Acknowledgements:

We, Zavi Engles and Ru Apt, would like to thank all of those involved in this project and the conducting of this research for their boundless support, input, and enthusiasm. In particular, we would like to thank L.M., the garden manager, for all of her patience in working with us and her passion and dedication to doing whatever necessary to make this project (and the research that will hopefully facilitate this project) succeed. L.M.’s entire family has also been endlessly hospitable to us, providing a second home for us in Ontario as well as comfort and support throughout the entire semester. We would like to thank the committed Huerta del Valle and the children from the Mira Loma Community Center walking club for persevering in their dedication to seeing this community project through. We would also like to thank our professors for their guidance in our learning process, internship experience, and ongoing research throughout the semester. We would like to acknowledge the Pitzer in Ontario’s Urban Fellow for going above and beyond her listed duties to support us and Huerta del Valle throughout the semester. Additionally, we would like to thank F.P., A.H., and O.P. for their contributions and support throughout the semester. Finally to all of our fellow Pitzer friends and cohorts in this community gardening project—thank you for the work you have done, the ways in which you have helped us, and the work that we will continue to do collectively with the community of Ontario.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Introduction</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Literature Review</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Research Methods and Methodology</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Findings</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Conclusion</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Bibliography</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Appendix A-Photographs</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Appendix B – Interview Questions</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Appendix C – Interview Transcripts</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Appendix D – Field Notes</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Over the course of the Ontario Program spring 2012 semester, we have been simultaneously working on and analyzing the community garden project formerly known as the Linda Loma Garden, recently renamed the Huerta del Valle (Garden of the Valley). We conducted six interviews with a variety of people who have been and/or are still active members of the project since its inception in the fall of 2010. We interviewed people with the explicit aim of hearing a diverse range of opinions and therefore sought to interview people with differing levels of commitment, from gardeners to administrators. The participants names and some brief information about their roles is provided below:

- **L.M.** : L.M. has been working as the official garden manager of the project since the Spring of 2011. She is a member of the Ontario community and is viewed by many as a crucial asset to the project. Like many other citizens of Ontario, L.M. speaks primarily Spanish and prefers to do so, although she understands and speaks some English.

- **K.P.** : K.P. is the head of the Pitzer in Ontario program and is the administrative link between Pitzer and the garden project. Though she did not initiate the project, she saw the connection between issues of food justice that were apparent in Ontario and the benefit of community-driven garden projects and therefore helped connect a network of Pitzer students, community members, and a local nonprofit to start the garden.
• C.V.: C.V. is currently a student at Pitzer College and, while enrolled in the Pitzer in Ontario program, chose to initiate this garden with the local nonprofit as his semester-long project. He became deeply involved with the garden and in the summer of 2011, stayed in Ontario through the Pitzer in Ontario program. During this time he applied for a city grant through Kaiser, which was granted to Ontario this year and allots $67,000 to Ontario Ministries and the garden over the course of 4 years.

• O.P. and A.H.: O.P. and A.H. are community members who have been involved in community organizing and activism regarding food justice for many years. They, along with F.P. (who we did not interview but whose role will be mentioned peripherally throughout), have recently become more involved with the project in light of recent changes and this will also be discussed in more detail in our analysis.

• E.O.: E.O. is the Urban Fellow of the Pitzer in Ontario program and has been involved with the garden in a transforming capacity since the summer of 2011. She initially began to work as a volunteer in order to understand the issues that were affecting the garden at the time and her role has evolved to become that of a liaison between the garden and Pitzer students. She also translates for L.M. frequently and has developed personal relationships with many of the garden participants.

• S.E.: S.E.’s role in the garden has been very different from those mentioned above. She is no longer actively involved with the garden, but we chose to interview her due to a desire to get as many varied perspectives as possible. S.E. began working at the garden when C.V. was first trying to set up the site. She, along with interested Pitzer students and active members of the Youth Coalition for Community Action (YCCA, explained below), helped to build and plant the actual site. In the past semester, due to a number of
issues that she explains in her interview, her participation has waned although she still expressed an active desire to continue working with the project in the future.

Other important figures in the project who were not explicitly interviewed but were a part of many of our field notes and were/are active members of the project include:

- **Ontario Ministries/Y.T.**: Ontario Ministries is the name of the local nonprofit whom K.P. initially contacted to work with in order to start the community garden. Y.T. is the main contact for the organization. Though the garden has been intrinsically entwined with Ontario Ministries since its inception, the challenges of the relationship have resulted in the garden workers choosing to move away from the nonprofit, despite the fact that Ontario Ministries and the garden recently won a Kaiser grant to help further develop the garden and aid it in achieving its aims of improving the health of the surrounding community.

- **Pitzer in Ontario Program**: This program is a semester-long intensive academic immersion in the city of Ontario. Students who participate in the program take three classes, Social Change Practicum, Critical Community Studies, and Applied Qualitative Methods, all held at the Pitzer in Ontario house. They also intern fifteen hours a week with a local community member or project working against injustice in the Inland Empire. Some of the other internships work with Warehouse Workers United, a labor rights organization; Inland Congregations United for Change, a community organization of local congregations; and Occupy Riverside. Throughout the semester, students conduct research at their internship site, culminating in an in-depth research project. E.O. is the
Pitzer Urban Fellow for the Ontario Program, and she coordinates participants’ internship sites, among a plethora of other details for the program. Zavi and Ru were both participants this semester, and this paper is their final research project. The website for the program is provided here: http://www.pitzer.edu/offices/ontario/index.asp.

- **F.P.**: F.P. is a well known food security activist in the area who has been involved with a number of projects, including community gardens in other cities. She heads a nonprofit organization and also organizes a monthly dinner for food activists in the area known as Transformations, which A.H. and O.P. are also a part of. F.P. and the Transformations group have helped guide the Ontario garden from a distance but F.P. has recently gotten more involved in order to sign the garden project under her nonprofit rather than Ontario Ministries.

