



Final Capstone

In Collaboration with

ALMA Backyard Farms

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Introduction & Problem Statement

An estimated 25 million Americans are incarcerated in overcrowded, violent, and inhumane jails and prisons with limited access to treatment, education, or rehabilitation.¹ Since the 1970s, the rate of incarceration in America has risen to about 500%, making the United States the country with the highest incarceration rate in the world.² Worse, nearly 62% of prisoners released between July 2017 and June 2018 did not receive sufficient rehabilitative programming. Specifically, a report by the California State Auditor in 2019 identified issues with assessment tools, classroom placement, enforcement of contract requirements, staffing, curriculum, and oversight.³ With so many formerly incarcerated individuals released in the past year, recidivism or revisit rates are a primary concern. As of 2020, about 46% of offenders released in California are reconvicted within three years of release, and even more are rearrested.⁴

In 2008, the number of incarcerated people peaked at 2.3 million. Since then, that number has dropped nearly a quarter (23%). For instance, during the pandemic, prison and jail populations dropped significantly. According to the Vera Institute of Justice, the number of incarcerated people in state and federal prisons and local jails dropped from around 2.1 million in 2019 to 1.8 million in mid-2020--a 14% decrease. The decline is a result of several factors, including changes in sentencing policies, alternative diversion programs, and fewer arrests despite increased crime rates overall—granted, this increase occurred during historic lows.

¹ *Prison Conditions*. Equal Justice Initiative. (2021, March 10). <https://eji.org/issues/prison-conditions/>

² Santos, M. R., Testa, A., Weiss, D. B., & Jackson, D. B. (2022). County jail incarceration rates and food hardship in the United States. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 83. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2022.101919>

³ Bliss, K. (2020, Jan 7). *California Prison Rehabilitation Programs Costly and Ineffective*. Prison Legal News. <https://www.prisonlegalnews.org/news/2020/jan/7/california-prison-rehabilitation-programs-costly-and-ineffective/>

⁴ CalMatters. *Community reentry program for prisoners reduces recidivism*. (2021, September 3). <https://calmatters.org/commentary/2021/09/community-reentry-program-for-prisoners-reduces-recidivism/>

First, many jurisdictions implemented measures to reduce the number of people in jails and prisons to prevent the spread of the virus, such as releasing low-level offenders and those at higher risk of severe illness. Additionally, courts were closed or operating at reduced capacity, leading to delays in trials and sentencing, reducing the number of people entering the system. During the pandemic, many judges and prosecutors applied broad discretion in the release of those deemed ‘safe,’ and public defenders also filed thousands of motions to secure the release of their clients.⁵ Finally, the pandemic decreased crime rates in some areas, further reducing the number of arrests. Growing awareness and advocacy around mass incarceration and racial disparities in the criminal justice system also led to an increased political will for reform. Although there has been a significant decrease in the number of individuals in the criminal legal system during the pandemic, these population decreases do not indicate long-term policy-driven changes.⁶ Much work must be done to ensure that this trend continues and that justice truly serves all individuals.

Despite historically low populations in some prison systems and local jails, other records have returned to pre-pandemic levels,⁷ and the number of states with increases greater than 5% is the largest over a 15-year period.⁸ According to the non-partisan think tank Prison Policy Initiative, eight of the ten largest COVID-19 prison clusters are based in California. As of December 15th, 2021, California’s prisons still held more people than they were designed for. The system is currently at 113% of its design capacity, up from 103% in January 2021.

⁵ Vera Project. (2020, August). *The Scale of the COVID-19-Related Jail Population Decline*.

⁶ Sawyer, W. and Wagner, P. (2022, March 14). *Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie 2022*. Prison Policy Initiative. <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/pie2022.html>

⁷ Widra, E. (2022, February 10). State prisons and local jails appear indifferent to COVID outbreaks, refuse to depopulate dangerous facilities. Prison Policy Institute. https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2022/02/10/february2022_population/

⁸ *People in Prison in Winter 2021-22*. (2022, February). Vera Institute of Justice.

https://www.vera.org/downloads/publications/People_in_Prison_in_Winter_2021-22.pdf

Incarceration rates in the U.S. continue to exceed all other countries.

