

GROW A GARDEN - CHANGE THE WORLD • MEET ME AT THE TABLE • ON THE ROAD AGAIN

MORSEL

neighborhood.coop

Summer 2022



FREE

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EDITORIAL POLICY

Morsel is a quarterly magazine produced by Neighborhood Co-op as a means to share news from the Co-op, promote local food, celebrate the seasons, and inspire our owners and patrons to enjoy a healthy lifestyle full of delicious and nutritious food. The views expressed in Morsel are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Co-op's directors, staff, or ownership. Health and nutrition articles are for informational purposes only and do not constitute medical advice.

SUBMISSION POLICY

Morsel accepts submissions on an ongoing basis. Letters, articles, artwork and ideas are all welcome! We reserve the right to edit content for brevity and clarity. Please send inquiries and submissions to amy@neighborhood.coop.

OUR STORE

1815 W Main Street, Carbondale, IL 62901

Neighborhood Co-op is a cooperative grocery store owned by members of our very own community. Most of our staff are even owners! We are a founding member of the National Cooperative Grocers, a network of more than 200 cooperative grocery stores all across America. We combine our buying power to bring you the best food at the best value while staying locally governed. We work hard to support our community and improve our local food system.

OUR MISSION

Neighborhood Co-op Grocery aims to serve the needs of its owners and patrons by providing wholesome foods, economically, in the cooperative tradition and in ways that best promote the health of the individual, the community and the earth.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Generally, meetings are held in the Co-op Community Room once a month at 6p.m.

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{Co-op Throw Back}

Neighborhood Co-op is a member and co-owner of National Co-op Grocers (NCG) along with 148 other US food co-ops. Together we operate 218 stores in 38 states, doing over \$2.3 billion in sales and serving almost 1.3 million co-op member-owners. NCG was created in 1999 by co-ops and their regional associations. In 2004, the regional cooperative grocers associations merged into the national organization in order to provide greater clout, savings and more services to food co-ops, while also retaining strong regional programs and services.

Sales & Events

at the Co-op

AUGUST

01
31



Owner Appreciation

Owners receive a 10% off coupon good toward any one transaction they choose during the month of August.

03

Wellness Wednesday

10% off all wellness items!

SEPTEMBER

07

Wellness Wednesday

10% off all wellness items!

10
11



Co-op Farm Crawl

Neighborhood Co-op's annual Farm Crawl is a fundraiser where farmers in our region open their properties and allow folks to learn about what they do. (Tickets go on sale late August)

OCTOBER

05

Wellness Wednesday

10% off all wellness items!

29

Murdale Safe Halloween

Put on your costume and trick-or-treat at the Co-op and Murdale Shopping Center.



GENERAL MANAGER'S REPORT



FRANCIS MURPHY

Neighborhood Co-op is a member and co-owner of National Co-op Grocers (NCG) along with 148 other US food co-ops. Together we operate 218 stores in 38 states, doing over \$2.3-billion in sales and serving almost 1.3-million co-op member-owners. NCG food co-ops have been seeking to improve community food access, local economies, and human and environmental health for decades now. Because co-ops are grassroots organizations powered by democracy, we have the unique ability to grow and change as our communities' needs change. Competing against international grocery chains and two of the top five largest corporations in the world can feel daunting at times, but people power is the cooperative's greatest strength. It's the reason why co-ops are unusually resilient in hard times, and it's why we've been successful at helping to make good things like organic agriculture, animal welfare, and zero waste (bulk) shopping popular. Our history demonstrates that when our co-ops work together on common goals, we can change things for the better.

Every year NCG co-ops are asked to submit data to help us focus our attention on what we want to achieve together and track our progress toward those goals. The "impact metrics" data collected from our co-ops gives us a picture of our collective social and environmental impact. The data is summarized in a "Food Co-op Impact Report". The 2021 edition of this report was recently published, and I thought I would share some of the highlights of this report.

Everyone deserves the best food Earth can grow. In fact, this is why food co-ops organized to form NCG. Our national co-op helps our small, local, independent co-op achieve pricing on organic and natural products that's comparable to much larger chains, and makes it possible to pass additional savings on to shoppers with our Co-op Basics everyday low prices and Co-op Deals sales. Co-op Basics provides everyday low prices on 379 high-quality items and Co-op Deals saves shoppers an average of 25% on 2,400+ items each week.

Food co-ops have cultivated relationships with local farmers and producers for decades, even when it wasn't trendy, cost effective, or convenient to do so. Locally grown and produced food increases our connection to each other and the land we all live on and builds a bridge between rural and city communities, which is needed now more than ever. Through NCG, food co-ops support federal policies to help small regional farms and farmers thrive. Local products are 26% of the average food co-op's total sales. At Neighborhood Co-op sales of local products in 2021 totaled approximately \$1.28-million or 25% of total sales.

Food co-ops have a special place in our hearts for organic food. Many food co-op communities worked to get Congress to pass the original legislation that established a national organic certification program at the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 1990. Food co-ops continue to advocate for strong organic standards to this day.

