

Family Food Garden – Research Feedback Report

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The research for this report was conducted as a Honours Research project based on a request for such research by Greenpop.

This summary report focusses on the findings of the study preceded by some quotes.

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Key finding:

Gardens are more than centres of food production. They are spaces that enable new ways of thinking of and being.

Connection to nature: Gardeners often reported that living in an urban landscape made them feel disconnected from nature. In this context, their gardens were frequently identified as a means to connect with nature. This reportedly improved their quality of life and sense of well-being.

- “I like digging in the soil [...] I feel that working without gloves is better because you can feel nature. I do like seeing the soil, it shows that nature is a true thing, a beautiful thing.” – Dorina
- “While digging in the soil I feel that I am connected with nature, the fact that I am bringing life to the soil for new crop veggies and flowers and so on.” – Dorina
- “We have a small place and we have so many people [...] so now with that garden I'm reconnecting [with nature].” – Norma
- “I don't know how to describe it, I can say everything around [gardening in] nature feel so fresh, the smell, the air is amazing, [it is also] a stress-free place to be around.” – Norma
- “The garden and soil care are a way for me to connect with nature [...] I don't think you can find peace and quiet anywhere else. It is there that you can reflect on your life.” – Val
- “I have come to care more about nature. You see there's no greenery [in my neighbourhood]. The garden gives you fresh air. it takes all the toxins away because I mean the toxin air feed off - and they gave us the good air. But the greenery gives you more than oxygen, it gives life.” – Warren

Connection to passion: While gardening was often cited as a way to save money and supplement household budgets, it was also described with a passion that extended beyond its utility. This passion improved the quality of life and was deeply meaningful to the participants. The garden and the labour that was required to maintain it was frequently described as a pleasurable activity.

- “My dream space would be more green.” – Rose
- “I feel pure excitement it's so exciting to see that new growth... And you can't wait for it to grow fast. I also feel like my plants take care of me. They add to my joy and excitement.” Val
- “If I have a piece of land in the future, I would create a garden area- I love, love, love it. A piece that I can eat from so I can feed off my land.” – Warren
- “It's not like work because it's doing something you love.” – Norma
- “My dream is to become a farmer.” – Norma
- “I can eat fresh vegetables from my own garden and I made it with my own hands and that makes me very proud.” – Phumeza
- “My green fingers make me feel complete.” – Dorina
- “I care more. Because with my time I spend thinking about my garden. Because when I open my eyes the first thing that I do is to go check - so that connection and that care [...] is a lot.” – Norma
- “It means a lot [to make my own food]. I can do something someday I can do something from my hands - from my head and the heart. When you are doing something, you want the results so I get very happy when I harvest because I think to myself this is me right here. I am in a harvest.” – Rose

Connection to people/self: Gardens connected gardeners to other people. For example, this involved sharing vegetables with neighbours who needed fresh produce, trading vegetables/soils/plants with other gardeners in their surrounding areas or gardening

with family members. In this sense, gardening helped build social ties and nurture a deeper sense of community and connection.



- “I would like to have a bigger garden. I want to be able to give to more people.” – Dorina
- “I can put one seed and I get something for the whole family.” – Rose
- “I am actually sad that I didn't start vegetable gardening before. Because it is so much more rewarding because you can harvest your own vegetables, you can eat your own vegetables, you can share with your friends and family those vegetables.” – Val
- “Gardening connects me with my family, especially those who are not here with me. When I cook the food from my garden, I feel close to them.” – Norma [Context: Norma’s parents are farmers].

Connection to innovation: Although gardeners learnt a lot from the program, I found that the gardeners have used the gardening program as inspiration and work outside of the information the lessons provided. While some of this was misinformation, my observations suggest that this external research was often meaningful and useful. It is also suggests that gardeners will continue to research and learn after the program is complete.

- “I learn a lot... I learn that you don't have to have a big space if you want to plant something if you have a garden - as long as you have something to plant it on. You can plant in whatever you want even an old bag or an old shoe or container. Anything you think that you can't use anymore but you can still use it to make your garden.”– Phumeza
- “I got the TV because I thought to myself “I really want to expand”. I could see in my mind that it would work.” – Dorina
- “Greenpop has made me want to know so much more...to learn more.” – Val
- “Before Greenpop I did have a little bit of passion. They have given me more passion through the knowledge.” – Phumeza
- “Greenpop... Crystal House... Urban harvest... they really help us grow veggies for ourselves and that's nice of them. I'm really appreciative. Now, we can't stop - now we can go through it on our own.” – Phumeza
- “The way I think about gardening didn't change but I've had more added because now there are things that I didn't know that I now know and things I now want to know.” – Norma



Connections to beyond-human worlds: Gardeners establish strong connections with elements in the garden as entities and companions in their own right. The majority of

my dissertation focuses on this connection which, I found, not only adds meaning to their lives but helps them rethink what it is to be human on this planet.