- **J.E.**: J.E. is a Pitzer student who was heavily involved in the garden during the Fall 2011 semester, particularly by initiating an ambitious composting project. His visions for the project are greatly based on his experiences working with Our School at Blair Grocery, a regional Growing Power training center and farm, where J.E. took the semester off to work in spring 2011. Like many other Pitzer students, J.E.’s participation has waned recently and though he was not interviewed specifically, we as researchers have spent time with him throughout the semester to understand his perspective on the project and we have incorporated his (along with all other participants and former participants we met with throughout the semester) opinions into our analysis.

- **Youth Coalition for Community Action (YCCA)**: YCCA is a consensus-based social justice organization at Pitzer College, of which C.V., J.E., S.E., and Zavi are all active members. YCCA has had close ties to social justice-oriented organic farms in New York
City as well as New Orleans and its members found the Ontario garden project to be an appropriate new, community based project to become involved with. Throughout the many phases of the garden, various YCCA members have contributed different things to the project and the organization as a whole has shown a commitment to support the project however possible.

Weaving together the personal experiences, stories, and opinions of this diverse group of people allowed us to formulate an analysis that, we hope, will be useful to all who are working towards the success of this social justice-oriented community garden. Most of our interviewees articulated similar ideas about the successes and benefits of the project thus far and also seemed to share a similar vision for the future of the project. We have decided to organize this analysis based on the themes that we traced in all of the interviews, while also attempting to keep the story as linear and chronologically ordered as possible, as many of our participants expounded on the benefits of community garden on multiple levels (personal and community-wide).

Many of the participants also discussed specific strengths and weaknesses of the project thus far, along with ideas on how to improve the effort overall. Some of the strengths include: L.M. ’s leadership, collaborative relationships (including connections to Pitzer College and other food justice-oriented groups), and a demonstrable need for a garden in the community of Ontario. We found that many of the weaknesses discussed seemed to stem from a larger problem of power struggle and deliberate exclusion. This greater issue most often took the form of miscommunication throughout the different parties involved. Other problems detailed by the participants that seem related were restrictions placed by authoritative organizations, including
Lastly, we found that many of our participants had similar dreams for the future of the Ontario garden. Many discussed the need for the garden to become a truly community-driven project with multiple community leaders sharing responsibility with L.M. Other themes included: long term sustainability, utilization of existing spaces, and the expansion of the garden to include other programs, including the possibility of an urban agriculture academy.

Understanding the dreams and visions of the current participants in the garden project is essential ensuring its future. Our hope is that the documentation of both the past and potential future of the Huerta del Valle Community Garden will assist these dreams in becoming reality.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of Academic Literature Regarding Community Gardens:
Since the 1970s, community gardens have grown across the United States as a simple yet effective measure to combat a variety of social ills including environmental degradation, food deserts, poverty, crime, health problems, to name a few. Though our own research project is a site-specific program evaluation, we found that there is little writing focusing on evaluating the specific structure and strengths of transforming community gardens. The few articles we found relating to this specific focus are explored below. However, we also expanded our search to understand other areas that are explored in regards to community gardens. Most of the literature we found was focused either on political circumstances of community gardens or served as an analysis of benefits (personal, communal, environmental) of community gardens. We found that many of the articles also overlapped and usually discussed, at least tangentially, one or more of
the three themes we have focused on.

**Political Circumstances of Community Gardens**

Much of the literature surrounding community gardening concerns the political circumstances of specific gardens initiatives. As community garden projects are often formed in an effort to build social capital in blighted neighborhoods, there is usually pre-existing political tension between local residents and government officials. Gardeners may have to handle issues of land ownership and negotiate with conflicting interest groups. The following articles explore the political landscape surrounding community garden initiatives.

Diane Englander details the story of a time when many community gardens were threatened to be demolished by the city government of New York City—her work is an illustrative example of the problems that can arise due to the internal and political tensions that are often a part of community gardening work. Like many other of the academic works we found, Englander began with a brief analysis of the myriad of benefits that can be found in community gardens, but wrote specifically about the community gardens in New York City.

Schmelzkopf examines the political context of community gardens in Loisaida, an impoverished area of the Lower East Side of Manhattan. The area was hit hard by the financial crisis of the 1970s, suffering budget cuts for public services and increased foreclosures. This time of financial depression and mass displacement of Loisaida residents resulted in the city’s reclamation of large numbers of vacant lots. While such prolific amounts of space allows for the creation of gardens, it requires collaboration and often creates conflict between resident gardeners, non-profit organizations, and city agencies. “As of spring 1995, thirty-five of the gardens were on property leased from the city; two or more were sites leased from private
owners; almost forty were the equivalent of squatters on either private or city-owned land.” The involvement between outsider non-profits and community members also causes friction:

“Gardeners and not-for-profit organizations note that about 90% of the members of the Green Guerillas and OGT are white.”

Smith and Kurtz examine the politics of community gardening in New York with a focus on the temporary nature of most gardens. Many gardens are built on city land, and “the city’s leases for garden plots include a provision that gardens can be removed at any time, given thirty-day’s notice.” This problematic power dynamic between city and resident gardeners is inherent in most urban community garden projects. Smith and Kurtz also explore the correlation between politics of homelessness and community garden spaces. This relationship is based on public land privatization, an aspect of reform that adversely affects the homeless and community garden projects.

In *Perceived Community Boundaries: Relationship Between Community Gardens and Surrounding Transitional Neighborhoods*, Hampton writes about the politics of community gardens as public spaces. As places which may intentionally include only a sector of the public (gardeners), these politics can get complex. She states that “community gardens that possess both legal land ownership and wide community support are able to sustain long-term permanency more efficiently.” In exploring the relationship between gentrification and community gardens, she finds that “community gardens can be a wall against gentrification by becoming a place that resists ‘upgrading’ of the community.” Gardens can serve as a safeguard against gentrification and preserve and bolster integrity of the existing community.