USDA Organic Certification is the gold standard of food labels because it speaks to so many issues people care about today, including protection of our air, water, and soil. Organic farming has been shown to sequester carbon from the atmosphere, slow global warming, and protect and foster biodiversity, including the essential pollinators we need to grow food. Organic certification does not permit the use of toxic, persistent chemicals that are detrimental to human, animal, and environmental health, nor does it permit the use of bioengineering (GMOs). Organic also includes standards for animal welfare. Certified Organic products are 40% of food co-ops' total sales. At Neighborhood Co-op sales of certified Organic products totaled just over \$2-million in 2021, which was 39% of sales.

The NCG annual impact report reflects the values and goals of the communities that are served, both as individual food co-ops and through our national cooperative. If these values speak to you, consider joining our co-op! If you're already an owner, thank you for strengthening our community.



Re-entry That Enhances Community Sustainability

by *Quianya L. Enge, MSEd*

Everyone deserves to fully participate in society as a free person to access housing, education, employment, and opportunity. And yet, Illinois leaders have continued to restrict the human and civil rights of people with records. They have told people with records to rebuild their lives, without help, while continuing to pass laws that impose impossibly high hurdles to doing so. As an advocate for sustainability and equality on Juneteenth of 2021, I consciously joined the Fully Free campaign to end permanent punishment for justice-impacted people in the state of Illinois. You may ask what is Juneteenth (June + 19th)? Well, historically on June 19, 1865, Major Gen. Gordon Granger rode into Galveston, Texas and issued orders for all slaves to be freed. Juneteenth (the combination of June and Nineteenth) is recognized as the official end of chattel slavery in the United States. Ninety-five-year-old activist Soror Opal Lee (member of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Incorporated) is often referred to as the “Grandmother of Juneteenth” after making it her life’s mission to bring national awareness to the cause. On June 17, 2021, she accomplished her mission and Juneteenth is recognized as a National Holiday.

In Illinois, 3.3-million adults have been arrested or convicted of a crime since 1979, with people of color most impacted. There has been a great push to confront and remedy the mass casualties that mass incarceration has birthed. The multilevel devastation that imprisonment has imposed on society financially and emotionally has caused mass incarceration to become a weapon of mass destruction (Skinner-Osei & Stepteau-Watson, 2017). Although recently, there has been a consensus for systemic reform, there are still more than 2-million people incarcerated. Did you know if you have a record, you can’t live in public housing -- so, what happens when a family has to choose between living with a loved one who’s returned from prison, or living in an apartment they can afford? Also, that current law prohibits anyone with a felony conviction from serving as an executor or administrator of an estate after a family member or loved one has passed away.

All this leads me to emphasize the importance of maintaining our community’s sustainability during the re-entry process. Unfortunately, reintegrating into society is not solely dependent on the program’s effort to transform the individual impacted by his, her, their, etc. incarceration, but also requires an abundance of external constructs outside the boundaries

of the organizational structure (Watson et al., 2018). Therefore, reentry programs would benefit from engaging and enhancing their relationships with local political, professional, and grassroots entities to advance policies and procedures that will allow justice-involved individuals to engage more closely with the communities to which they are returning. Improving outcomes in reentry programs must be centered on easing their transition into the complex systems of the family, workforce, and society at large, while also considering their mental and emotional well-being.

The CARE Model that has been introduced to help justice-involved people to successfully reintegrate into society is a complicated issue that involves several interconnected factors. The model proposes that more reentry programs consider the different situations those impacted endure, particularly trauma, their environment i.e., community, and the impact both have on their social and cognitive functions. This model proposes that reentry programs specifically in communities those impacted are returning to apply four steps (i.e., collaboration, amend, reintegration, and empowerment) to successfully reunite justice-involved individuals with their families, the labor market, and their communities.

Using the ideals from the CARE Model, the Fully Free Campaign, first of its kind in Illinois, is bringing together diverse people from across the state to push for bold policy changes, eliminating permanent punishments and providing hope and opportunity to people with records. This article is only the tip of the iceberg. Despite the progress, there are still many issues that are not being addressed and will continue to stop all efforts to successfully reintegrate justice-involved individuals into society and their families. The common belief of assisting people impacted by his, her, their, etc. incarceration is to provide practical needs such as housing, food, and employment, which are often inadequate when their basic needs aren’t being addressed. In addition to providing practical needs and psychological assistance, reentry programs should serve as a mediator between the individual impacted by his, her, their, etc. incarceration and the various environmental structures they are encountering upon release. For more information on the subject, please visit www.Fullyfree.org, cleanslateillinois.org, www.btwththemovementnfp.org and www.jlusa.org.

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Our third quarter **Wooden Nickels** recipients are **World Hunger Sale** and **Southern Illinois Collaborative Kitchen**



World Hunger Sale Since the mid-1970s, CWU has sponsored the annual World Hunger Sale, which benefits primarily local organizations, such as Good Samaritan Ministries, The Women's Center/Survivor Empowerment Center, Feed My Sheep, and area food pantries. A multitude of volunteers makes the sale happen. Local businesses and organizations donate food, auction items, advertising services, and storage facilities. Some provide assistance setting up and taking down the event. Various agencies pick up unsold items after the sale to further benefit community programs, such as the Boys and Girls Club, Big Muddy Correctional Center, and Southern IL Coalition for the Homeless. We intend to continue and increase our outreach to those in need in our community. Any Wooden Nickel funds received would increase donations to the local organizations.