- “Digging in the soil is the most amazing thing to do. I don’t wear gloves at all, I feel uncomfortable with them and it feels like I’m not going to do the right thing. The smell of the soil... mmm... it is so good and I like it a lot. When I dig in the soil, I get excited and think about how it is going to produce beautiful, healthy, living plants - wow that’s so precious. As farmers, we are privileged to experience such wonderful transformations.” – Norma
- “I feel more connected. Sometimes when something is eating at you then you go into the garden then at some point, I feel relaxed again because [...] they give love. I can’t help being way more connected to their food because I put love into it.” – Phumeza
- “Early in the morning, I greet [...] and if they’re growing nice then I just praise them and say that you’re growing nice. Sometimes I even sing for them or praise with them.” – Phumeza
- “Now I have another family - my garden[...] it is part of my heart. I have to feed it; I love it and even talk with it.” – Rose
- “I am excited to start a new earthworm farm. They are like my co-conspirators.” - Val
- “I never use gloves, although the group gave us gloves, I never use them. I like to feel the soil.” – Val
- “I learn with the soil - you learn as you go.” – Warren
- “It’s my first time with earthworms and has been finding it exciting.” – Warren
- “You see the time and effort that you put into your garden is priceless but at the end of the day what you get out of the garden is much more profitable and [...] because you get to respect it. For me, it is the more effort I put into it, the more effort I put into it the more I respect it.” – Warren
- “I see them as my friends because [...] I get so relieved when I spoke to my plants, they listen to my secret things. So that’s why I’m saying, they are friends because they can listen to you.” – Norma

Connection to homegrown versus purchased: Gardeners demonstrated a strong preference for their own vegetables in comparison to store-purchased vegetables. My dissertation suggests that this is because of the intimate companionships they establish with the soil and plants.

- “Oh my goodness the lettuce was lovely. It was lovely and the taste - you can taste the difference; you can tell that it's good food.” – Dorina
- “It's straight from the garden into my mouth - it's not like farmers will do [when it is] harvested and put it in the crates and then it goes there and then it goes into a fridge for how many days before it gets to the shop. It's more personal to me. I feel more connected because it's my hands - I put effort into it, my family's put effort into it. Big farms don't even know their plants or where they end up.” – Dorina
- “You see there's a big difference between a fresh crop [and] the one you'd buy.” - Norma
- “I have started to eat more greens because of my spinach.” – Phumeza
- “Well, I always can't buy the vegetables that I would like to eat. So by planting your own, you will always have. My garden gives me more access [...] all the shops around me sell all the same types of things.” – Val
- “I feel more connected to my food. It's from me and to my pot. From my soil to my body. Those people in the farm [...] you don't even know where did it go through until it reaches your point. But from me, it's just from my soil to my pot.” – Norma

Connection to organic living: Gardeners saw their produce as healthier than chemically produced vegetables and valued their produce because it was organic and homegrown.

- “Farmers on farms use the chemicals when they spray because they have big pests like locusts. But heaven forbid that must happen because I don't want to use chemicals. I'll stick to what I can make.” – Dorina
- “Even the taste of the food from natural and chemicals is different. You can taste the difference, mine is much better in the natural way.” – Norma

- “It is very good because it is healthy [...and] there's no chemical in there. If we stick to the natural where we will eat healthier.” – Norma
- “I always buy was the cabbage and the spinach, [...] they're okay but I don't like [the taste] because now I can see the difference. I wanted to create more so that we can have enough and don't have to go to the shops anymore.” – Norma
- “So with the natural fertilizer, it's nice because you don't have to worry about washing your vegetables you can just take them from the ground, fresh. But with chemicals, you have to worry and make sure that you watch everything.” – Phumeza
- “I would rather create my own fertilizer. I think on the whole chemicals aren't good for your body so I won't use them at all. It's like you are what you eat - if you eat chemicals, you become chemicals.” – Val
- “I want to keep it organic because it's healthy and it keeps you healthy. I mean I've tried I've tasted the stuff that we've harvested [...] it was exciting.” - Warren

Primary barriers to gardening involved:

- Access to sun
- Access to good soil
- Access to effective pest prevention
- Access to adequate space
- Access to additional resources/materials to foster innovation

Observations and advice:

- Based on my observations, the program is a success. Gardeners are passionate and enthusiastic about their gardens. I believe that a number of them will continue to garden after this year of training. Saliiently, I suggest that this is because of a combination of knowledge *and* passion. This passion is especially important to foster when the gardens are so small/ not producing an income or good harvests.
- Gardeners seemed to really enjoy the home visits and Bongile's in-person praise/critiques. I highly recommend that at least one in-person checkup per

gardener/ year is carried out. Gardeners reported that this kind of encouragement and feedback was valuable and meaningful. It might be useful to also check on gardeners a couple of months after the program has finished running to document their progress / see if they need any additional support.

- I suggest that future iterations of the gardening program accommodate and encourage these other ways of relating that are growing naturally in the space (beyond food security and entrepreneurship). I do not mean that these goals should be decentered but rather that new focuses should be added and nurtured.
- The gardeners were all deeply appreciative of the program. They receive a strong network of support within the Whatsapp group. Many gardeners have actually built connections and ties with one another outside of it; the program is thus not only helping foster food security but is helping nurture a sense of gardening community.
- I am not convinced that competition is the best strategy to improve garden *enjoyment* of gardening. While it may engender good results, it does not take into account the circumstances of different gardeners. Not all gardeners have the same access to resources, time and physical ability. This means that those who have the most visibly impressive gardens might not be the best reflection of the care and passion a gardener has for their space. For example, Phumeza may not have the most flourishing garden but the hours of work she has poured into it are made more meaningful by the fact that she also maintains a full-time job and takes care of a full household. I would recommend that enjoyment and personal satisfaction – rather than competition or output – be continuously recentered as a value within the program.

This report has its limitations; only gardeners that were comfortable doing the study were included. This potentially leaves out gardeners that might be struggling in silence, not developing a gardening passion, etcetera.



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