A disproportionate number of incarcerated people experience poverty, creating a social justice issue. Incarcerated individuals are likelier to experience poverty before and during a jail or prison sentence. Many incarcerated people come from low-income communities and face various economic and social challenges, including limited access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities.

Additionally, incarceration can exacerbate existing financial struggles, as individuals may lose their jobs, homes, and other sources of income. Significant barriers to re-entry upon release compound these challenges. Beyond poverty and racial disparities, the prison death rate from COVID-19 is more than double that of the general U.S. population, further implicating the public health and safety challenges and concerns in prisons.

Literature suggests a causal connection between food and carceral outcomes; however, food inequity's consequences can have lasting impacts on community and identity. Reese and Sbicca write that carceral spaces (such as surveilled neighborhoods and plantation prisons that exploit incarcerated labor) reflect and reproduce systems of oppression that are also present in the food system. Kanav Kathuia of The Maryland Food and Prison Abolition Project argues that food is a form of control, violence, punishment, and ultimately a source of profit for private food service corporations.

Consequently, a lack of equitable access to healthy and local food contributes to reduced lifespans with generational impacts that last long after incarcerated individuals are released. It is well known that a lack of nutritious food can disrupt daily life, cloud our minds, and weaken our

bodies. For most people experiencing incarceration, there is little opportunity to see and interact with nature or to become their agents of health, safety, and community. In the interest of collective liberation and humane treatment, it is possible to connect economic, racial, food, and restorative justice frameworks of food with carceral narratives. Food justice is inseparable from the anti-carceral social justice movement. Food justice relates to systemic inequalities (intensified by factors of race, class, and economic pressures). Food justice explores how these factors influence food production, distribution, and consumption to improve access to nutritious, affordable, and culturally-appropriate food.

In Los Angeles, food insecurity and food deserts are two leading causes of food injustice, disproportionately affecting communities of color experiencing poverty and other systemic inequities. Interpersonal and institutional discrimination prolong this struggle with hunger and malnutrition. Access to nutritious food is a right, not a privilege, and we must ensure that this right extends to the most vulnerable communities.

Consequently, repairing food systems must be a priority to improve health outcomes and reinforce equal opportunity to build a better Los Angeles for incarcerated individuals and the community. Beyond doubt, incarceration can significantly impact access to healthy food, as individuals in prison often have limited options and may rely on processed or unhealthy foods.

Additionally, the high poverty and food insecurity rates among incarcerated persons and their families can further exacerbate existing disparities in food access and contribute to health problems. Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach that addresses the criminal justice system and broader economic and social inequalities.

Urban farming in food deserts, such as Compton, can significantly address incarceration and food justice. By repurposing blighted land and providing job opportunities for formerly incarcerated individuals, urban farming can provide access to healthy, fresh food and support reentry into society. ALMA Backyard Farms in Los Angeles is an example of an organization tackling food justice through urban farming initiatives that support the formerly incarcerated. Further research on the effectiveness of initiatives like ALMA Backyard Farms can provide valuable insight into the potential of urban farming to promote social and environmental justice.

Background & Literature Review

ALMA Backyard Farms is a transformative initiative that brings together the issues of incarceration and food justice. This program addresses the challenges incarcerated individuals, their families, and the larger community face. Co-founders Richard Garcia and Erika Cuellar established ALMA in response to the needs of formerly incarcerated individuals who voiced their desire to transform their lives and their communities. These individuals wanted to “give back to the communities they had taken from and were taken away from,” and they recognized the potential of urban farming as a way to achieve this goal.⁹

ALMA Backyard Farms focuses on three key areas: reclaiming lives, repurposing land, and reimagining communities. By providing training and employment opportunities for formerly incarcerated individuals, ALMA helps to address the issue of recidivism and provides a pathway for individuals to reenter society. The program also repurposes unused land, transforming it into productive urban farms that provide fresh, healthy food for the community. Finally, ALMA reimagines communities where people and plants can flourish, promoting social and

⁹ ALMA Backyard Farms. (2022). *Our History*. <https://www.ALMAbackyardfarms.com/our-history>

environmental justice. At the same time, the initiative recognizes that no lives or land are to be wasted and that everyone has the potential to contribute to their community. By providing training, education, and employment opportunities, ALMA empowers individuals to take control of their lives and become “agents of change.”¹⁰

In recent decades, a growing body of literature has demonstrated how community gardens can empower participants, foster participation in health, push collective action toward environmental sustainability, and promote contact with nature and its food systems.