Southern Illinois Collaborative Kitchen works with community members and organizations to feed those in need. Meals are purchased from local restaurants at a lower cost, then offered to the community with the option to "pay what you can" as a donation. This method allows meals to be ordered by those experiencing difficult times who may not have funds to cover a meal, which they can get for free or at a reduced cost without question. Donations that are received cover the costs of meals; additionally, this also helps support and drive businesses to local restaurants.



2022 Co-op Farm Crawl

Farm crawls (also called farm tours) are among the most enjoyable and effective forms of agritourism because they immediately engage community members with local growers. The Farm Crawl is an excellent opportunity for families and friends to tour local farms in southern Illinois. Farmers in our region open up their doors to share the history of their farm and how they got started. Things you can expect and learn:

- The unique farming industry in Southern Illinois
- One-on-one interactions with local farmers
- See demonstrations
- The various crops, livestock, and unique ups and downs in farming
- How farms operate and developed their business

It makes a difference when you know the story behind your food! This kind of interaction is tremendously effective at conveying the delights of local food and the importance of supporting a local food economy. Neighborhood Co-op has worked with local farmers and producers in Southern Illinois for many years to build up our local food economy. We feel it is essential to educate and connect our customers with our local food sources. Not only is it an excellent opportunity to learn, but it is also a fundraiser! This year's Farm Crawl is partnering with Food Works to support their outstanding work in building our local food economy.

This year's Farm Crawl is set for September 10-11. Car passes will be available for purchase in late August 2022 at the Co-op. This event is a self-guided tour. Each pass will give you access to each of the farms on the crawl for two days!

Food Works is a non-profit organization facilitating the development of a regional food economy in Southern Illinois. Every ticket that is purchased will go to support this great organization.



Grow a Garden – Change the World

How Community Gardens Make Life Better for Everyone

by **Monica Tichenor**

When I was a young child, my family kept a vegetable garden not far from neighboring corn and soybean fields. We grew everything we could think of planting in the fertile black soil of central Illinois – green beans, carrots, lettuce, tomatoes, corn, radishes, cucumbers, zucchini – and what we didn't eat, we packed in paper bags and shared with others.

Working the soil together taught our family problem-solving skills and gave us a greater appreciation of nature. It fostered a deeper connection to the land and to each other. Unfortunately, many people do not have the same accessibility to land that my family enjoyed. And not everyone has access to fresh produce or can afford to buy it even if it's available. This is where a community garden can make a difference.

What is a Community Garden?

A community garden is a shared plot of land, usually donated by a resident or municipality, where people come together to learn about gardening and share homegrown veggies. Extra produce, plants, and seeds are offered free to anyone who needs them, with leftover food often donated to local food pantries. Some community gardens also maintain chicken coops.

Benefits of a Community Garden

A community garden not only makes fresh, affordable produce available to everyone, it gives people an opportunity to enjoy outdoor physical activity, which can reduce stress, boost the immune system, improve mood, promote better sleep, and reduce the risk of obesity. But its positive impact extends far beyond individual health benefits.

A Healthier Environment

Community gardens contribute to a cleaner environment by reducing waste and pollution, enriching the soil, improving water filtration and air quality, protecting pollinators, and increasing the biodiversity of plants and animals.

Food Security and Autonomy

Maintaining a community garden can be empowering, especially for those who have felt the sting of injustice in a world that historically has refused to make space for them and can help to combat the inequities in our food system that lead to food insecurity – a lack of consistent access to healthy fresh foods.

According to the U.S Department of Agriculture, more than 38 million people experience food insecurity. Embedded in this alarming statistic is the long-term impact of racist policies and practices on communities of color, who experience food insecurity at higher rates than white communities. A community garden can help to restore food security and autonomy for all residents.

Coalition Building & A Better Quality of Life

Strong partnerships between municipalities, businesses, and non-profit organizations can lead to better decisions that can improve quality of life for residence. A community garden is a powerful example of this kind of transformational change in action. It can restore neglected neighborhoods by beautifying vacant lots, creating green spaces, and building cross-cultural social connections.

Over time, all of these changes can lead to a reduction in crime, a phenomenon supported by decades of research. For example, a review of 45 studies reported in the National Library of Medicine in 2019 concluded that green spaces, especially community gardens and vacant lot remediation, appear to reduce crime and improve both the health and well being of residents. [“The Impact of Green Space on Violent Crime in Urban Environments: An Evidence Synthesis,” International Journal of Environment Research and Public Health; v16(24); 2019 Dec]



Photos: (Left) Check out the produce stand at the Red Hen Garden. Photo credit: Ruth Hoak (Right) Volunteers (L-R): Deb Woods, Ruth Hoak, Kim Reese, and Kate Heist at the Red Hen Community Garden on Larch Street in Carbondale. Photo credit: Aimee Trojnar.