*Program Evaluations*
The articles we encountered concerning program evaluations often contained that aspect as just one component to the overall work. In *Community Gardens and Sustainable Land Use Planning: a case-study of the Alex Wilson Community Garden*, Irvine, Johnson and Peters discuss the merging of community gardens and innovative landscaping methods at one particular garden in Toronto, Canada. Though the title suggests that the researchers are interested in evaluating the Alex Wilson Community Garden, the actual article details the story of how the community garden came to be, as well as its specific focus on environmentally sound design. Irvine, Johnson, and Peters also discuss a brief history of community gardens and also discuss the wide range of possible benefits that come with the presence of community gardens. Therefore, the article is not a traditional program evaluation but instead focuses on other aspects of the specific garden.

Clara Irazabal and Anita Punja wrote a comprehensive program evaluation of perhaps the most famous community garden, known as the South Central Farm in Los Angeles. The project met its demise in 2006 after a highly publicized, politically charged battle between the gardeners, the city of Los Angeles, and an independent businessman who took control of the land in a controversial deal with the city government. Their work is unique in that they wrote this evaluation after the garden had already closed down and is therefore more of a retrospective assessment of the events that transpired leading up to farm’s end.

*Analysis of Benefits of Community Gardens*

Many authors have written about the individual, communal, and environmental benefits of community gardening. Lautenschlager discusses the potential benefits of incorporating community gardening into nutritional and environmental education programs. Such education
programs have long-term positive effects on dietary habits, environmental awareness and general knowledge concerning gardening skills, nutrition, and cooking.

Okvat discusses the benefits of community gardens as related to the well-being not only of the human community but also the greater Earth Community. She identifies clear health benefits related to food access, physical activity, and mental health, as well as benefits to community well-being such as social networking, multicultural relations, crime reduction and community organizing and empowerment. In a world replete with crises of all categories, community gardens seem to offer a plethora of positive solutions.

Blair, Giesecke, and Sherman undertook a classic research study on the dietary, social, and economic benefits of urban gardens in Philadelphia. They took a sample of 144 gardeners in the city of Philadelphia and studied the various effects that gardening edible food had on them. Their research found many possible beneficial effects that were correlated with gardening including more life satisfaction, community involvement, fiscal savings, and better health. This study seems reflective of other academic articles related to community gardening as it focuses on the positive impacts that urban gardens can have on the surrounding community.

Other works discuss the benefits of community gardens as an introduction to a different, more specific focus. In *Cultivating Community: Principles and Practices for Community Gardening as a Community-Building Tool*, Payne and Fryman have assembled what is essentially an action guide for creating community gardens as a vehicle for community-based social change. The article includes an analysis of community gardening benefits throughout the article, but is more focused on the implementation of community gardens to create community.

Alaima, Reischl, and Allen explore the associations between community gardening, neighborhood meetings and social capital. These authors’ quantitative research on this topic
suggests that “neighborhood community gardens’ impact on neighborhood residents’ perceptions of social capital can be enhanced by neighborhood-wide meetings.” Efforts to build community can have transformative effects, especially in areas that suffer from social and economic oppression.

**Methodological Problems**

Given that our research focus often was not directly discussed in the literature we found, due to our narrow scope, it is difficult to recognize possible methodological flaws in our research. However, it is always safer to assume and acknowledge that some level of bias probably affected which articles we found to be more relevant. For example, we did not examine any articles that describe community gardens as being a waste of space and resources, for that point of view is in direct opposition to the work we aim to do.

**Conclusion**

While academic research has been conducted in the area of community gardens, much of it has been focused on legitimizing the claims put forth attesting to their beneficence. There have been limited studies examining the actual structure, cohesiveness, and success of individual community garden projects, which is what we as researchers aim to do. However, we also expected this limitation as our research focus is obviously extremely narrow in scope. Therefore, while much of the literature we encountered was not directly related to our own research study we found it to useful for elucidating what topics related to community gardening are of interest to others in the field. We also found much of the information to be useful for our own work at the community garden site at which we are studying but also participating in.
Our Research in Relation to the Literature

Much of the literature surrounding community gardens relates to their benefits, and political contexts, as well as providing evaluation and analysis of specific case studies. Our findings relate the benefits, political context, and analysis of the Huerta del Valle garden as a case study. Our research fits similarly into the existing literature because it offers one community’s responses to specific challenges that many gardens may face. Additionally, we explore the relations of various entities on the garden, including community members, Claremont College students, Transformations members, Ontario Ministries and the Ontario-Montclair school district. In this way, it relates to the program evaluation-type literature we found, which examines the political contexts of individual community garden case studies. Our findings differ from the existing literature where we provide individuals’ personal visions for the potential future of the project. Currently, the garden’s undefined nature allows for this sort of dreaming and scheming, which will certainly be essential later for developing a more specific step-by-step implementation plan for the project. Through our personal involvement in Huerta del Valle, we have been able to observe and experience in-depth the power dynamics that contribute to the interpersonal politics of the garden, something we did not find in our exploration of existing community-garden related literature. Additionally, our section on the strengths of Huerta del Valle provides a positive and hopeful perspective on the garden’s history and future. Though our exploration of the benefits of community gardens and the political context surrounding Huerta del Valle echoes the existing literature, our findings relate a unique uplifting and hopeful vision for the future.
Research Methods

In our research concerning the evolution of the Huerta del Valle Community Garden Project, we utilized a variety of methods and methodologies which correspond to the types of interactions we had with community members. Our methods mainly consisted of individual interviews, with one exception in which we interviewed O.P. and A.H. who are long term partners and preferred to be interviewed together. Our interviews took approximately 30-45 minutes each and, though we had a standard interview question sheet (attached), our interviews often took a more freeform narrative style, which we believe facilitated a more lucid conversation. The interviews were recorded on our computers, with the exception of S.E. whose interview was recorded on Zavi Engles’ personal tape recorder (S.E. consented to this form of recording and the audio file has been transferred to Zavi’s computer and deleted from the tape recorder) Our individual personal philosophies and positionalities informed our approaches to the research separately, though we attempted to be as cognizant as possible of where we stood in relation to the project and its participants throughout the semester.

