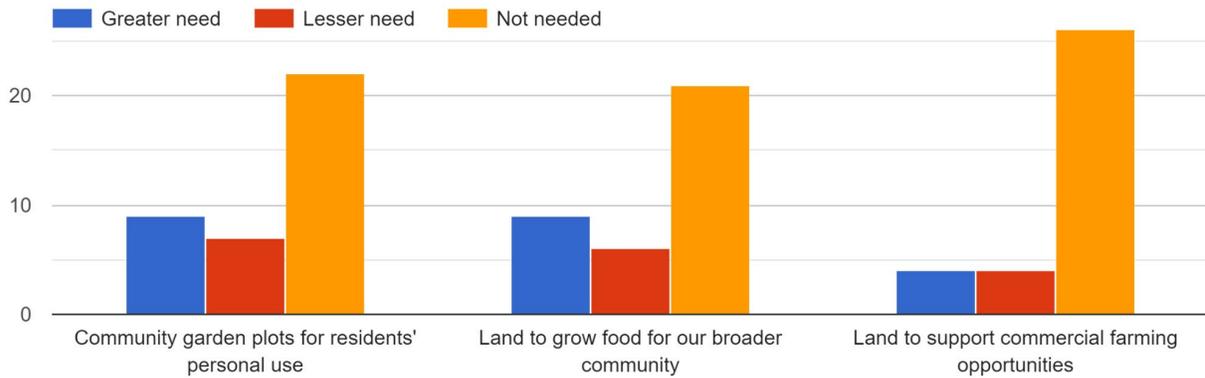
Garden Support Needs Over Summer When Sites May Be Closed



Skill development opportunities can be a good point of mutual benefit to leverage agricultural, infrastructure building, or farm workers with direct community apprenticeship opportunities. There are several existing skill development programs that operate within the county. Despite discussing overlaps with several of the players (Example: Integrated Community Services’ GEM: Garden Program, College of Marin’s Indian Valley Campus Organic Farm (IVC), and Homeward Bound’s Fresh Starts Culinary Academy) there is not an strong existing set of students or adults in training programs who appear to be seeking out farming jobs that could directly support a countywide program. This is an area that could be considered and having a connection that would link the garden needs with young adults or interns would create a positive

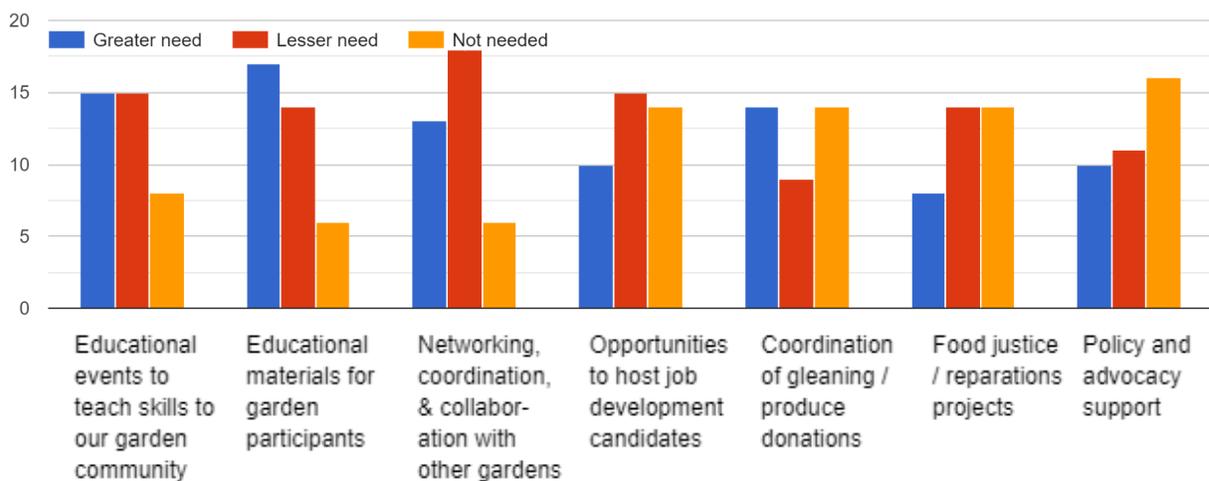
connection point and opportunity to support sites while offering job opportunities to community members. This worked during the Captain Planet summer program leveraging young adults in a few locations and others who worked school year garden jobs to provide them with some income over the summer.