About The Red Hen Garden

Alarmed by the murder of a young man on Carbondale’s Northeast side in 2016, Carbondale residents Ginger Rye-Sanders, Deb Woods, and other concerned women founded the non-profit organization, Women for Change/Unity in the CommUnity, to address violence and other critical issues in the neighborhood. One of the first actions taken by the group was the creation of The Red Hen Garden at 511 East Larch Street.

“At our first Women for Change meeting, resident and Master Gardener Delora Bell asked if anyone would like to start a community garden,” says Deb Woods, Vice President of Women for Change. “Volunteer Kate Heist, a few other ladies, and I agreed to work with her and after acquiring property on Larch Street, which was donated by another Carbondale resident, we started the garden. We began with a few gardening tools, but soon realized we needed more resources and began actively looking for volunteers, gardening supplies, and donations.”

Initially, the group had been attempting to water the garden using empty milk jugs, says Kate Heist, who penned the garden’s name and has been volunteering at the garden year-round since it’s creation. That all changed in 2018.

“Thanks to the financial contribution of resident Lee Franklin, the Plumbers & Pipefitters Union Local 160 and their apprentices installed a water spigot at the garden,” says Kate. “Having water readily available is absolutely necessary! A garden cannot flourish without water on the lot.”

The Red Hen Garden provides a rotating supply of garden staples to neighborhood residents, including cabbage, mustard greens, collards, kale, snow peas, beets, onions, garlic, cowpeas, peppers, tomatoes, green beans, sweet potatoes, and herbs. The garden also grows flowers, many of them edible, fulfilling a key part of the Women for Change mission, which includes beautifying the neighborhood.

Volunteers and visitors are welcome to take home a bag of veggies from the food stand or pick what they want or need for free. Any surplus not distributed directly to residents is donated to local Farmers Markets, food pantries, and the Southern Illinois Collaborative Kitchen, which creates meals for those in need while supporting local restaurants.

Over the past five years, more community gardens have been planted, including the Washington Street Garden, 211 N. Washington Street, which grows heirloom and hybrid organic veggies, fruits, herbs, and flowers; the Attucks Community Farm, operated by Attucks Community Services; the Chestnut Street Family Garden, 412 Chestnut Street, managed by local non-profit Common Greens; and the Birch Street Food Forest, 442 Birch Street, which regenerates empty lots in northeast Carbondale, with a focus on planting native species and perennials to improve soil health and build food security.

Continue to next page



All About Volunteering

Volunteers at the Red Hen Garden maintain a group text system to coordinate their schedules and log an average of anywhere between 6-10 hours per week, typically morning to early afternoon, but earlier in the summer due to the heat.

"I usually work at least 6 or more hours per week," says Ruth Hoak. "Deb, Kate, and I try to be there from 9am to noon every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, but we're flexible. Since the garden is open to the public at all times, we want to be on site to talk to people and invite them into the garden. I learn so much chatting with visitors and volunteers about gardening."

Typical activities include planting, watering, weeding, harvesting, and saving seeds for the next year, with winter reserved for cleaning the plot, planning crops for the next year, and starting seedlings for spring planting, which begins in late February.

"We also maintain pathways, build new raised beds and structures, and make compost to enrich the soil," adds Kate.

Gardening is a passion for many of the volunteers for a variety of reasons – from a deep love of nature and a desire to learn something new to addressing critical issues like climate change, food insecurity, and violence and reducing stress.

But you don't have to be an expert gardener to volunteer at the Red Hen Garden. People of all ages and abilities are welcome, says Ruth, with veteran gardeners learning right alongside those new to the experience.

"Gardening is an adventure, with something new to learn every day, no matter how much experience you have under your belt."

Special Events & Activities

In addition to maintaining the Red Hen Garden, Women for Change also hosts special events to support the garden and to give residents more opportunities to learn about gardening, nutrition, cooking, and environmental sustainability.

"Each year we host a Garden Gala where we give away plants, seeds, flowers, pots, mulch, soil, trays, and tools," says Deb. "Some of the plants come from our own yards, but we also receive donations from local businesses and Farmers Markets. We also show attendees how to start a garden, share gardening tips, and demonstrate how to grill vegetables."

This year's Garden Gala was held on May 14 on Birch Street to introduce attendees to the organization Common Greens, which manages The Chestnut Street Family Garden, and to encourage families to sign up for a garden plot.

"We gave away over 1,000 plants and grilled vegetables for guests, all for free," says Kate. "We've also hosted visits from local schools and the Carbondale Park District's summer program. Before COVID, we hosted Fabulous Food Fridays where folks came to the garden to eat lunch and watch a few garden-related programs. We'd love to restart this event."

Fabulous Food Fridays also gave volunteers the opportunity to swap recipe ideas and demonstrate new ways to cook vegetables, adds Deb. "We've demonstrated how to use herbs to create different flavors and how to use parts of vegetables previously thrown away. We've also given out samples of dehydrated fruits and vegetables."

Support for Carbondale's Community Gardens

The Red Hen Garden is among several community gardens supported in part by the Food Autonomy Initiative, which was created in 2018 by the non-profit organization Carbondale Spring to address the issue of food insecurity in Carbondale.