Given the nature of our investigation, which is primarily action-based research, our methods mainly involved observation and interviews. Such methods allowed us to work both as researchers and active participants in order to further the goals of the project while simultaneously analyzing and recording the process in order to eventually produce a final program evaluation. We interviewed people who have been involved with the project since its inception, such as C.V. and L.M., who can inform us about the history of the project. These
participants were able to illuminate us with the original incentive for creating the garden, their visions, and their experiences thus far. We also interviewed people who were no longer involved as well as though who were involved in an administrative capacity, such as K.P.. From these people, we gained a fuller picture about the ways in which the garden has failed thus far to keep people actively involved as well as learning about the broader context behind the creation of the garden. Through observation, we ascertained certain power dynamics between people involved in the garden, but our knowledge regarding this matter was very much informed by the interactions we had with other community members and interview participants. These methods of research helped inform our current work and we hope that the information that we have gathered will help others continue furthering the goals of the project in the future.

My (R.A.) methodology was based in both a critique of existing power structures and a background of anti-oppressive and feminist work. Thus, my methodology has been critical, feminist, and anti-oppressive. As an outsider to the city of Ontario working on a project with limited community involvement, I have been hypercritical about my own role as a researcher in this situation throughout the semester. Specifically on this project, I have worked towards the emancipation of marginalized groups with regards to food access. Working with any project, however, brings up other issues related to race, class, gender, and other systems of oppression. Thus, I have attempted to frame my research in a critical and anti-oppressive way on multiple levels.

Similarly, my (Z.E.) methodology has been based on a variety of different philosophies including feminist, anti-racist, and anti-classist ideology. Throughout my research, I have tried to remain aware of my own positionality and personal philosophy, especially in regards to the concept of constructivism which posits the inevitability of subjective experience over the concept
of positivism. My own unique and subjective reality no doubt had an effect on my observations and the resulting research data we gathered—however, I attempted to remain as aware and critical of my own actions and position within the project. I do not ascribe to the idea that the researcher can be an invisible eye or fly on the wall, and I hoped to make this distinction clear in the resulting research project.

Through these various methods and methodologies, we have created a case study narrative about the progression and current standing of the Huerta del Valle community garden project. We believe that our methodologies will allow future participants in the project to see variables that may not be immediately visible on the surface. Through this critical approach, our investigation will attempt to contribute towards a growing body of emancipatory knowledge regarding food justice.
Findings

A Brief History of the Huerta del Valle Ontario Community Garden Project

In order to fully understand our findings as they are presented in this document, we believe that it is necessary to contextualize and historicize our data in a brief introduction to the project and its history up to this point. We understand and wish to explicitly acknowledge that history, indeed any kind of story, is extremely subjective. Bearing this in mind, we have attempted to create a short narrative designed to inform the reader about the background of the garden. We have attempted to reconstruct this story here as objectively as possible, using as much indisputable fact and as little subjective interpretation as possible.

In the fall of 2010, a Pitzer in Ontario student named C.V. decided to engage with community members and organizations to create a community garden in the area, citing the area’s status as a “food desert” with limited access to fresh, healthy food. Aided by his professors, namely K.P., the director of the Pitzer in Ontario Program, C.V. initiated the project jointly with a local nonprofit organization named Ontario Ministries, headed by Y.T.. Though the garden initially struggled to take off as a community venture, a community member named L.M. eventually emerged as a leader and thus became the official garden manager of the project. L.M.’s involvement with the garden was initiated through her relationship with R.U., a Pitzer in Ontario Program intern with the garden in the Spring of 2011. Ontario Ministries provided the site with the permission of the Ontario-Montclair School District which owns the land. The site is currently situated in between the Linda Loma Elementary School and the Ontario Ministries office. The garden was named the Linda Loma Community Garden and initially had 20 families working their plots, along with communal spaces for gardening.
Problems in relation to Ontario Ministries began with communication and exclusion issues with regards to L.M.’s role. Though she quickly took on the role of garden manager, spearheading outreach and maintenance of the garden, L.M.’s hard work went unacknowledged by Y.T., the school district, and at times, Pitzer students. Y.T.’s refusal and C.V.’s inability to speak Spanish certainly influenced L.M.’s experience of exclusion surrounding the garden.

C.V. continued to be involved in the garden throughout the spring and summer of 2011, when he and fellow Pitzer student Q.W. decided, in conjunction with L.M. and Ontario Ministries, to collaborate with the city on a Kaiser grant they were proposing. The proposal, called “Healthy Ontario” aimed to address the health issues in Ontario through supporting a variety of projects in the “Heal Zone,” the area in south Ontario deemed to be the most in need of such work. C.V. and Q.W. worked together to write the grant that summer, and it was won that fall. What was then the Linda Loma Community Garden and Ontario Ministries won $67,000 to be given to them over the course of four years. The money was to be used to build two greenhouses, pay a workshop coordinator, buy materials for workshops, and pay for garden supplies and tools. Because it was a collaboration with Ontario Ministries, the allocation of the money has been slightly controversial and only added to the heated politics surrounding the relationship between the garden and Ontario Ministries. The grant money will become available in September of 2012.

In the fall of 2011, L.M.’s role strengthened and C.V. took the semester off from school to work on the garden. The project unified when that same semester, J.E. began a composting operation to produce soil, based on a Growing Power model. This visionary common goal brought people together, both from Pitzer and the Ontario community. The resulting unity and strength, was impeded, however, when the school district demanded the removal of the ten tons
of compost the group had created together over the semester. Through a collaborative effort with Transformations members, the gardeners were able to move the compost to a different site, a lot at the Church of New Beginnings, a church in northern Ontario. Shortly after this disheartening obstacle, many Pitzer students dropped their commitment to the garden, including C.V., J.E., and S.E.

As interns to L.M., Zavi and Ru have been the primary Pitzer students involved in the garden this semester. Zavi has been involved since spring of 2011, after she returned from the YCCA trip to Our School at Blair Grocery in New Orleans. Ru only became involved through the Pitzer in Ontario program. This semester, the problems with the location of the garden and its relationship to Ontario Ministries have been increasingly evident. Ru and Zavi entered at a point of uncertainty and disenchantment on the part of everyone who had been involved the previous semester. Thus, our analysis of the project rests in a context of interpersonal disharmony, community disengagement, and physical uncertainty.