LAND ACCESS



Land access: While there is a desire by some respondents for more access to land, the respondents surveyed here are not the best resources for assessing land access needs. This is because many are challenged to keep the existing space they have fully in operation. However, anecdotally we know there are individual farmers and local residents who would like to see more access to land for community growing and the need for land access should be further investigated beyond this sample population. At least two community gardens noted that during the last year or so the demand for garden plots has decreased. They presumed this may have been due to the drought or pandemic. The strongest interest for more growing space came from several residential sites where individuals live and would like to have more space to grow food that they can use to feed their families.

BROADER COMMUNITY RESOURCES



Broader community resources: It was notable that many respondents mentioned a need for additional education resources. This may be most efficiently done through a coordinated response, leveraging the master gardeners and UCCE as a distribution of materials. UCCE's Master Gardener team has materials available on their website, but they also have created some school and community garden specific program information for instance on where to donate excess produce. The materials for the garden seem to be more around direct education about specific plants and trees and how to effectively grow them at the site. Additional information should be collected to understand what kind of educational resources are desired by gardeners.

Site Specific Needs and Goals:

In addition to providing information on relative needs in our four categories, recipients were asked to provide information on specific one-off needs that they have at their garden sites:

- Homeward Bound's half-acre garden at the New Beginnings Center serves unhoused adults who receive shelter onsite and welcomes school groups and other volunteers from the broader community. They have a full-time garden manager and partner with Integrated Community Services of Marin to help cultivate the garden and serve more people in need through this unique resource. They would be very interested in educational materials to offer volunteer groups who spend a day onsite assisting in our garden and grants to help purchase seeds, starts, or bigger items, such as a new greenhouse. The greenhouse would help them grow and service their production with their own starts, which they have a hard time getting enough of and often have to purchase. They have a shade house but it is currently needing to be used for storing garden tools and equipment so it has little space and is poorly sited relative to the sun to optimize the growing of plant starts.
- A couple of respondents mentioned wanting to make sure any community housing element plans include community garden provisions to support new or expanded housing sites and units.
- Several Senior and Institutional sites noted that their residents benefit from outdoor time in the garden and having support to run site programming with them is of great benefit. In some cases, they use the garden for other programs for example therapeutic meetings and in other cases they have residents grow their own food or garden communal beds that can be provided to those unable to participate in the garden, but who are in need of and greatly value having fresh local produce. In at least one housing site in Point Reyes Station, the site manager indicated that there are numerous farm workers living in the housing as well as older community members and many are interested in growing food for their community.
- Marin City Community Services District has been working on the Intergenerational Garden with a team of residents and support from other communities, and other agencies. Their plan is to work with community partners to make sure that residents of Marin City, which is an underserved community, have access to fresh fruits and vegetables.

- There are several other community based organizations in Marin City working on building entrepreneurship opportunities around food production by and for residents.
- Indian Valley College Organic Farm has a site and programming conducive to site visits and educational events. They want to continue to be able to support the community through shared use of the farm facilities. There are several separately funded grant programs that leverage the IVC site to offer camps or other garden opportunities for students. The college is working to revise the course guide for their programming and is using the site to layer in garden experiences with many science and environmental studies classes. They also produce food that is sold through a CSA, but since the pandemic they have also prioritized getting CSA products to students at the college who are facing food insecurity through the targeted CSA boxes as well as the college's food pantry.
- Numerous schools noted that they are using garden education in after school programming or through sporadic experiences with students. They typically have an educator for a minimal amount of time but would like to expand that resource and ideally engage more students in garden experiences during school time. (Examples: Laurel Dell, Bolinas Elementary, Lagunitas School, Pre Schools supported by Marin Child Care Council, Tam Valley School, Marin City/Sausalito Schools, Venetia Valley School). Many seek curriculum, educator, and/or garden maintenance support.
- The Mill Valley Children's Garden (aka the Edna Garden) has existed as it is now for 33 years and has a long history of highs and lows. The garden is primarily dependent on parent volunteers to lead the charge in its maintenance. And this model is just not sustainable. This has led to years of neglect in between having a parent who is willing and able to run the garden. Their garden is large, almost 1/2 acre, and needs a dedicated team who can run the garden in a more streamlined way. We can be a showcase to other school gardens who have smaller spaces. We can also work well with other school gardens like MLK Academy to avoid redundancy. It has been our view that maintenance of school gardens can be grouped regionally within the county. This continuous and professional maintenance support would support the garden educators at each school to have much better outdoor learning experiences. In addition it would be wonderful to integrate school gardens within the greater community. For example, offering after school activities or summer programs. All of this requires dedicated management (labor).
- New greenhouse is of interest at San Domenico School.
- Next Step Project at Marin Juvenile Hall is seeking an expansion of their garden area to support their programming.
- The NLWN (The Novato Live Well Network) has a history of some success with gardens at local schools and has been the lead in attempts to locate and develop community gardens in the past. Recently the City Council decided to curtail the further efforts to create a garden at the City owned site across from Hill Recreation Fields. There is still community interest in creating shared garden space.
- Several local demonstration gardens provide community workshops for individuals of all ages. These can include classroom instruction as well as hands-on experience in the