Thanks to a \$25,000 grant from a local philanthropist, the Food Autonomy Initiative has expanded the volunteer base for the gardens, helped distribute free produce, provided financial compensation to workers, and worked with partners to build and distribute a dozen chicken coops, along with chickens – free of charge – to residents willing to manage the coops and share surplus eggs with neighbors. Learn more about the organization's mission to create a sustainable local food system at carbondalespring.org/food-autonomy.

The Food Autonomy Initiative has been a valuable partner for the Red Hen Garden's annual seed swap, says Deb, who is a board member of the Food Autonomy Initiative. "We partner with them to give away seeds that were either donated or that we harvested ourselves. The group has also led workshops on medicinal plants."

The Red Hen Garden has also received support from other non-profit organizations, like Carbondale's Boy Scout Troop 66, who helped refurbish the garden this spring.

"One of the Boy Scouts wanted to do a project to complete his Eagle Scout badge," explains Kate. "The troop came over and rebuilt some of our raised beds, replaced wood, trimmed tree limbs, removed brush and weeds, and built a metal storage shed."

Students in the Community Engagement Program at SIU's Center for English as a Second Language have also volunteered their time at the Red Hen Garden, helping to create a compost pile in May.



Photo: Red Hen Garden volunteer, Kim Reese, harvests beets out of the garden.
Photo credit: Amy Dion.

The City of Carbondale provided initial funding for the development of Carbondale's community garden network and continues to support the effort, says City Manager Gary Williams. "We've provided funding in the past to Women for Change and to the Carbondale Spring Food Autonomy program, which operates several gardens. The City is supportive of any effort that promotes local foods, improving public health, and building resiliency."

Volunteers appreciate the city's past support and hope the partnership will grow to allow for help with basic needs like mowing, providing water and rubbish pick-up, donating more space from vacant city lots, and sharing information about the gardens on the city's website. Kate Heist would also like to see the city hire gardeners whose job would be to work with residents to help them create their own gardens.

"In 25 years, climate change will be wreaking havoc on our food chain. City governments could work towards making those years easier by planning ahead for food shortages and having trained gardeners teach sustainable gardening methods to residents."

In Their Own Words

Being outdoors in the fresh air, watching the plants you've nurtured grow, and seeing joy on the faces of people who are gardening for the first time is a fulfilling experience for volunteers at The Red Hen Garden.

"Watching couch-potato kids put their hands into the dirt for the first time is wonderful to see," says Kate. "They are animated and attentive. Their eyes brighten. Plus, the best place to learn about gardening is in a community garden because of the huge pool of experience to be found in other volunteers. Your questions get answered immediately. You learn how to plant with the seasons. And the Zen of the garden just happens to you without effort. As soon as you get your hands dirty, you begin to relax – but at the same time your brain is stimulated because you're learning constantly."

For Deb, witnessing the reaction of youth when they see how vegetables are grown, harvested, and taste right from the garden is priceless. "Seeing them harvest their own lettuce and tomatoes to take home is a joy," she says. "And I love the look of surprise on people's faces when they find out they can take what they need from the garden. Watching the number of people who participate in and attend our Garden Gala grow every year is also rewarding. I encourage people to donate their time and get their children involved."

"Joy" is a word that pops up over and over again when talking to the garden's devoted volunteers about their experiences. "I smile when we plant and then after so much anticipation harvest the bounty with the joy of accomplishment," says Ruth, who adds that interacting with people who visit the garden is particularly meaningful. "There is always something new and fresh happening in a garden."

Community Garden Resources

- Women for Change/Unity in the CommUnity – Eurma Hayes Center, 441 E. Willow, womenforchangecarbondale.org, facebook.com/uitc8
- Carbondale Spring Food Autonomy Initiative – carbondalespring.wpcomstaging.com/food-autonomy, facebook.com/foodautonomy
- Red Hen Garden – facebook.com/uitc8
- Birch Street Food Forest – libreunschool.org/birch-street-food-forest
- Washington Street Garden – facebook.com/WashingtonStreetGarden
- American Community Gardening Association: communitygarden.org

Meet Me at the Table

The Family Dinner Makes a Comeback

by *Monica Tichenor*



My husband and I joke that the question we each dread hearing the most from the other is: “What do you want for dinner?” Boy, does that sometimes feel like a loaded question!

When life feels frenetically busy, a simple question about what kind of evening meal to prepare can feel like one more task to add to the pile of responsibilities we’ve already struggled to meet for the day. “Can I just have five uninterrupted minutes to think without having to answer another question?” we sigh in exasperation.

But when we finally settle on a menu, prepare the meal (true confession: my husband is usually the cook), and take the time to enjoy our food, we’re more relaxed, the conversation flows freely, and we feel a deeper sense of connection to each other.



Food and Family Connections

Enjoying dinner together on a regular basis gives families time to unwind and check in with each other after spending the day apart, which over time can help them develop a stronger and more resilient identity both as individuals and as a family, says Brenda Green, MS/RD/LDN/CLC and an Associate Lecturer in Nutrition and Dietetics at SIU Carbondale.

“Family mealtime can foster a positive and nurturing environment for families to grow in,” she says. “Children learn how to sit down and eat a meal together. They learn manners, but more importantly, they learn how to have a conversation with others. Overall, family mealtime can help kids feel more connected to their siblings and parents and vice versa.”

