Locally available produce from urban green infrastructure

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A disparity in food access exists in the United States where low-income, minority neighborhoods have significantly less access to affordable, nutritious foods compared to their higher-income, primarily white counterparts (Bublitz et al. 2019, 354). Many of these neighborhoods reside in food deserts, characterized as low-income areas where more than one-third of the population lives more than one mile from a grocery store and the poverty rate is above 20% (U.S. Department of Agriculture [USDA] 2011). Many approaches exist to reduce the presence of food deserts by either growing food in urban gardens or increasing the amount of produce to purchase within the community. The need for urban agriculture is increasing and research is demonstrating vegetable production in green infrastructure projects to be a successful option for producing food in urban areas. Our rooftop garden project has successfully produced vegetables for local distribution as well as for a mobile market. A new phase of our program is assessment of the various initiatives distributing locally grown produce to low-income communities in the broader St. Louis region. Because multiple approaches exist in the area, this project aims to compare the effectiveness of mobile produce markets and smaller stores to reach low-income households, as well as identify gaps in urban garden coverage. Working with a small group of organizations, this assessment project seeks ways to improve existing services based on community needs and to determine viable options for increasing the prevalence of locally available produce.