According to Sonal Jessel and Bobbi Wilding, incarceration is an environmental justice issue and must be treated as such. Carceral facilities are geographically located in areas known as food deserts that lack “clean water and sanitation, healthy food, energy insecurity, environmental results of climate change such as extreme heat and cold, climate crisis events, unhealthy housing, siting of facilities near toxic sites, and exposure to chemicals while doing labor. All of these issues compound cumulative burdens that come from environmental hazards in which those incarcerated lived previously and to which people go back upon release.”¹¹

Similarly, environmental educator and cultural preservationist Ashia Ajani explores the relationship between prison systems and the politics of disposability (which govern “who is allowed to suffer and who is allowed to prolong suffering”). She recognizes that vulnerable, low-income populations experience a disproportionate pollution burden and mass incarceration. Ajani adds that this “[encourages] the need for comprehensive environmental policy with respect

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Jessel S., & Wilding B. (2021, July). *Environmental Justice, Health, and Carceral Facilities*. WE ACT for Environmental Justice & Clean and Healthy New York. <https://www.weact.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/WE-ACT-CHNY-Carceral-Facilities-Report-071321.pdf>

to social wellness.”¹²

Despite the emerging movement for police and prison reform, social consciousness requires continuous reflection and policy actions to match. Social consciousness also demands correction to the larger prison system structure and the conditions that lead to incarceration. In order to understand hardships and their effects, it is vital to apply an intersectional analysis that reflects on the situation at hand.

Additionally, reparative justice interventions must address issues within the criminal justice system and the various environmental damages that disproportionately harm communities of color. Finally, overinvestment in incarceration and policing should be redirected toward social support efforts (including but not limited to community resources and efforts to alleviate poverty) and environmental justice (Jessel & Wilding, 2021).

A broad array of experts has contributed to this area of research. For instance, one initiative sought to provide inmates with science education and access to conservation and sustainability efforts. (This team was composed of researchers led by Nalini Nadkarni, a professor at the University of Utah; Tom Kaye, executive director and senior ecologist at the Institute of Applied Ecology; and Kelly Bush, the co-director of the Sustainability in Prisons Project at Evergreen State College.) This effort extends one means to alleviate the human costs of incarceration, loss of biodiversity, and ecological harms to our planet.¹³ Researcher Seth Prins

¹² Ajani, A. (2021, Dec 1). Reframing environmental racism as a form of criminalization: Actualizing Critical Environmental Justice. Yale Environment Review. <https://environment-review.yale.edu/reframing-environmental-racism-form-criminalization-actualizing-critical-environmental-justice>

¹³ Ecological Society of America. (2017). *Collaborating with the incarcerated in ecological restoration, education, and sustainability*. <https://www.esa.org/esablog/2017/08/25/collaborating-with-the-incarcerated-in-ecological-restoration-education-and-sustainability/>

and filmmaker Brett Story offer analogous suggestions for the causes of mass incarceration and health disparities. Prison abolitionists and public health advocates, they write, argue that these causes include extraction, exploitation, domination, racism, and heteropatriarchy.¹⁴

Projects like ALMA Backyard Farms can facilitate the local processes of restorative justice. Another inspiring example of a similar organization is Planting Justice, a food justice organization based in Oakland, California, that tackles inequalities in the industrialized food system, from the underpayment of food workers to the lack of fresh produce in low-income neighborhoods. One of the participants said, “It’s the same as a plant. A plant, if you don’t weed it, if you don’t prune it, if you don’t water it, it’s not going to grow and give fruit.”¹⁵ Like Planting Justice, there are a couple of other urban farms throughout the United States with the same focus.

