

ISSUE REPORT

Investing In America's Health:

A STATE-BY-STATE LOOK AT PUBLIC HEALTH
FUNDING AND KEY HEALTH FACTS



MARCH 2012

PREVENTING EPIDEMICS.
PROTECTING PEOPLE.

 Trust for
America's Health
WWW.HEALTHYAMERICANS.ORG

PREVENTION IN ACTION

The Dudley Greenhouse: Fresh Produce in the City

By Lisa Conley, Director of Intergovernmental Relations & Public Health Advocacy, Boston Public Health Commission

We all know that consumption of fruits and vegetables protects us from obesity as well as an array of chronic diseases, including cancer, diabetes and cardiovascular disease. Yet, in spite of these known health benefits, many Boston residents do not eat the recommended minimum five daily servings of fruits and vegetables. Fewer than a third (28%) of Boston's adults and fewer than one-fifth (18%) of public high school students consumed fruits and vegetables at this minimum level. For too many of Boston's low-income residents, affordable fresh produce is simply not accessible.

Increasing access to urban gardening opportunities is an integral strategy to both bolster healthy eating among low-income residents and to increase physical activity through gardening. Research on school gardens demonstrates that participation in gardening and urban agriculture can encourage fruit and vegetable consumption among children, and has led to increased physical activity and improved nutrition among low-income populations of color. With this in mind, the Boston Public Health Commission partnered with the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI) and The Food Project (TFP) to rehabilitate a 10,000 square foot greenhouse in the heart of Boston's Roxbury neighborhood.

Located at 11 Brook Avenue, the greenhouse replaced the former Brook Avenue Garage, a dilapidated structure that had lain dormant for many years. Not only were the physical remains of this abandoned mechanic's shop a neighborhood eyesore, but the site also posed serious environmental hazards, owing to the nature of the business that had been run there. In preparation for the greenhouse's construction in 2004, the Mass Highway Department conducted extensive environmental site assessment, investigation and remediation.¹⁸ The remediation effort brought down lead and other industrial contamination to below acceptable levels.

After several attempts to develop business projects to benefit the community, DSNI, which remains the owner of the



greenhouse, leased the facility to The Food Project (TFP) in 2010. Building on its many years of nurturing green spaces in surrounding neighborhoods, and with the resources provided by Boston's Communities Putting Prevention to Work grant, TFP was able to undertake the final steps needed to get the space into working order.

The greenhouse measures approximately 10,000 square feet. Its growing space has been organized into four bays with one additional smaller bay that houses the controls, storage and educational and vegetable washing spaces. Two of the growing bays will be dedicated for use by the community ("community bays"), with the remaining two ("enterprise bays") allocated to growing produce to be sold at market rate to restaurants and other business. The goal is to generate enough revenue to enable this valuable community learning resource to be financially self-sufficient.

Spinach, tomatoes and salad greens are just some of the vegetables that are grown and harvested in the greenhouse. When the greenhouse is in full production, the bays are expected to generate a yield ranging from 30,000 to 40,000 pounds of fresh produce per year, depending on the varieties of vegetables planted. The community bays are used by community organizations to grow vegetables for their members. In addition, community bay produce may be donated to local hunger relief organizations, serve as material for classes on cooking healthy meals, or be sold at neighborhood farmers' markets/stands at substantially reduced prices. The prospects are many, and what is most exciting is that these decisions will be made with significant input from the community that the greenhouse will serve.

"Not too long ago, this site where we're standing was a garage; it was a blight on the neighborhood," Mayor Menino said during a visit to the Dudley Greenhouse in August. "Now it is an agricultural oasis, where residents can learn how to grow their own vegetables, and where fresh, affordable produce will be grown for the city's farmers' markets and food banks."