

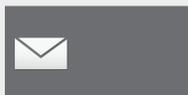
Growing Project “grows” a better community in Fort Collins



by **Madison Brandt**

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The Growing Project is a local non-profit dedicated to developing a strong and diverse local food system in Northern Colorado. Over the years, it has made impacts in the community through its educational programs, volunteer gardens and local events.

“So many Americans have forgotten what it means to work with the land and grow your own food, and community gardens are the best way to show people the challenges, reward, thrill and joy that come [from the] noble art of growing vegetables,” said Colton Pinto, a volunteer with the Growing Project and recent Colorado State University graduate.

Pinto said he got involved with the Growing Project because it blended together his interests of community development, food access and hunger issues, nutrition and social justice.

Pinto volunteers his time managing a community garden called the “Cowboy Garden.” According to Pinto, he felt it was a unique opportunity because he was given immense responsibility that caused him to quickly learn how to manage and nurture a successful garden.

“This project is an incredible way of relocalizing food production and getting organic food of the highest quality to the people who truly need the healing power of good food but can’t afford it,” Pinto said.

One such program dedicated to delivering local food to low-income populations in Fort Collins is called Urban Foods Outreach, according to the Growing Project website.

Through UFO, the Growing Project teams up with the Fort Collins Housing

Authority and Habitat for Humanity to install community gardens in low-income areas as well as provide instruction on how to efficiently run the gardens. Currently, the Growing Project maintains 14 community gardens working with the local housing authority.

Dana Guber has been the executive director of the Growing Project for over a year, but has been involved in Fort Collins food issues and projects for many years.

One of Guber’s favorite programs supported by the Growing Project is the food rescue and distribution program called Food Finders. Volunteers of Food Finders ride around the community on bikes and pick up unwanted and excess produce from local growers and distribute it to nonprofits that feed the hungry.

Guber said in 2014, Food Finders collected and donated 12,000 pounds of local food to families and individuals in need. The transportation for this program was 85 percent bicycle powered.

According to Guber, her personal philosophy in relation to her work with the Growing Project is to create a community one would want to live in.

“All of us working together, getting sunburned shoulders and dirt under our finger nails, riding miles across town with a bike trailer full of food, building a garden and sharing a meal, watching the sunset over rows of green beans and kale, that is the community that I want to live in,” Guber wrote in an email to the *Collegian*.

More information can be found at the Growing Project [website](#) and [Facebook page](#) for upcoming classes this spring. Class topics include foraging for mushrooms and native plants, canning, fermenting, gardening basics, vermiculture, natural building with cob and permaculture design.

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