Benefits of Community Gardens

Many of our participants expressed to us their passion for community gardens as an agent of beneficial change. L.M., C.V., A.H. and O.P. all discussed with us the benefits they see to community gardening. These benefits apply on personal, community, and global scales. All of the aforementioned respondents mentioned positive effects on food access, community health, and personal fulfillment.

As garden manager and community member, L.M. emphasized the personal benefits she and her family experience as a result of involvement in the garden project. L.M. became
involved with the garden as her mother was dying. Throughout this painful and difficult process, she told us, the garden was what kept her from becoming depressed, “Yo me refugiaba en el jardín. Yo me tristeza, cuándo estaba enferma, estaba para nada mas quitarle el tubo y ya, yo me fui al jardín.” [“I took refuge in the garden. My sadness, when she was sick, when there was nothing keeping her alive but the tube, I went to the garden.”] L.M. views her participation in the project as the beginning of a shift in her life: “Se puede decir de una tercera edad. Es el principio de ese camina.” [“You could say ‘la tercera edad’ (old age). It’s the beginning of this stage.”] L.M. also discussed the health benefits for herself and her family. Mostly, these benefits stem from an increased awareness of the powerful effect fresh, organic produce can have. P.E., L.M.’s 11-year old son, is a bright and inquisitive child but has trouble in school because of his ADHD. Eating more organic foods has helped him with his focus, L.M. tells us. “Las cosas orgánicas tienen otro sabor.” [“Organic things have a different flavor”] she says, and everyone in the community who grows food in the garden learns this. Growing one’s own food breaks the mechanical processes we normally experience day-to-day: “Nos hacemos muy mecánicos. Nos vamos a trabajar llegamos a trabajar nos ponemos a cocinar a comer y el lugar de darnos un poco tiempo para sembrar, mejor nos vamos y compramos una libra de tomates, una libra de cebollas, y hacemos una salsa, pero no sabemos que lo que estamos comprando son químicos.” [“We become very mechanical. We go to work, we come home, we start cooking, we eat. We don’t give ourselves a little time to plant, so we go to the store and we buy a pound of tomatoes, a pound of onions, and we make salsa. But we don’t know what we’re buying – chemicals.”]

In addition to addressing food-related health concerns, a garden may provide a safe, inclusive, green space in an otherwise somewhat unsafe, concrete neighborhood. C.V. states,
“It’s universally accessible from, like, kids to old people. And it’s healthy for old people. Gardening, pulling weeds is one of the best things you can do for arthritis. Even the connection with the earth, if you wanna go, like, hippy-dippy with it.” Such a health-oriented space is truly a rarity in a food desert such as southern Ontario.

Both O.P. and A.H. emphasized the potential of this garden project to model a solution to larger world problems. Regarding access to food, A.H. states, “We’re under this myth that says that everything has to be expensive and that’s wrong. It’s not true.” Rather, A.H. asserts, this garden can be the model of providing “accessible, organic, affordable” food to community members. O.P. and A.H. discussed with us how this is not only a possible solution to global problems of climate change and overpopulation; it’s an absolute necessity. O.P. puts it this way:

“I tend to look at things from the numbers. We’ve got 7 billion people on this planet right now. Half of them live in cities. By 2050 it’s going to be 9 billion, 8 of them in urban areas so you’ve got another 4 ½ billion living in urban areas and the question comes up, “how are we going to house and feed all those folks and this is one of the answers to that. The idea of everything being shipped in from 3000-5000 miles – that’s absurd. I think we need to start looking at local resources.”

To O.P. and A.H., this project is an urgent opportunity to model an effective solution to an inevitable crisis.

It is clear that involvement in the community garden has had personal beneficial effects on an individual level. Zavi and Ru have certainly felt that it is a source of hope, energy, and inspiration for them this semester. In terms of community space, gardens provide a positive alternative to unsafe or exclusive areas in a neighborhood. On a larger scale, community gardens are practical models for the world that can be, and that must be if we are to rely on one another
for survival in the coming decades.

**Strengths**

Despite its tumultuous political history, there are several strengths of the garden project that should be recognized. Most respondents view the project as a potential space for personal and community empowerment, particularly for community leaders such as L.M.. The garden is an effort to respond to a very real need in the area: the need for access to affordable, organic produce. The strengths contributing to this vast potential include the positive roles of L.M., Pitzer, and Transformations. These separate entities can share resources and work as a team to strengthen Huerta del Valle. For the people who have been passionately involved, the learning process within the project in itself has been a point of strength, continuity, and shared experience.

L.M. has been the garden manager since the spring of 2011, when R.U. became involved with the project. Her involvement has truly held the garden together, bringing in community members who might not have otherwise become connected to gardening projects at all. Everyone we interviewed emphasized L.M. as perhaps the most important aspect of the garden project at this point, in terms of community leadership, continuity, and dedication. C.V. truly views L.M. as a model leader, both on the project and in her community in general. He describes her leadership as a party organizer; “but that’s almost what a community leader is, like, it’s someone who’s, like, popular, that people respect, and are willing for her to take charge. And she’s done it before and she’s confident, she’s skilled and she can do it.” He also expresses the potential to find other leaders like this in the community – “an untapped resource.” K.P. describes L.M. as the “key strength” of the project. S.E. also described her as an asset, referring to her as a
“community member who is super involved and has a stake in it who is super friendly and outgoing and is just a wonderful organizer in her own way.” As participant observers, we have witnessed L.M.’s dedication firsthand on numerous occasions--L.M. works tirelessly to engage her fellow neighbors in the project and we have seen her engage neighbors and passersby for extended conversation about the goings-on in the garden various times. As the garden transitions locationally and in relation to student involvement and collaboration with non-profits, it is L.M.’s dedication that remains constant.

