



CULTIVATING A Community

She arrived to class Monday morning with bags under her eyes. Between work, school and an attempt at having a social life, there was little room for sleep in her hectic schedule. With tuition, books and living expenses reaching an all time high, the last thing on her mind was eating healthy.

She could barely make ends meet. Her diet consisted of ramen noodles and frozen pizzas.

This situation is more common than you might think. Many college students across the country struggle to put a decent meal on the table.

Ashley Elle, Ph. D, a horticulture instructor at Texas Tech University, had a student approach her one day questioning why she did not qualify for the local food bank, only to realize she made just \$100 above the threshold.

“She solidified that the hunger issue is here at Tech,” Elle said with a sigh. “I’ve heard people kind of make fun of the fact that students take every opportunity to find free food, but it really is an issue.”

Elle said she saw this increasing need on the Tech campus and decided to take action. With the help of the greenhouse staff and multiple students, Elle formed what is known as the community garden, located in the horticulture gardens on campus.

“The garden is pretty much in its infancy right now,” Elle said. “But I saw it as an opportunity to get the horticulture club and other organizations involved in learning how to grow food and also how to give it away as a community involvement.”

Even though the garden is still in its beginning stages, Elle said one of the main goals is to give students on campus the experience of growing their own food from seed to harvest.


“We want to have more hands-on experience for students so that they can learn how to grow their own food and hopefully pass that on to others,” Elle said with a hopeful tone.

From tomatoes to basil, a wide assortment of fruits, vegetables and spices are growing in the community garden. Elle said experimenting with different foods is a great way to analyze what develops most effectively in the region.

“We are growing food that will hopefully grow well in West Texas kind of as a demonstration for people,” Elle explained. “It gives them an opportunity to come and see, and at the same time hopefully give as a produce.”

Kyle Tengler, a graduate student in the Department of Plant and Soil Science and a key component in the making of the community garden, said he would love to see members of the horticulture society be able to branch out and teach others how to garden in their local communities.

“It’s great for people to come here and learn, but I want them to grow food when they go home,” Tengler said. “There’s really nothing more empowering then growing your own food because you know exactly where it came from.”

As the girl left for home with a bag full of healthy produce in tow, she turned to thank the workers at her new found community garden. Without their help, she would still be surviving on ramen noodles and frozen pizza. 

Jordan Burson
Haskell, Texas