Benefits of the Family Dinner

Research over the past several decades reveals significant nutritional, psychological, social, and academic benefits associated with eating dinner together as a family, says Brenda.

“When families eat together, they tend to eat healthier, specifically more fruits and vegetables. They eat less fried foods and consume less soda. A report from Homeland Security states that children who eat family meals are also less likely to become overweight or obese. They tend to eat a wider variety of foods and become less picky eaters. Studies also show a strong link between family meals and academic performance.”

These positive correlations are supported by research aggregated by the Family Dinner Project, a non-profit initiative that champions the family dinner as critical to the health of families and society. Measurable benefits cited by the organization include:

- Better nutrition and healthier eating patterns
- Greater self-esteem and resilience
- Lower rates of obesity
- Lower risk of eating disorders
- Lower risk of anxiety and depression
- Lower risk of substance abuse (up to 70% lower risk)
- Lower risk of violence
- Lower risk of teen pregnancy
- Better cardiovascular health in teens
- Bigger vocabulary in preschoolers
- Better academic performance

Source: The Family Dinner Project, thefamilydinnerproject.org

While there are several “Family Dinner” movements active in the country, Brenda cites registered dietitian and family therapist Ellyn Satter of the Ellyn Satter Institute as a research leader in the field. Satter has made helping families build a healthier, weight-neutral relationship with food her life’s work, with an expanded focus that includes emotional health and positive family relationships.

“She is considered the guru of feeding dynamics, which includes mealtime,” says Brenda. “Her work has changed how we work with families with children.” Learn more about the Satter Institute and access helpful resources at ellynsatter.institute.org.

The Healing Power of Eating Together

Family dinners have enjoyed a resurgence over the past two years, bringing structure, consistency, and comfort to families rattled by the uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Stay-at-home orders and shutdowns pushed families to cook together, eat together, and spend more time together in conversation, creative activities, and play.

“I think families were tired of the isolation,” says Brenda. “Family mealtime brought some normalcy to their day. During lockdown, my family would end up sitting at the table for a good hour just talking. At first, we talked a lot about COVID, but then we quickly turned the conversation to other things. COVID was literally everywhere – television, the news, the radio, social media. So mealtime ended up being our time to break away from it all and just talk, listen, and enjoy each other.”

Finding Time for the Family Dinner

Most families are juggling multiple responsibilities between home, work, and extracurricular activities, so finding time to cook and eat together without turning dinnertime into another chore to finish can be challenging.

“I think it is important not to stress yourself out and to start small,” advises Brenda. “First, try to plan a week’s menu at a time. For instance, hamburgers on Monday, tacos on Tuesday, breakfast on Wednesday, leftovers on Thursday, and pizza on Friday. Second, accept that you may not be able to do nightly family meals – and that’s okay. Even two days per week is a WIN! Third, family meals don’t have to be at the dining room or kitchen table. There may be times you are eating at a park before a game or sitting in the car at the ball field. The most important thing is to eat together as a family and to talk with each other.”

Big/Little Helpers in the Kitchen

Getting kids to help with dinner without eye rolls and deep sighs might seem like an impossible feat, but it can be done, says Brenda, especially if you simply ask what they might want to eat and have them help you plan the menu. “Kids will definitely be more interested in eating together when it is food they helped pick to eat.”

Invite the kids to help in the kitchen – and the younger they are, the better, says Brenda. “Younger kids can do simple tasks, such as buttering bread, tossing a salad, or cutting up softer fruit, while older kids can help with more finite skills, such as making sauces, seasoning meats and/or vegetables, or cutting harder fruits or vegetables.”

Family Table Etiquette

Keep Conversations Positive

Sit-down dinners give families an opportunity to check in with each other and talk about a wide variety of issues, from silly to serious, but sometimes kids (or parents) don’t feel like talking or have disagreements about specific issues. While there’s no guarantee that every family dinner will remain drama-free, keeping things positive can make mealtime a more pleasant experience for everyone.

“Mealtime is just that – mealtime,” says Brenda. “It’s not a time to discuss bad behaviors at school, a poor test grade, or anything else negative. The atmosphere should be supportive and encouraging, which helps to create positive memories for you and your family. This can in turn help to foster healthy traditions that can be passed down. Ask questions about everyone’s day, but use open-ended questions instead of ‘yes/no’ questions to get kids to talk. What made the day great? What’s something funny that happened?”

Make Dinner Technology Free

Taking a break from technology for at least 30-minutes during mealtime not only reduces the likelihood you’ll overeat, it also makes it easier to hold meaningful conversations. Families can’t connect at the dinner table if everyone is looking at their smartphones, sneaking peeks at the television, or wearing headphones.

“Keep mealtime a screen-free environment,” says Brenda. “No television and no phones at the table. If a call is important, the person can leave a message or call back, but usually the only people who call in the middle of dinner are telemarketers!”

Practice Good Table Manners

Modeling good manners is the best way to teach kids how to be polite at the dinner table. You're less likely to come across as rigid and judgmental. You can also prevent behavioral problems by being clear about your expectations at the outset, says Brenda.