The project is also incredibly strengthened by its collaborative relationships with Pitzer College and other Ontario community members. A.H. expressed to us her feelings about the strength found in the relationships L.M. has. This sentiment particularly implicated the Transformations community, which A.H. is highly involved and invested in. A.H. stated, “The relationships L.M. has made, particularly with Transformations members, give her a lot of leverage.” She referenced “the compost fiasco” as an example of this partnership between the garden and Transformations working effectively together. She recounts this incident laughingly:

“You can tell I’m getting older because now I find it funny. O.P. and I were actually out of cell phone range, it was a Saturday. But all of a sudden we got a call from F.P. and C.V. at the same time telling us the school district had demanded that we remove ten tons of compost that was originally started by J.E.. Well all of a sudden we had to get organized to get it out of there because they were saying it was going to be $10,000 if we didn’t get it out of there in two days, which is an incredible thing to do. Here we have an entity with no real budget, and we managed to get a dumptruck, a scooploader, a couple bobcats and were able to get it all transferred to the other site, and people to drive and were able to get it all out of there in two days. Never seen anything like it in my life.”

Everyone involved in the project remembers this “compost fiasco” with both fondness and
frustration. While it reflects the complicated relationship with both Ontario Ministries and the school district, which we will explain in detail later, it was certainly also a point of unity on the project, pulling in resources from both the Claremont Colleges and the Transformations community. Currently, there is certainly still a lot of organizing and relationship-building that needs to happen. This particular incident references the composting endeavor, which is not currently in operation. In the past, the relationships essential to composting were made through J.E. and were not transferable to other garden project participants. Hopefully in the future, L.M. and other community members invested in the garden for the long-term will be able to build these and other relationships with supportive entities in the city.

With regards to the relationship to Claremont Colleges, it is clearly a positive resource for the project to utilize. C.V. spoke of the importance of college students’ persistence, “In terms of what the project has benefiting it...is a connection with the Claremont Colleges. That’s, like, a consistent source of, like, able-bodied, intelligent, active, outgoing, college students who really can do amazing things and are really smart and should not be turned down by what happens in the city.” Because each student has a slightly different motivation for being involved in Huerta del Valle, they each push it in a different direction. The story of the project can be traced through individual students’ roles on the garden, and their relationships to L.M., Y.T., and the Pitzer in Ontario program. C.V.’s work on the project focused on beginning the garden and applying for a grant from the city. R.U.’s previous relationship with L.M. through the Spanish Practicum in the Community class brought in L.M. as the garden manager. J.E.’s involvement initiated the composting operation at the Linda Loma site, which brought together many community members and Pitzer students with a common goal. E.O. remembered this time at Linda Loma fondly: “There were just mountains of rotting melons and I think the task really brought everyone
together, gave them a really strong sense of community and solidarity and like, ‘we’re going to work as a group to do this.’” K.P. asserts that this is simply the nature of Pitzer’s engagement: “It goes back to these key students and quirky personalities in a sense like Y.T., J.E., C.V., you know, R.U.. But this is how programs get built at small colleges, you know what I mean? And this is how, in a tiny program, given how tiny the Ontario Program is, we literally really were starting from nothing with this food justice project.” As relationships between community members and the colleges have endured and continued to develop, students have been able to more clearly identify how to be most useful in these relationships. L.M., A.H., and O.P., all feel very positively about the students currently involved in Huerta del Valle, which is a good sign for where Huerta del Valle is headed.

K.P. initially pursued starting the garden at Linda Loma with Y.T., at Ontario Ministries because she felt there was a real community need the garden could directly address. She claimed to see lots of energy on campus and in the community around issues of food, and people were “absolutely responsive” to the idea of starting a garden in Ontario. C.V. identifies the need for the garden as related to its location: “It’s a high-need area, it’s the reason we won the grant, because it’s one of the highest health risk areas in the country. It’s listed on the USDA website as a food desert. That’s in terms of, like, over-access to fast food and junk food and convenience-store quality and lack of, like, markets and also other kinds of availabilities like gardens.” Community gardens such as this project, he asserts, are a “direct response to the food inequality of the entire area.” This need is certainly undisputed, and everyone we interviewed felt committed to staying involved for that reason, among others. The garden certainly built credibility with the food it did grow on the Linda Loma site. Additionally, the project retains its
relationships with composting partners and city leaders. Those who have been involved before are interested and excited to see where the project will go.

**Weaknesses**

Since shortly after its inception, the garden has faced challenges to its efficacy and existence. These challenges stem from the bureaucratic land system within which the garden operated. Weaknesses of the project related to a lack of support from the associated nonprofit, Ontario Ministries, and particularly from Y.T., the executive director. This lack of support was experienced often as miscommunication or exclusion. Other challenges included the language barrier, the role of power relations in interpersonal interactions, the difficulty in community outreach and bureaucracy.

Various parties working on the garden have experienced repeated incidents of miscommunication and exclusion. At different times, L.M., other community members working with the garden and Pitzer students have felt out of the loop or excluded by Ontario Ministries or by each other. E.O. summed it up by saying, “To me this has all been about communication and power, that there is, you know, this feeling of marginalization as a result of not being kept in the loop of communication, that’s been the story of the garden to me.” C.V. also recounted negative experiences with bureaucracy, power and communication through his work on the project. Because he was very assertive with going forward and meeting people, C.V. came into conflict with Y.T., who wanted complete control over the communication between Ontario Ministries and outside entities. He recognizes that these communication issues extend to the L.M./Y.T. relationship as well. Additionally, he experienced ageism from city officials, who were “condescending...I guess I’m not indoctrinated fully as far as what they have come to know...”
Politics as.” He says that it would be most beneficial to the project to separate from Ontario Ministries; “Ontario Ministries is just stagnation. And there’s no transformative creative thought going down at Ontario Ministries.” A.H. repeatedly asserts that there is simply a difference in value systems between the gardeners and the non-profit. This sentiment certainly expresses the power disparity between the disparate entities involved the garden.

