

Connecticut College
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The East Portland Lunch Cart
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United States of America

Background: Portland, Oregon has the reputation of being a hub for sustainable food and healthy lifestyles. However, access to healthy, affordable, and culturally appropriate food is not equally distributed across all of the city's neighborhoods. East Portland is a quintessential food desert; there are fast food restaurants and car dealerships on every block but grocers and farmers markets are few and far between. The lack of access to healthy food and the knowledge of how to cook with it represent a societal injustice in which communities of lower economic status are deprived of the right to healthy lifestyles. This inequity takes a toll on the East Portland community in the form of rapidly increasing obesity, heart disease and other diet related diseases. East Portland needs programs that will provide education on healthy food acquisition, preparation and consumption.

Project Proposal: We are proposing a lunch cart to be set up in a East Portland urban garden as a method of increasing healthy food consumption. The food cart will offer healthy, culturally familiar and affordable meals and will provide instruction and educational material to community members about how to cook with healthy produce. Since many of the customers may not be able to afford meals from the cart, the meals will be sold on a “pay what you can” basis. The aim of the cart is not to raise revenue but to increase awareness about where healthy food can be grown and the fact that it can be cooked into healthy, affordable and culturally familiar meals. The meals sold from the food cart will be prepared in cooking classes that will be held once a week, the day before the food cart sells them. Eventually, the cooking classes and food cart days will be increased to twice a week. Recipe cards will be available to the customers so that, if they enjoyed the meal, they could prepare it on their own. Participants in the cooking class will take some of the food home and the rest will be distributed from the food cart the following day. The overarching goal of the cooking classes and food cart is to increase the knowledge about how to cook with healthy produce. We also aim to emphasize the fact that many of the ingredients in healthy meals can be grown in urban gardens.

About Us: As a junior, environmental studies major at Connecticut College, Azul is most interested in food justice and healthy food access issues. With experience leading the garden on campus, working on a small farm and researching food deserts in Oregon, she has developed an understanding of the initiatives that are being taken to combat food deserts and what actions have yet to be carried out. This Davis Project proposal is her perception of a necessary step in the process of bridging the gap between healthy food access and integrating healthy food consumption into a community's daily life.

During the past year and a half of being an environmental studies major, Emily has acquired knowledge about environmental and social issues related to food security and production. This, in combination, with her work experience in the campus garden, at a community farm, and in the College's Office of Sustainability, has given her a solid foundation in organic farm work, an ability to advocate plans and projects, and adeptness in both hands-on and research-based work.

Emily's contribution to this project will be both a continuation of her pursuit of sustainability, and her involvement in mitigating food deserts for better food access and community life.

Partners: The East Portland Community Center (EPCC) is located in the Lents neighborhood of East Portland and is run by the Portland Department of Parks and Recreation. It is an ideal site for the food cart because it has a kitchen space that we will use to lead the cooking classes. It also has a collection of five raised beds, near which the cart will be stationed and which will provide produce for the cooking classes. The EPCC holds summer camps, a soup kitchen for the elderly, and other community events, resulting in a high traffic of people of all ages.

Since the raised beds at the EPCC cannot provide all of the produce for the meals, the rest of the produce could be purchased from Zenger Farm, an urban farm in East Portland. By purchasing produce from Zenger Farm we are supporting an urban farm in a food desert and preparing meals that use organic and locally-sourced produce.

Timeline: The launch date for the first cooking class will be July 7th and the food cart will open on July 8th. The project process can be described based by its schedule: Wednesdays will be cooking class days in which Emily, Azul and the community member leading the class will introduce the recipe for the day and discuss the ingredients (where they came from, why they are healthy, where they could be purchased). After the food is cooked, people will pack up food to take home to their families and the rest will be sold in the food cart the following day. On Thursdays, the cart will sell the meals to the community. Eventually, we hope to hold the cooking classes and food cart days twice a week. The meals will be sold at a “pay what you can” basis so that everyone has a chance to eat a healthy lunch and learn about cooking with fresh produce. Any revenue from the cart will go towards ingredients.

The cart will be stationed in front of the raised beds from which some of the produce is secured. This fact will be communicated to the customers through the educational component of the cart with the goal being to make the link between the produce in the beds and the cooked meal. Information will be presented in pamphlets that the customers can take with them and will be displayed on a poster board next to the cart. Another component of the educational portion of the food cart are the recipe cards. The recipe cards, which will feature different a fruit or vegetable grown in the garden each week, will be taped to the to-go boxes. The front of the card will have a very simple recipe such as how to sauté eggplant in olive oil and the back of the card will have a more complex recipe such as ratatouille.

Friday through Tuesday will be days to purchase supplies, meet with the person teaching the cooking classes and creating the menu, recipe cards and pamphlets. Throughout the project, customers will be asked to take feedback surveys to improve the food cart and cooking classes.

Cause of Peace and Expected Outcomes: A peaceful neighborhood is one in which people can live in security. One aspect of security is having access to proper nourishment in order to lead long, healthy lives. Nourishment requires both access to healthy food and knowledge about how to prepare it. The cooking classes and the food cart that this project proposes aim to raise awareness about how to access and prepare healthy foods. These educational tools will entice people to prepare their own meals, a skill that has been overshadowed by fast food.