"Set dinnertime rules early and stick to them. If you make family mealtime a priority, the kids will follow. Parents can set an example of healthy eating, polite table manners, and being respectful. Children watch us to learn proper behavior – from saying 'please' and 'thank you' and chewing with mouths closed to listening politely and learning about health and nutrition. Having conversations during mealtime is also the best time to show your children they are important and loved. Remember that family mealtime is a learned behavior. If you make an effort, even if you start small, you'll create lasting memories and a meaningful new tradition that continues for generations."

September is National Family Meals Month™

Research supporting the health and societal benefits of family mealtime is so strong that September is now celebrated as National Family Meals Month™. "This is a nationwide event designed to encourage families to gather and enjoy their meals together," says Brenda.

Created by the FMI Foundation, National Family Meals Month™ emphasizes the importance of family mealtime and promotes the role food producers, manufacturers, and grocers play in helping families prepare affordable meals to share at home. Families who join the Family Meals Movement are asked to pledge to enjoy one more meal together, at home, per week in September and to encourage others to do the same on social media using the hashtags #FamilyMealsMonth and #FamilyMealsMovement.

You can learn more about National Family Meals Month™, join the Family Meals Movement, download toolkits, and watch free webinars at fmi.org/family-meals.

Resources

- The Family Dinner Project – thefamilydinnerproject.org
- The Ellyn Satter Institute – ellynsatterinstitute.org
- The FMI Foundation Family Meals Movement – fmi.org/family-meals-movement
- The U of I Family Resiliency Center & Christopher Family Foundation Food & Family Program – familyresiliency.illinois.edu



On the Road

(Re)Discover Biking in Southern Illinois

by *Monica Tichenor*

When pandemic shutdowns began in 2020, Americans turned to the outdoors in droves. Public interest in recreational activities like hiking, running, birding, and kayaking soared – in part because the outdoors offers plenty of space to practice social distancing while enjoying the beauty of nature. Of all the outdoor activities that saw a boom over the past two years, however, none have grown in popularity quite as steeply as bicycling.

In 2020, Americans spent \$6.9 billion on bicycles and accessories, up from \$6.1 billion over the previous year, says the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, one of the principal agents of the U.S. Federal Statistical System. U.S. retail tracking company The NPD Group reported that in March of 2020 alone adult bike sales were up 121%, while mountain and sport bikes saw increases in June of 2020 of 92% and 87%, respectively. Electric bike, or ebike, sales also saw a whopping 240% increase between 2020 and 2021.

Biking the City of Carbondale

Carbondale has been “bicycle friendly” for nearly half a century thanks to the thousands of SIU students who have historically used bikes for basic transportation. Senior City Planner Molly Maxwell says “the bike movement in Carbondale may seem like a recent endeavor, but there really has been motivation behind it from the City and individual citizens since at least 1973 when the City obtained a federal grant to create the Carbondale Bikeway Feasibility Study.” [Copies of the study are available upon request at City Hall.]



Again

Creating a network of safe bikeways is now an integral part of city planning, says Molly. “In 2015, the City adopted the Complete Streets Policy, which states that we consider all modes of transportation equally when making planning and construction decisions for public streets. In 2016, the City, along with consultants and community members, developed Carbondale’s Bicycle Master Plan, which helps guide decisions for bikeway improvements. In 2019, we also created a half-time position for a bike plan coordinator to ensure staff dedication to this endeavor.”

About the Carbondale Bikeway System

Currently, the City maintains 20 miles of on-street bike lanes and off-street multi-use pedestrian, bike, and micro-mobility paths, all designed to follow roads and highways best suited for bicycles in terms of traffic flow and safety.

“We also update the Bicycle Master Plan every five years with community input and cyclist counts,” explains Molly. “When a street is improved, our Complete Streets policy dictates that we incorporate bike infrastructure if none already exists. For example, in 2020, Oakland Avenue was rebuilt, so we removed on-street parking and replaced it with bike lanes. When the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) resurfaces parts of Highways 13 and 51, they also try to incorporate bike lanes where possible.”

A downloadable map of Carbondale’s Bikeway Network can be found online at explorecarbondale.com/712/Bike-Carbondale-IL, along with links to bicycle rules, safety tips, and links to regional biking trails and groups. There is also a plan in the works to update bikeways with new signage and maps, says Molly.

“We are wrapping up a ‘Bicycle Wayfinding Plan,’ which identifies seven main corridors that cyclists can use to safely navigate through town using signage and color-coded maps. Signage also will remind drivers that they are sharing the road with cyclists. Look for these signs over the next couple of years.”



Funding & Future Plans for Carbondale’s Bikeway System

In 2021, the City of Carbondale was awarded a \$2-million grant through IDOT’s Illinois Transportation Enhancement Program (ITEP) and Highway Safety Improvement Program to extend the bike and pedestrian path along Route 13, from Murphysboro Road to Wood Road. The City was also recently awarded a \$13.9-million grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation’s Better Utilizing Investment to Leverage Development (BUILD) program to design and construct the Southern Illinois Multimodal Station (SIMMS) project, a new transportation center in downtown Carbondale set to be completed by 2024.