Power relations play an undeniably important role in interactions between entities working on the garden. As Huerta del Valle interns, we (Zavi and Ru) have observed this firsthand. Our interactions with both Y.T., executive director of Ontario Ministries, and his friend W.P. at the Church of New Beginnings, a site we worked on briefly at the beginning of the semester, have both been lacking in respect and trust. For us, this may have been related to age and gender; the first time we met W.P., he asked us (rhetorically) if we were elementary school students, and Y.T. has always referred to us as “the girls.” For L.M., their treatment towards her is definitely related to her gender, class, and language. Over the course of the project, Y.T. has routinely excluded L.M. from meetings with city and school officials and failed to provide her with essential information. L.M.’s personal experience provides us with an understanding of the general problems in relation to the community and the interpersonal politics within the project.

The language barrier has also caused frustration and problems with communication. Despite recognizing the beneficial support of Transformations, a network of people involved in gardening projects in the area, L.M. does not attend meetings because they are conducted all in English. Language has caused problems in relations between Pitzer students and Ontario community members as well. C.V. does not speak Spanish, which contributes to difficulties in communication between him and L.M. Because of C.V.’s gender, confident demeanor, and
fluency in English, Y.T. quickly entrusted him with a great deal of responsibility, thus bypassing L.M.’s authority as the official garden manager. Therefore, though the language barrier is a legitimate obstacle on its own, it has also played a role in further cementing already-existing issues of power relations. Additionally, the language barrier poses day-to-day obstacles, which are mostly minor and often inevitable. Throughout the semester, though we (Zavi Engles and Ru Apt) have studied Spanish and are able to communicate by and large using only Spanish, there were many times when L.M. would have to clarify herself once or twice in order to ensure that we did not misunderstand. However, we would also like to note that this was also a part of the learning experience for us and forced us to find creative ways to communicate and connect with the Spanish-speaking members of the community. Therefore, the language barrier itself is not necessarily a weakness— in our experience, it is when the language barrier becomes used as a tool of further exclusion and preferential treatment that it impedes the functioning of the project.

Despite its role as the “supporting nonprofit” connected to the garden on the Linda Loma site, Ontario Ministries has failed to provide the necessary welcoming environment for the community space. Ontario Ministries has enforced limitations on the physical space, often representing the voice of the absent school district. These restrictions have included a lack of available bathrooms, limited open hours and a demand to remove all compost from the site. Sometimes in her time working on the garden, this lack of outside support has left L.M. unenthusiastic or depressed. L.M. relates this lack of support to difficulty in community outreach and lack of participation. When the project was first started, she had around 20 families involved. That number has dwindled mostly in relation to the lack of support the families experienced working on the garden. For example, there were no available bathrooms on the site, making it unappealing to families with children.
These restrictions have affected Pitzer student involvement as well. When the school district ordered the removal of ten tons of compost from the Linda Loma site, many students who had been involved quickly became disengaged. Participants described this experience surrounding the compost removal process as disempowering and a huge letdown. S.E., who is no longer involved in the garden, expressed to us her feelings about it. “I just can’t tell you how heartbreaking it was, not even just, not even for me specifically but for J.E. to put in that effort and then being told that they didn’t even want that. Like to completely nullify it.” Most recently, almost simultaneously with our decision to terminate the garden’s connection to Ontario Ministries, Y.T. informed L.M. that we would no longer be able to use the land on which the garden is located currently. All of the work everyone has put into making the physical space into a beautiful, shared, productive garden was devalued with a unilateral decision from entities with which we have no direct contact. As active participants in the project, we were surprised to hear the news, mostly because it confirmed the suspicions we have collectively had all along about the lack of transparency with which Ontario Ministries conducts its work. The restrictions implemented and enforced by Ontario Ministries and the school district were destructive to building a unified and empowered community around the garden.

As researchers and interns at Huerta del Valle, we feel that this lack of involvement or a cohesive community has been a weakness in our work there. Other than L.M., we were unable to interview any other community members who work on the garden. Our first community meeting happened at the end of April, as the semester and our research project were coming to a close. It felt difficult and hypocritical to be representing a community garden when we had never actually met everyone who works on it. Happily, this trend seems to be shifting with as the future
of the project becomes more ambiguous. The group has come together to start to develop a vision for what we want the new space to become.

Vision

Through all of the challenges the garden has faced, a larger vision for the potential of the project still prevails. All of our participants expressed great enthusiasm about the project and, despite their worries about its current struggles, all stated that they desired to continue working with Huerta del Valle in the future. Many of the participants spoke of their desire to see the project become more community-driven through successful outreach and all discussed their dream for the project to be a self-sustainable and stable aspect of the Ontario community. Some, A.H. and O.P., in particular, had especially grand visions for the future of the garden and many spoke about the garden’s importance and possible influence in relation to larger global changes in food access, health, and environmental agents.

Since one of the garden’s primary weaknesses, as we have seen above, is the current site (and the many stipulations and restrictions that come with it), most of the interviewees expressed the need for a new, improved site. In order to develop a strong network of support around the garden, participants must be invested in what they see as their vision of Huerta del Valle coming into fruition. Firstly this will involve finding the right space, one which everyone agrees upon and believes fits with what the garden should be. Ideally the process of finding and establishing roots in a new space will also encourage the emergence of new community leadership. E.O. expresses her hope for leadership in the new space: “It would be great to find a site close to the current site where lots of people live who are low-income and Spanish-speaking and interested in gardening and, um, and to find other leaders in the community who, uh, would share the
leadership responsibilities with L.M. and get involved more long-term. And I’d like to be able to send Pitzer students there um just as support.” C.V. also emphasizes the importance of finding the right space for the garden. “Staying alive and, like, accessible, and like, utilized by the community is super important.” Ultimately, he would like to expand into other spaces. “My ideal solution is to look into all the vacant lots and create, like, a network of gardens. There needs to be more.” He sees this network of gardens in Ontario as a long-term solution to a structural problem the area suffers from: the food desert phenomenon. His thoughts on this matter are related to the grander future that O.P. and A.H. hope for the garden. A.H. envisions “a place that is truly an urban farm.” She and O.P. repeatedly used the term “non-contiguous urban agriculture” to describe a similar network of gardens to what C.V. discusses. A.H. has even greater dreams, however: “I want to build an environmental academy where young people can come there for hands-on learning, and can learn how to grow food in an urban environment.