Meanwhile, ALMA not only challenges structural limitations but champions an overall philosophy that isn’t so simple as opening more grocery stores than liquor stores. Co-founder of ALMA Backyard Farms Richard Garcia recognizes the greater philosophical challenges of food injustice.¹⁶ “The battle we face, the injustice,” Garcia explains, “is one where people in lower-income, impoverished neighborhoods are bombarded with messages that healthy, nutritious food is something for other people. It involves a mindset” (Garcia in Kuipers, 2020). As the NationSwell article argues, “You can’t argue with the benefits of urban farming. Not only does it provide fresh, local food, but it also helps to unite a community.”¹⁷ As a result, coercion

¹⁴ Prins, S. J., & Story, B. (2020). Connecting the Dots Between Mass Incarceration, Health Inequity, and Climate Change. *American journal of public health*, 110(S1), S35–S36. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2019.305470>

¹⁵ Kandil, C.Y. (2022, August 7). *The Urban Garden Transforming Lives After Prison: I’m finally free*. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/aug/07/planting-justice-oakland-california-food-prison>

¹⁶ Kuipers, D. (2020, October 21). *You Should Know a Farmer*. Red Canary Collective. <https://redcanarycollective.org/magazine/you-should-know-a-farmer/>

¹⁷ NationSwell. (2023). *These Three Urban Farms Provide the Formerly Incarcerated an Opportunity to Grow*. <https://nationswell.com/urban-farming-help-ex-inmates-at-risk-youth/>

and isolation are not sustainable; existing practices and projects require collaboration, reintegration, and transformation.

Methodology & Data Analysis

Reflecting on nearly a decade of refined approaches to sustained community engagement, our hypothesis posits that the urban farming projects at ALMA Backyard Farms effectively propose real solutions to the challenges of California's overcrowded prisons and food injustice in low-income neighborhoods. One of the principal mechanisms for ALMA's success is the compound effect generated by the various activities designed to tackle food justice and incarceration issues simultaneously. In order to assess this activity, our methodology integrates mixed methods research with collecting and evaluating both quantitative and qualitative data. Whereas quantitative data provided structured information, the more unstructured qualitative data provided important contextual knowledge that also informed the research hypotheses for the quantitative research components.

The study followed a semi-structured interview protocol to collect data about participants' and stakeholders' experiences with ALMA Backyard Farms. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Pepperdine approved the study, and the research team confirmed informed consent before participants' interview participation. Please see the Appendices for a copy of the interview questions read to each participant.

Traditionally, researchers use thematic content analysis to structure collections of qualitative data. After interviewing participants and transcribing the interviews, the team excerpted portions of each interview into a structured table format by theme. Excerpts were then

systematically analyzed to obtain qualitative insights into our research questions and to guide our quantitative data analysis. Intersectional, mixed-methods research allowed our team to structure a holistic picture of ALMA's impact through justice-based community initiatives.

Qualitative Data

Interviews

The qualitative portion of our data analysis consisted of 14 interviews with various stakeholders associated with ALMA Backyard Farms. Stakeholders' expertise on ALMA Backyard Farms ranges from occasional attendance as a community member enjoying the project to internal stakeholders directly involved with operating ALMA Backyard Farms. The interviewees mostly expressed positive views of the program with minor suggestions for improvements to bolster the program's long-term success.

1. In one of the first interviews, the stakeholder served as a representative of a foundation that got involved with ALMA Backyard Farms due to their belief in the vision and potential of the two young founders, Richard and Erika, and their commitment to cultivating leadership skills for young men and women who had troubles in the past. The stakeholder also noted the organic growth of the program and its ability to modify and iterate to improve its impact.

Regarding organizational culture, the stakeholder mentioned the strong Catholic tradition that informs the intuition and decision-making of the founders, who engage with young people to cultivate new skills. The stakeholder identified ALMA's mission as “changing lives through farming in very spiritual ways, with a focus on helping to cultivate leadership skills for young men and women who have had troubles in the past.”

Regarding the impact on the community, the stakeholder noted that ALMA has been successful in its efforts, but “there is still tremendous opportunity for growth and greater impact.” The stakeholder also identified potential barriers to the program, such as societal stigma surrounding formerly incarcerated individuals and the broken criminal justice system, and noted that ALMA is limited in its ability to reach a larger number of disadvantaged community residents that inhabit the immediate area.

