

Welcome to American Mosaic. I'm June Simms.

In many U.S. cities people live in neighborhoods considered "food deserts." These are areas where healthy, fresh foods are not easily available. An organization in the nation's capital is working in one neighborhood to improve its access to health foods. Milagros Ardin reports.

In Washington D.C.'s historic LeDroit Park neighborhood, finding fresh food that is not too costly can be difficult. About one-third of the neighborhood's residents live in poverty. The nearest grocery store is more than 1.5 kilometers away.

But a community farm is trying to solve the problem by providing food and education through programs on food production, healthy eating and environmental responsibility. Anita Adalja runs the farm.

"Not only they know how to grow their own food, we start from seed to harvest to weeding, composting. There are workshops on canning food preservation, beekeeping, herbalism, health and nutrition. So not only do they get to educate themselves on that process of food system, but we also distribute up to 15 pounds ((6.8 kg)) of produce per week, per family."

Since 2007, Common Good City Farm has taught more than 1,100 residents in its workshops. The farm has involved more than 2,000 school children and accepted the help of more than 2,500 volunteers.

Anita Adalja says last year the farm provided more than 2,200 kilograms of fresh fruits and vegetables to the community.

"At Common Good we tried to stick to 85-15, so 85 percent of the food we grow are distributed within the community, then 15 percent we sell to local restaurants and a mobile farmers' market that comes once a week."

Companies donate seeds to the farm. They are also harvested from the farm's greenhouse. Community members, staff and volunteers grow them in a garden built on an old baseball field.

Cassie Hoffman likes the idea of an urban garden that is not only beneficial to the community, but also to the participants.

"I can spend an hour cutting salad greens and slip into a purely meditative state where I'm not even thinking about anything in particular.

I kind of like it, just because I do a lot of other research and number crunching, sitting in front of the computer a lot of the other times."

Fifteen-year-old Eliamani Ismail has been volunteering for more than two years. She believes the community around the farm will enjoy a healthier life.

"I think it's absolutely fantastic. They really teach people about how their food gets to them and how to properly eat and properly grow things and that's what a lot of, especially Americans need nowadays because we have the obesity problem."

And developing healthy customs requires an early start. Youth director Elizabeth Packer is taking children to harvest eggplants grown in the past few months. Then they cook the Italian dish eggplant parmigiana in an outdoor kitchen. It immediately becomes a favorite.

Common Good City Farm hopes to serve as a model community-based urban food system while helping the residents of LeDroit Park.