

## Las Vegas helping build sustainable food system

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As the world population approaches 7 billion, Earth's resources are becoming increasingly strained. Fish stocks are rapidly diminishing, forests are being cleared and converted to pasture or farmland, and climate change is exacerbating extreme weather such as drought. Traditional agricultural systems are feeling the pressure of these strains.

Providing enough food to feed a world of more than 7 billion is undoubtedly one of the greatest challenges we face this century. The U.N. Population Fund annual World Population Day, this year slated for Monday, is meant to raise awareness about issues we face with a rapidly increasing global population. Despite the challenges that a growing population presents, new and innovative solutions are emerging to build a sustainable food system, from vertical farming in a Nairobi slum to urban gardening here in Las Vegas.

Tonopah Community Garden, for example, is an urban garden in Las Vegas that provides city residents with fresh, locally-grown food. The organization works to build a community as well as a sustainable food system. Most food in Las Vegas is shipped in from out of state, but projects such as Tonopah Community Garden are encouraging residents to grow their own food here in the city.

Garden Farms of Nevada is a service that helps people start their own vegetable gardens in their backyard at home. Garden Farms provides free at-home consultations, installs the garden boxes, supplies water-saving irrigating systems, and even offers to help people maintain their garden if needed. Through these services, Garden Farms of Nevada promotes urban gardening and sustainable, home-based food production.

Halfway around the world in sub-Saharan Africa, urban gardening has already helped people become self-sufficient in food production. In Kibera, a large slum within Nairobi, Kenya, thousands of local residents have begun to literally dig themselves out of poverty by growing crops in dirt filled sacks. This kind of small-scale, "vertical" farming helped prevent mass starvation in 2008 when national electoral unrest interrupted food imports from the countryside. Mary Mutola, a farmer in Kibera, remarked "the vegetable gardens ... saved our families from starvation during the political crisis of 2008."

This is just one example of the many inspiring innovations discovered by researchers from Worldwatch Institute's Nourishing the Planet project. We traveled across 25 countries in sub-Saharan Africa over two years unearthing environmentally sustainable solutions to hunger and poverty. Research findings -- including innovations in urban agriculture -- were published in State of the World 2011: Innovations that Nourish the Planet.

Innovations in food waste reduction and management also make it possible to feed people across the planet without increasing agricultural production. According to the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization, industrialized countries waste 222 million tons of food annually. One company that is working to reduce food waste in Las Vegas is A1 Organics Nevada. A1 Organics has implemented a food waste recycling program, in which waste from some of the city's largest producers, such as restaurants, is captured and recycled into high quality compost and mulches, which are then used in landscaping.

Through food waste recycling programs and urban gardens like Tonopah Community Gardens, Las Vegas is finding ways to sustainably feed its people. Let this July 11 World Population Day event be a reminder that discovering and supporting innovations in sustainable agriculture will be key if we are to adequately feed a population of 7 billion.

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