The stakeholder also suggested that ALMA could improve its impact by intentionally expanding its presence in parishes and schools, providing more life skills to formerly incarcerated men and women, and building a more finished business model.

Overall, the stakeholder expressed confidence in ALMA's ability to sustain its model, citing the quality of partnerships it has established with local businesses and the commitment of its founders to the program's vision and mission.

2. According to the second interview with a stakeholder involved with ALMA Backyard Farms, several themes emerge that can inform a qualitative analysis of the program's effectiveness. The stakeholder heard about ALMA from a friend and was drawn to the organization's mission of helping formerly incarcerated individuals learn new skills and rebuild their lives. However, she noted that “the mission has evolved over time to focus on building communities at multiple levels, including a youth component.”

The stakeholder described the organizational culture at ALMA as "magical," with a positive and encouraging atmosphere that gives second chances to individuals who may not have had them before. She also noted that ALMA significantly impacts the community, not only in providing affordable healthy food but educating on how to grow and cook it.

When asked about any potential barriers to the program, the stakeholder could not identify any. She also described the program as socially accessible to disadvantaged community residents and noted the quality of the produce and crops were “very fresh and in high demand.”

The stakeholder identified no weaknesses regarding the program model and culture and described it as sustainable, given the program's success and the positive relationships ALMA has built within the community. The stakeholder also spoke about how ALMA fosters social inclusion and trust in the effort toward food security through its culture and communication within the community.

Overall, the stakeholder's interview provides evidence of the effectiveness of ALMA's program in achieving its mission and building positive relationships within the community. The program's focus on helping formerly incarcerated individuals learn new skills and rebuild their lives has evolved to focus on building communities at multiple levels, mainly providing affordable healthy food and education about how to grow and cook it. The positive organizational culture and strong relationships with the community also suggest that ALMA can sustain itself.

3. In the following interview, the stakeholder learned about ALMA Backyard Farms through a colleague who had a positive experience with the organization's emergency food distributions at the beginning of the pandemic. The stakeholder's positive first impression was reinforced by the outstanding leadership they encountered and the beautiful, organic produce that ALMA provided. The stakeholder's role is as a funder. The stakeholder has visited ALMA many times and is always struck by the positive, beautiful space that serves as a community gathering space in a blighted neighborhood. While the stakeholder can't remember ALMA's mission

statement, they are impressed by its ambition and ability to achieve its goals. ALMA's impact on the community includes creating "community green spaces," which can improve mental health and create a new generation of kids who value healthy food and respect the earth. Offering the formerly incarcerated the opportunity to become agents of health, safety, and community is a great thing to offer. The stakeholder believes working in such a beautiful space and positive working environment is inherently healing. ALMA's primary facilitators include their bi-monthly farm stand that prioritizes selling goods and their partnership with local entrepreneurs. The significant barrier to the program is the hard work of farming and the risk associated with not owning the land they farm on.

4. In one of the other interviews, the stakeholder became aware of ALMA Backyard Farms through their previous work with an organization involved in food equity and climate change initiatives. They were drawn to ALMA Backyard Farms due to its location, workflow, and holistic mission. The stakeholder described ALMA Backyard Farms as a "secular nonprofit with an intersection of faith-based community building." The stakeholder visited the farm and found it an overwhelmingly beautiful cultivated space with a strong work ethic. They commended ALMA Backyard Farms for creating a safe space for everyone, connecting people from different spectrums, and demonstrating their mission through action.

The stakeholder was primarily involved in the program as a chef and volunteered on-site, packing grocery kits for distribution. They never gardened or farmed, but they supported the program through action-oriented initiatives. They also sourced products for meals from ALMA Backyard Farms. When asked about the impact of ALMA Backyard Farms on the community, the stakeholder noted that it connects people across different spectrums and creates a safe space for everyone. However, they could not speak to the goal of offering formerly incarcerated

individuals the opportunity to become agents of health, safety, and community.

The stakeholder also highlighted several significant program facilitators, including the partnership with a backyard farm in Riverside, California, that could serve as a new location for ALMA Backyard Farms. Food Forward supplied surplus food for grocery kits, and the market-based aspect of the program was great for all involved. The Archdiocese was also a significant source of financial support for ALMA Backyard Farms. However, the stakeholder was unsure of any significant barriers to the program and those it serves.