garden. The Master Gardener exhibition garden at Indian Valley Campus is one such site that is a collaborative partnership between the organizations.

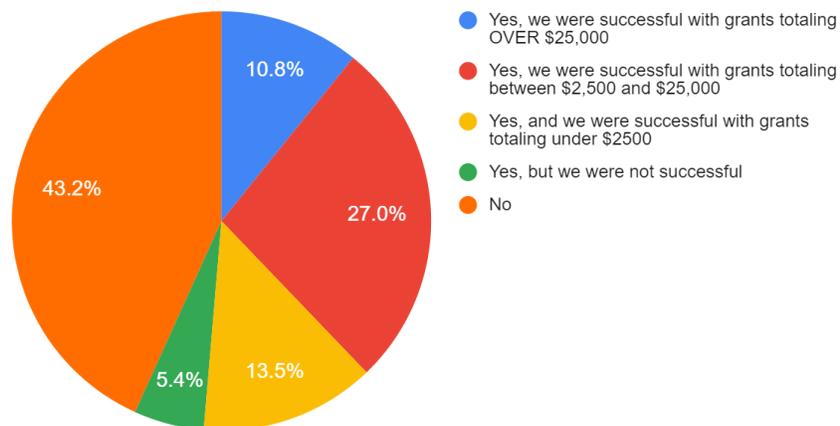
- Sanzuma would like to continue to expand their farm to school experience through educational offerings to other sites and possibly supporting a countywide resource hub. They would like to add more nutrition education for the community and to start working with more preschools

Current Garden Funding

Gardens are typically funded through a mix of donated materials, grants, and site budgets.

- Many of the school gardens have dedicated garden educators that may be paid as part of the school budget or through a PTA or other non-profit.
- Residential and institutional gardens more often have a maintenance staff assigned to handle some of the garden work (weeding and planting). These sites may have a different person running programs who, if interested in gardening and if they have residents interested as well, helps facilitate basic garden work but is less well suited to larger infrastructure projects.
- Most of the community gardens have a few annual work days to tackle group projects but require individuals to maintain their own plots.

Has your garden team actively applied for grants in the last three years?



Several of the larger grants garden sites received were for infrastructure projects, many of which are still in use, but some of which have not been as well used as they could because of a lack of ongoing funding for the labor needed to utilize the infrastructure. The sites that noted that they received the largest grants in the last three years include:

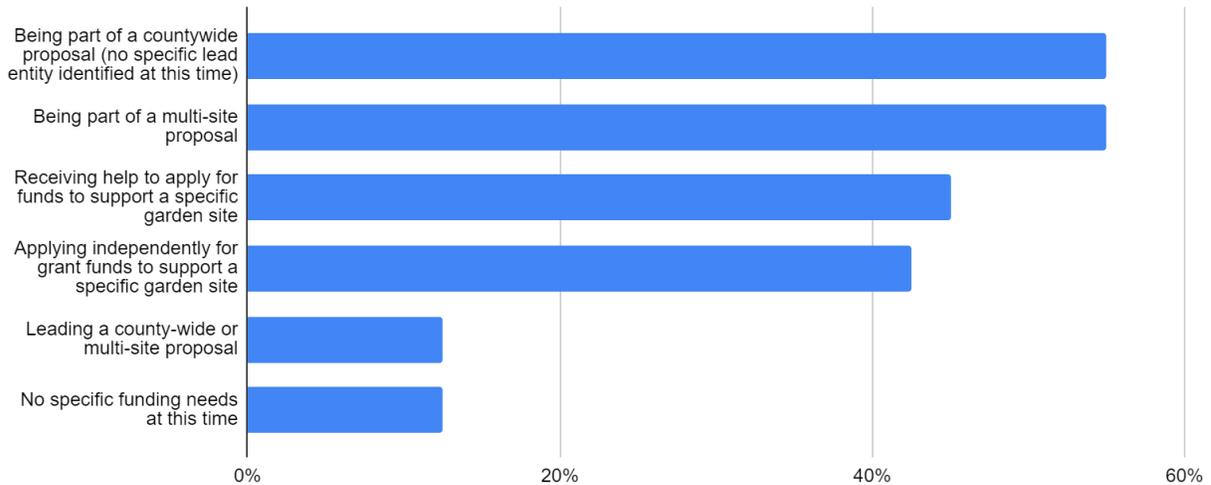
- Sanzuma provided a series of garden education and networking sessions at their farm in San Rafael for other school garden programs. Sanzuma has a follow-on grant to further some regional farm to school work in Marin in 2023 though not as directly focused on region-wide educational support. Sanzuma has also received grant funding to grow food and distribute it to COVID patients and others in need through the pandemic.

