



WEST SACRAMENTO URBAN FARM

Stewardship Profiles in California Agriculture
Environmental Leadership with Pest Management and Water Efficiency

In 2014, Sara Bernal and the Center for Land Based Learning transformed a vacant $\frac{2}{3}$ acre lot on 5th and C Streets into West Sacramento Urban Farm's first farm site. Now named the Lake Washington Farm, the site encompasses 3.5 total acres. Since 2014, West Sacramento Urban Farm has grown into a network of four major farm sites covering 6.5 acres of land and producing more than 70 different crops.

Bernal serves as the Program Manager, overseeing more than 300 volunteers each year who help with the day-to-day maintenance, planting, weeding, and harvesting of the farm sites. Each farm sells its produce on-site, welcoming community members to connect with their food and farmers. The 5th and C Street Farm alone produces 2,500 pounds of fruits and vegetables that are sold or donated within a 10 mile radius of the farm. With much of West Sacramento lacking access to local and healthy produce, the farm sites have become important community access points for local and healthy food.

PROBLEM

Farms located in urban spaces create a variety of challenges. With West Sacramento Urban Farm adhering to non-chemical pest management practices and zoning restrictions not allowing chickens to be kept in city limits, Bernal and the team needed to come up with alternative options. West Sacramento Urban Farm sites are located in urban neighborhoods and connected to city water meters, making the use of water extremely costly.

SOLUTION IMPLEMENTATION AND MANAGEMENT

Before being transformed into urban farms, many of the sites were lawns which left remnants of ever-occurring Bermuda grass. Instead of using herbicides, Bernal and the farm managers removed the Bermuda grass by hand and amended the soil with compost. To keep the grass from coming back and to improve soil quality, the farm sites also now use cover cropping systems.

To control for bugs and other pests, Bernal and the farmers take a hands on approach. They start with handpicking bugs off of the infected plants. This is a time consuming but effective practice. At the Lake Washington Farm site, Bernal removes any plants that can't be saved and recycles them at a local green waste facility. Next year, Bernal plans to plant a 350 foot hedgerow at the site to provide habitat for beneficial predators and contribute to pest management (along with other benefits).

ACHIEVEMENTS

- Self-designed drip irrigation system to decrease water use
- Integrated pest management used to control for pests and weeds without chemicals



“Start small. Make lots of contacts. Make a plan and follow through.”
-Sara Bernal

All of the West Sacramento Urban Farm sites have installed drip irrigation to increase water use efficiency. At Lake Washington Farm, Bernal built the drip irrigation herself and had the water meter installed by a local contractor. Using drip irrigation instead of sprinklers had led to significant water and cost savings. In the summer, depending on rainfall, crops are watered two times a week for about 3 hours. In the winter when rainfall is more dependable in California and temperatures cool, irrigation is used only once a week.

Bernal and the farm managers have also worked hard to retain moisture in the soil by incorporating mulch, compost, and cover crops. One of the advantages of farming in an urban area is that the farm sites are small enough to be overseen simply by walking the field. Bernal monitors moisture by sight and feel and irrigates or amends the soil accordingly.

CHALLENGES/OBSTACLES OVERCOME

In the case of both pest management and water conservation, the restrictions of operating in an urban area has proven to be challenging. Sara emphasizes that in pest management, she would love to incorporate chickens for consuming insect pests. But unfortunately, zoning laws and the city limit the amount of urban chickens and consequently she cannot use chickens as a method of pest management. And as mentioned, the West Sacramento Urban Farm operates on city water, but Sara hopes to overcome this obstacle by filing for a landscaping rate for irrigation, which would significantly reduce the expense of the cost of water. Meanwhile the drip irrigation system combined with Sara's close oversight assures efficient water use.

MEASURING SUCCESS

Although the process of bringing former lawns in an urban area into active agricultural production has been challenging at times, the results have proven worthwhile. Converting the farm sites' irrigation from sprinklers to drip irrigation was a significant undertaking, but one that Bernal takes a great deal of pride in. In addition, the success of West Sacramento Urban Farm can be seen in the impact the sites have had on the neighborhoods and communities where they're located. In only two years, each farm location has created new businesses and career opportunities for West Sacramento residents, while providing access to healthy, fresh food to community members and families.

West Sacramento Urban Farm has been acknowledged by the Council of Mayors with its Most Involved Community Achievement Award. In addition to receiving other funding and grants, West Sacramento City Farm was recently awarded with Miracle Grow's GRO1000 3 year grant.

For more information about the stewardship practices discussed in this profile, please contact Sara Bernal at (530) 383-2019 or by email to sara@landbasedlearning.org

STEWARDSHIP PRACTICES



Water Efficiency



Pest Management



PROJECT PARTNERS

- Center for Land-Based Learning
- Wells Fargo
- City of West Sacramento
- Nugget Market
- Fresh Works
- Washington Unified School District
- University of California, Davis

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2001 N Street, Suite 110, Sacramento, CA 95811 • (916) 448-1064 • www.farmland.org