Regarding the program's model and culture, the stakeholder identified several strengths, including its potential for sustainability in the long-term, community-based organization efforts and its ability to demonstrate its mission through action. The stakeholder noted that the program was labor-intensive and required the talents of Erika and Richard to cultivate everything. They also praised the quality of the produce and crops, noting a night and day difference compared to local options in Rancho Dominguez. The stakeholder also mentioned ALMA Backyard Farms' efforts towards social inclusion and trust in the step towards food security. They commended the program's ability to collapse social barriers through markets, community-based events, and emergency food relief.

Overall, the stakeholder was a huge fan of ALMA Backyard Farms and was grateful for the space they had provided. They believed that the city would be a better place if every neighborhood had an ALMA Backyard Farms.

5. In this interview, the stakeholder has participated with ALMA Backyard Farms as a funding partner since the beginning. They visited the farm in its early stages. They were impressed by their vision for the future, the thoughtfulness with which they grew food, and their

(initially) small and scrappy organizational culture. According to the stakeholder, ALMA's mission statement is about never wasting food, promoting healthy food and communities, and restorative justice efforts. At the same time, ALMA has become a vital community hub that has cultivated a market for fresh and organic produce, is an educational resource, and is a "place for healing." The stakeholder also believes that the program offers employment and training and a new perspective for engagement with the formerly incarcerated. Moreover, ALMA has successfully promoted its organization to a larger group of funders through other philanthropic institutions. However, they might have challenges keeping up with the pace of their rapid growth and zoning issues with the city over the farmstand.

The stakeholder also believes that ALMA has always been socially accessible, but the farmstand has increased accessibility substantially. Furthermore, the stakeholder was impressed with the organization's soft skills, such as solid communication skills, that have led to success in generating interest, resulting in increased fund development. Besides that, according to the stakeholder, ALMA's strengths include working in relationships with people internally and externally. Their weakness is scaling operations too rapidly without enough trained staff to support the program at the same high level of quality.

The stakeholder has not observed any issues with the quality of produce/crops, finding them of incredible quality, with reasonable pricing and high demand. Overall, the interviewee confirmed that ALMA fosters social inclusion and trust in the effort toward food security by approaching all of their work with dignity and thoughtfulness and celebratory engagement with the community.

6. This interview featured a stakeholder who participated in an initiative addressing

recidivism. They mentioned their partnership with ALMA Farms, where staff members volunteered and contributed to the organization. They heard second-hand from people who had visited ALMA Farms. They learned that it provided opportunities for formerly incarcerated individuals to explore and connect with the community, giving them another healthy avenue to return to society. Overall, ALMA Farms offers a unique urban farming model that is uncommon in the Los Angeles area. ALMA also focuses on providing job opportunities that are “less labor-intensive than construction and hard labor.”

The interviewee believes that ALMA Farms' model is successful in combating high rates of recidivism and improving community outcomes by providing formerly incarcerated individuals with an opportunity to become agents of health, safety, and community. According to the stakeholder, the program fosters social inclusion and trust toward food security by giving back to the community and providing therapeutic options while working on a farm. The stakeholder identified no significant barriers to the program or those it serves. Still, they did mention that since ALMA Farms is a small organization, it can only help a certain number of people at a time. However, the interviewee believes that ALMA Farms can sustain its model in the long term by scaling it up and offering a variety of opportunities.

Finally, the interviewee thinks that ALMA Farms is a successful program and recommends it as an opportunity to give back by learning or providing produce during the pandemic. Overall, this interview highlights the positive impact that ALMA Farms has on formerly incarcerated individuals and the community overall.

7. This interviewee learned about ALMA Backyard Farms through a co-founder they knew from school. The interviewee was drawn to the organization's restorative justice model and

how urban farming was interconnected. They felt a “sense of divine beauty” when they walked into the farm in the middle of Compton. They are personally and professionally involved in the program, visit the farm frequently with their family and enjoy purchasing baked goods and fresh smoothies. The stakeholder also helps to connect students, staff, and faculty from a local university to the work that ALMA is doing.

