

272. Growing community through urban agriculture: a community-university project involving senior immigrants

Immigrants represent a significant segment of the senior population in Canada but their adaptation and integration into Canadian society can be extremely difficult due to variety of economic, social and health factors. It was hypothesized that involvement in urban agriculture could assist senior immigrants in addressing some of the challenges they face. Urban agriculture is increasingly recognized for its contributions to individual and community well-being, and has also proven to be an effective way for many minority groups to become integrated into the socio-economic fabric of the cultures and countries they immigrate to. In 2007, a pilot project was launched in Edmonton, Alberta to train senior immigrants in a commercial approach to UA, known as Small Plot Intensive (SPIN) farming. This project was developed through a university-community partnership involving the Senior Association of Greater Edmonton (SAGE), the Multicultural Health Brokers Cooperative (MCHB), and members of the Faculty of Extension at the University of Alberta. Interdisciplinary and exploratory research was used to investigate the effectiveness of the project, with data derived primarily from qualitative interviews with key informants. This paper describes and evaluates the community-university engagement process that shaped this project and the strategies used to facilitate engagement and learning for senior immigrants. This research identifies the benefits and challenges of utilizing a collaborative approach in this type of initiative and explores the role of urban agriculture in growing partnerships and community.