- Community Action Marin received ongoing support to leverage their production farm which grows food for their programming. They are currently working with a non-profit “Appetite for Change” to build garden beds that community members associated with their programming can use to grow food at their site. This program is getting started this spring.
- Alcohol Justice has had a strong focus in the last year on educational programming around growing and is working to help connect interested Canal residents with garden spaces and projects throughout the community. This includes collaborating with some local businesses to use and maintain space on their sites to grow food, flowers, and medicinal herbs.
- The HEAL (Healthy Eating Active Living) program has supported three community action teams (CAT) all of whom have a focus on growing food in communities and helping local food entrepreneurs identify ways to access growing and food production opportunities. The areas of focus are Marin City, San Rafael’s Canal, and West Marin. These CATs have helped identify key growing opportunities as well as food production and entrepreneurship needs and opportunities.
- The Indian Valley Campus has continued to grow food for a range of constituents at the College of Marin Organic Farm. They continue to host two demonstration gardens at the site and have worked with several local organizations on grants that are creating opportunities to get young people into the farm through focused field trips and week long camp activities centered around farm experiences. They are a resource and groups looking to engage with an active local educational farm should consider connecting with the IVC site.
- Marin City’s Intergenerational Garden has received funds to build out their site including an outdoor kitchen and additional planting beds. They have worked closely with a local church and boy scouts for volunteer labor in addition to receiving infrastructure funding.
- Numerous school gardens have received individual grants from smaller organizations or local community philanthropic panthers.
- The Captain Planet Foundation grant helped provide a coordinated set of summer growing resources to support a total of 14 garden sites. There were 13 paid part time growers involved over the course of the 2021 summer and food from the sites went to 11 food distribution sites. Many of the growers were youth or recent graduates from youth programs and were based on the local community. This model could be considered as an example arrangement to help streamline a centralized and coordinated workforce that might create a more efficient approach.

Potential Future Funding

The survey also gathered insights into how participants might want to engage with potential funding resources. The survey was meant to be used to not only connect with sites to indicate that there was future potential funding around school and community gardens, but to also gather updated contacts and interest level around a variety of support models.

Measure A Funding: Areas of Interest



Several sites indicated an interest in coordinating in a more narrow community “team” to minimize the number of players and create a stronger opportunity to work effectively (eg: Novato schools, Mill Valley Children’s Garden working with Marin City school and community gardens). In follow up conversations, some felt a full countywide operation might be too big and not support the local needs as well as smaller “pods” or “teams”.

Key community partners

Many organizations cited challenges keeping momentum with their garden programming due to limited funding for labor to support the site as well as changing volunteers over time. Many sites rely on community partners to provide technical or materials assistance, to provide volunteer events or work day support, and to provide grant funding for both ongoing needs such as compost and tools as well as larger infrastructure projects. Partners that respondents cited as important for their school and community garden includes:

Garden Specific Community Organizations

- University of California Cooperative Extension - UCCE (Marin County)
- Marin Master Gardeners (supported by UCCE) (Marin County)
- IVC College of Marin Organic Farm (Novato)
- Integrated Community Services of Marin’s GEM Program (San Rafael)
- Sanzuma (San Rafael)
- Clarence and Mattie Boatman Garden (Marin City)
- Inverness Garden Club (Inverness)
- Sausalito Beautiful (Sausalito)
- Sloat Garden Centers (Marin County)

Broader Community Organizations

COUNTYWIDE ORGANIZATIONS:

