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Healthy Soils, Healthy Communities: A research and education partnership with urban gardeners

Project Summary

Urban community gardens can provide affordable, locally grown, healthy foods and many other benefits associated with urban green space, opportunities for recreation and community building activities, and reduced environmental impacts of food transport and large-scale production. However, garden soils (and urban soils in particular) can contain contaminants that may pose risks to human health, and the nature and extent of contamination in many areas remain poorly defined. In addition to this knowledge gap, gardeners and other community stakeholders have identified a need for support in considering risks associated with soil contamination and implementing strategies to reduce those risks. To help fulfill these needs, a new community-research partnership was formed to include team members from Cornell University, Cornell Cooperative Extension, the New York State Department of Health, the community gardening organization GreenThumb, and other stakeholders with interests in community gardening. This partnership aims to address community concerns through collaborative research to inform the development of education and public health action strategies. Key project activities will include: (1) Assessing soil and vegetable contaminant levels (and other properties) and human exposures through activities in urban community gardens, and evaluating the effectiveness of management strategies to mitigate associated potential health risks; (2) Translating research findings into effective education and public health action strategies to reduce exposures to soil contaminants and potential risks; (3) Identifying future research needs related to potential exposures and risks for urban gardeners; and (4) Evaluating the success of education and outreach programs in addressing community concerns and reducing exposures to soil contaminants related to urban gardening activities.

Funding Agency

National Institutes of Health / National Institutes of Environmental Health Sciences

Primary Project Team

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- Gretchen Ferenz, Veronique Lambert, and colleagues
Cornell University Cooperative Extension – New York City
- Henry Spliethoff, Lydia Marquez-Bravo, and Lisa Ribaudo
New York State Department of Health
- Edie Stone and colleagues
GreenThumb, New York City Department of Parks and Recreation
- Other collaborators and community participants from government agencies, not-for-profits, colleges and universities, gardens and gardening groups, and other interested organizations