There are farmers out there who mentor others. I want us to have a mentor. O.P. and I coined this phrase: cBIG. Community-Based Income Generation. Where the money goes back into the program and into the community.” A.H.’s ideal garden would be a model for what she sees as the future: a new approach to urban living, food production and knowledge. It is apparent that O.P. and A.H. have spent extended amounts of time dreaming together. O.P. expressed the wish to “see this turn into the longest urban farm on the planet.” He, too, believes that non-contiguous urban agriculture is the future of cities. He stated, “I think you can integrate it into the urban environment,” and referenced a city in which the street trees bear fruit. Both O.P. and A.H. are confident that this is the future and now is the time.

Community members currently involved in the garden are hopeful for the future of the project as well. J.H. and E. R., two gardeners from Ontario, have the vision that in the new space,
there will be both areas for personal/individual production and a community plot which can be used to produce income and generate jobs for community members. L.M. also expressed her hope to have the garden model an alternative lifestyle, a form of knowledge that can translate into subsistence, food, profit. She sees it as a space to produce healthy, affordable, organic food and sell it back to the community. “¿Porque no proberles a todas las tiendas nuestros productos? Con los camiones grandes, repitiendo comida a todos. Sonrisas grandes.”

[“Why not sell our products to all the stores? With big streets, sharing food with everyone. Big smiles.”] Her involvement with the garden has impacted her personal life immensely for the better, and she wishes these same changes for all those in her community. Though our interviewees all articulated big dreams for the project, their visions come from the outside; what truly will shape the success of a community-driven project is to develop the garden that residents of Ontario are excited about.

Participants also spoke of the future roles that the supporting organizations may play as the garden, hopefully, becomes more self-sustainable and community-driven. E.O. spoke about her desire as the Urban Fellow to “be able to send Pitzer students there just as support”. While current students, such as S.E., spoke of a desire to continue developing relationships between the two. S.E. said “I’d love to start going out there and bringing as many people as I could...getting started early in the semester too so that people develop a relationship with it before they get too busy.” One recurring problem with college students developing ties with the larger community is that many are transient and cannot always stay involved with projects as consistently as would be ideal. Many of our interviewees spoke tangentially of C.V. and J.E.’s inability to stay in such pivotal roles at the garden, and as participant observers, we had many experiences where community members would ask us about other students who formerly
participated and why they had not stayed involved.

Participants in the project have begun to take concrete steps to ensure the requisite space and support to transform this project into something stable, productive, and lasting. K.P. and L.M. have submitted a letter to Ontario Ministries, informing them of our separation. F.P.’s nonprofit has obtained space at an organic family farm in southern Ontario. This land is available for the Huerta del Valle garden to use. The land is rented by the nonprofit from the farmers, who rent it from the owners. Thus, we proceed tentatively and hopefully, with an eye out for, ideally, a patch of land we can call permanently our own.

Conclusion

Huerta del Valle is currently at a multitude of different crossroads--for the people who have been working on the project since its inception, this is a time of exhilarating potential as well as a time of doubt and uncertainty as the project’s location, structure, and level of community participation is still unclear. We believe this case study can be useful to others interested in issues around food justice activism and community gardening--namely, the story of the garden is rife with tales of what not to do when starting a community-based project. Despite the lofty ideals and visions of the project when it was first conceived, its actual implementation has suffered greatly from issues of power and exclusion, namely related to restrictions placed by an ineffective nonprofit organization and the bureaucratic public school district on whose land the garden was originally situated.

Other problems that were not addressed early on in the project included the language barrier as well as simple miscommunication on a variety of levels between a variety of actors in the project. Despite the weaknesses of the project thus far, however, we hope that the relaying
the project’s strengths and sharing the story of its exciting new potential will provide inspiration to others with similar aspirations. We hope that others can use this information not only for its conclusions on “what not to do in a community garden” but also for the information it provides regarding strengths that should be encouraged within such a project. Despite the habitual problems of the project, its active members are taking steps to redress these issues and are ending their partnerships with Ontario Ministries and the Ontario Public School District, as well as looking for a new site with which to stabilize the project. The network that the project is involved with, such as Transformations and Pitzer College, as well as L.M.’s enduring dedication are just a few of the key strengths that we identified in the project. Overall, our research is less of a program evaluation and more of a case study that hopes to relay one story of a small community garden in just one of the many food deserts in the United States. We hope that this written account that chronicles the progression of the project thus far will be most useful for the community members and other garden participants that wish to learn from the mistakes of the project in order to see its enduring success.


Appendix A: Photographs of the Linda Loma Site

1-The Communal Linda Loma Plot

![Photograph of the Communal Linda Loma Plot]
2-Composting at Linda Loma circa October 2011
3-View of the Site April 2012
Appendix B: Interview Questions

Interview Questions

1) What has been your involvement thus far at the community garden?
2) What has your experience been?
3) Do you wish to continue working with the project in the future?
4) What are some of the strengths that you can identify in the project?
5) What are some of the weaknesses that you feel are apparent in the project?
6) What is your vision for the project?
7) What are some specific steps you believe the project should take in order to achieve your vision?
8) Is there anything else that you would like to say in regards to the project?

Las Preguntas de la Entrevista

1) ¿Cuál es su participación en el proyecto?
2) ¿Cómo ha sido su experiencia?
3) ¿Usted quiere continuar su trabajo con el proyecto en el futuro?
4) ¿Cuáles son las fortalezas que usted puede identificar en el proyecto?
5) ¿Cuáles son las debilidades que usted puede identificar en el proyecto?
6) ¿Qué es su visión para el proyecto?
7) ¿Cuáles son algunas cosas específicas que cree que el proyecto debe tomar para realizar su visión?
8) ¿Hay algo más que Usted quiere decir con respeto al proyecto?