“The Southern Illinois Multi-Modal Station will offer bike racks and sheltered, enclosed long-term bike storage,” says Molly. “We’re also looking at scooter rideshare programs and will be welcoming a scooter company to town soon, so stay tuned! While they won’t be free, scooters will add a less-expensive, more eco-friendly transportation option to Carbondale.”

Continue to next page



Other bikeway expansion plans include construction on the Northwest Bike Path, beginning just north of Oakland Cemetery, which will start this year.

"The City has also secured funding for the Saluki Greenway, which will run west along Highway 13 towards Murphysboro, connecting existing bike paths at either end," adds Molly. "We hope to improve the Piles Fork Greenway path in the next few years, too."

The Power of Partnerships

In addition to state and federal funding, regional partnerships are also essential to the successful planning, development, and expansion of Carbondale's Bikeway System.

"We rely heavily on the Southern Illinois Metropolitan Planning Organization (SIMPO), which funds our transportation planning studies and keeps us in communication with Jackson County, Williamson County, neighboring cities, and IDOT," says Molly. "The newly-opened Crab Orchard Greenway along Highway 13 on the east side of town is one segment of a regional plan to connect Murphysboro, Carbondale, and Marion. The City also supports initiatives like Touch of Nature's Mountain Bike Trails whenever we can, so this year, we became a title sponsor for their Catalyst Race Series."

The Benefits of Bicycling

"Biking is great for your health and the environment, and in the long run commuting by bike is much cheaper than driving," says Molly. "While Carbondale's size and climate help to make the town bike-friendly, legitimate barriers still stand in the way of someone hopping on a bike instead of into their car. Creating a robust bike system is where the City can help break down those barriers and make biking an easy, safe, efficient, and convenient choice for transportation around Carbondale."

Supporting the City's efforts is easier than you might think, says Molly. "Just get out and ride your bike! Challenge yourself to ride to work for a week or to run errands by bike. The more people out riding, the more of a priority these improvements become."

The Touch of Nature Mountain Bike Project

If you haven't visited SIU's Touch of Nature (TON) Environmental Center recently, you should make plans to visit this beautiful 3,100-acre natural area soon. Located off Giant City Road less than 8-miles south of Carbondale, TON recently constructed 10-miles of multi-use mountain bike trails for cycling enthusiasts, runners, and hikers.

"Southern Illinois is ideally positioned to become an outdoor recreation destination," says Brian Croft, Assistant Director of Programs. "There's not many places where you can go paddling, rock climbing, hiking, and mountain biking, explore a national forest, and visit wineries and breweries, all in one location. The addition of a mountain bike trail system fits perfectly in our recreation portfolio and supports our mission to enhance the lives of all people through meaningful outdoor experiences."

Funding the Trail System

Funded by a grant from the International Mountain Bike Association, the new trail network was intentionally designed for biking in terms of flow and pace, says Brian. Additional input was provided by the region's existing mountain biking community, which played a critical role in the planning, development, and construction of the trails.

"We also appreciate the support of the SIU Credit Union, E.T. Simonds, River Radio, the Bike Surgeon, and the City of Carbondale," says Brian. "All of our partners worked closely with us to get this exciting project off the ground."

Community members and volunteers provide trail maintenance, but bike races like the Catalyst Race Series also provide an important revenue stream, adds Brian.

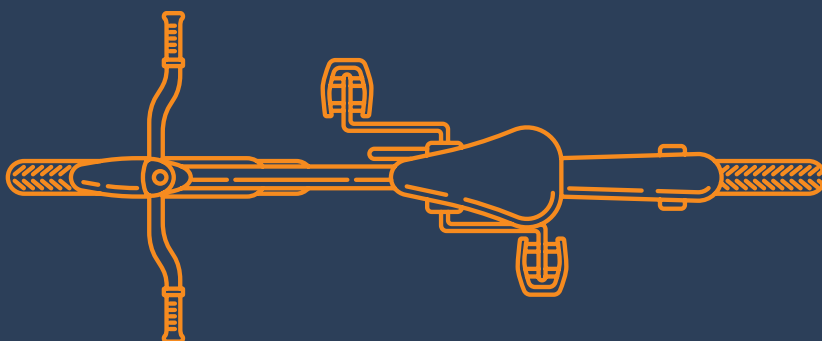
"Funds raised from our mountain bike races go right back into the trail system. We also get generous support from donors. The more money we raise, the more trails we can build. This is just the beginning of what we hope to accomplish."

Plans for Future Trail Development

Public response to the new trail system has been great, says Brian. "We're already pulling visitors from St. Louis and Paducah, and that number will only increase as we grow. We have 12-miles of trails, but plan to construct up to 30-miles of trails and go from there. We'd like to see Southern Illinois become an outdoor recreation destination where visitors will spend 2-3 days exploring our trails and other opportunities to bike and explore."

About Touch of Nature

Visit Touch of Nature Environmental Center at 1206 Touch of Nature Road in Makanda and check their website at TON.siu.edu to learn about the trail system, educational programs, special events, activities like canoeing and kayaking on Little Grassy Lake, volunteer and donation opportunities, and more. See you on the trails!



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