Marin County Health and Human Services (Marin County)
Marin HEAL: Healthy Eating Active Living (Marin County)
Marin Community Foundation (Marin County)
College of Marin (Marin County)
Marin Community Clinics (Marin County)
Marin Municipal Water District (Marin County)
Conservation Corps North Bay (Marin County)
Agricultural Institute of Marin (Marin County)
Boys Team Charity (Marin County)
Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts (Marin County)
Rotary Club (Marin County)
The Cultural Conservancy (Marin County)
Southern Marin Fire (chipper services) (Marin County)
Marin County Office of Education and school district contacts across Marin (Marin County)
Marin Child Care Council (Marin County)
Community Action Marin (Marin County)
Extra Food (Marin County)
San Francisco Marin Food Bank (Marin County)
MarinLink (Marin County)
Numerous local churches and community organizations (Marin County)
Innovative Health Solutions (Marin County)

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS:

Marin City Community Development Corporation (Marin City)
Sausalito Marin City Community Services District (Marin City)
Women Helping All People (Marin City)
Performing Stars of Marin (Marin City)
Rise Up! 94965 (Marin City - Sausalito)
Conscious Kitchen (Sausalito)
Tamalpais Valley School PTA (Mill Valley)
Mill Valley Community Center (Mill Valley)
Friends of the March (Mill Valley)
Next Steps Liaison Project (Mill Valley/San Rafael)
Canal Alliance (San Rafael)
Alcohol Justice (San Rafael)
Integrated Community Services GEM Garden Program (San Rafael)
Marin Academy (San Rafael)
Pickleweed Community Center (San Rafael)
The Novato Live Well Network: NLWN (Novato)
Homeward Bound (Novato)
Branson School (Ross)
West Marin School PTA (Inverness - Point Reyes Station)
West Marin Climate Action (Across West Marin)
San Geronimo Valley Community Center (San Geronimo)
Sleepy Hollow Presbyterian Church (San Anselmo)

SPAWN (Turtle Island Restoration Network) (Lagunitas)

Grant Providers and Support from Organizations Who Serve a Broader Constituency

Edible Schoolyard
School Fuel
Big Green
Numi Foundation
Wellness in Schools
Planting Justice (Oakland)
Green Thumbs
Appetite for Change
Captain Planet Foundation
California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA)

UCCE Marin School and Community Garden Resources:

The Marin Master Gardener School and Community Committee maintains a list of garden contacts and can help connect individuals to various resources as needed. They can arrange to have Master Gardeners visit and/or technically assist specific gardens to support either specific pest or growing questions or to help with future planning needs. If you need to reach the Master Gardeners who are leading the School and Community Garden Committee, please email them at: schoolandcommgardens@marinmg.org

[UCCE's school and community garden website](#) provides information on the range of gardens, ways to get support with a proposed garden, and a [map of garden sites](#).

[A Garden for Everyone: Tales of Marin's Community Gardens](#) for more information on and examples of the variety of gardens that can be found across the county.

[Grow an Extra Row](#) for those in need - information about donation sites for excess produce

The Urban Agricultural Report includes the following table on the gardens that exist across the county.



School and Community Gardens: Much of this document focuses on residential opportunities for urban agriculture, but School and Community Gardens as well as other collective projects are often a very effective and community beneficial way to implement urban agriculture. Marin County has over 150 community gardens that provide opportunities for community members as well as specific groups (school sites, faith-based sites, etc.) to grow collaboratively. Please see the UCCE publication on [A Garden for Everyone: Tales of Marin’s Community Gardens](#) for more information on and examples of the variety of gardens that can be found across the county. [UCCE’s school and community garden website](#) provides information on the range of gardens, ways to get support with a proposed garden, and a [map of garden sites](#).

Number of Community Gardens by Type	County		Cities											TOTALS
	Marin County General Residential	Marin County Mobile/Floating	Belvedere	Corte Madera (includes Greenbrae)	Fairfax	Larkspur	Mill Valley	Novato	Ross (includes Kentfield)	San Anselmo	San Rafael (SF and Other Residential)	Sausalito	Tiburon	
Existing Community Gardens	4				1	1	2			1	4			13
Demonstration Gardens	1						1	1	1	2	1		2	9
Faith-Based Gardens			1							2			1	4
Institutional Gardens	4					1	1	1			5			12
Residential (senior centers, apt complexes, or shared private sites)				1	3		2	2			5	1	1	15
School Gardens	9		1	5	5	4	9	17	3	6	25	3	4	91
TOTAL GARDENS	18		2	6	9	6	15	21	4	11	40	4	8	144

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Thank you to Innovative Health Solutions, the HEALing Collaborative and the Marin Community Foundation's Healthy Eating Active Living Older Adult Grant for their support in this ongoing collaborative community work.