The interviewee feels that ALMA's organizational culture is hospitable, welcoming to everyone in the community, and able to address important social justice issues adequately. They have created a space for the community to come together, socialize, and nourish one another. The interviewee believes that ALMA has been successful in making healthy and accessible food available to the community and creating a different space for the community to gather.

The interviewee is impressed by ALMA's mission statement of offering the formerly incarcerated the opportunity to become agents of health, safety, and community. At the same time, ALMA has been successful in achieving this goal, but the interviewee wishes they were a bigger operation. The stakeholder believes that ALMA can sustain success in the long-term and that the senior leadership team complements each other well.

Regarding produce quality, the interviewee finds that ALMA's produce is affordable and of great quality, and the stakeholder purchases it for their family and colleagues. The interviewee believes that ALMA fosters social inclusion and trust by engaging with the community, having relationships with the school and the church, and speaking to people one-on-one.

The interviewee did not identify any significant barriers to the program but suggests that ALMA may need to prioritize intersecting restorative justice and urban farming more smoothly. The stakeholder thinks that ALMA could better achieve its goal of offering the formerly

incarcerated the opportunity to become agents of health, safety, and community by expanding its operation and training programs. The interviewee also believes that ALMA is socially accessible to disadvantaged community residents, but they are a smaller team and may need more resources to expand their reach.

8. According to another stakeholder, it is clear that the interviewee is a regular customer and vendor at ALMA Backyard Farms and retains a deep appreciation for the organization's mission and impact on the community. The interviewee mentioned that she loves the "happy Sunday place" vibe at the San Pedro location. She enjoys spending time there with her dog, chatting with other community members, and sampling the variety of produce and spice blends.

The interviewee also spoke highly of the organizational culture at ALMA Backyard Farms, asserting that the leaders, Erika and Richard, are amazing and have cultivated a group of happy and dedicated individuals, including students who work at the farm. The interviewee also admired the organization's mission statement, which she summarized as reclaiming urban land for those living there, ensuring access to quality seasonal organic produce, and teaching people that having those things isn't out of their reach. She always talks about ALMA Backyard Farms and even posts about it on social media.

When asked about the success and areas for improvement of the program, the interviewee acknowledged that she might need more experience to speak directly about that, given that she is a regular customer and vendor rather than someone who is there daily. However, she did note that the quality of the produce at ALMA Backyard Farms is incredible and that the organization fosters social inclusion and trust-building through its events and farm stand.

The interviewee was also asked about the sustainability of the program in the long term,

and she emphasized the strengths of the group of people that ALMA Backyard Farms has gathered to further its mission. She also mentioned that as a non-profit organization, they must be doing well financially, given that they keep expanding and adding more programs. Despite her optimism, she also acknowledged that she is not privy to the organization's financial details.

Overall, the interviewee's responses demonstrate a deep appreciation and support for ALMA Backyard Farms and a belief in the organization's mission and impact on the community.

9. According to another interview our research team conducted, the interviewee learned about ALMA Backyard Farms through social media, particularly on Instagram. What stood out to her was “the beauty of the space and the organization's focus on growing healthy food and natural products for the community.” Her involvement with the program is primarily as a buyer of wholesale soaps from ALMA, which she resells in her business. It has been an excellent financial experience for her and her family, and she appreciates the organization's mission to support small businesses.

The interviewee has visited ALMA Backyard Farms with her children, and they enjoy getting smoothies and spending time there. She notes that everything sells out quickly, and the food is always fresh. The organization's culture is positive, as the interviewee sees everyone working together, and the environment is enjoyable. Although the interviewee is unfamiliar with ALMA's mission statement, she knows it aims to provide affordable and healthy food options for the community and support small businesses. She also highlights the importance of being in nature, even on a small farm, as it is healthy for everyone's minds.

One of ALMA's significant impacts on the community is that it brings together people of diverse ethnicities, including those from outside the community, to experience Compton

positively. This positive experience and social diversity foster local pride in a community still battling negative media coverage and stigmas of the past. The interviewee also notes that ALMA offers formerly incarcerated individuals the opportunity to become agents of health, safety, and community. She observes that these individuals feel good about themselves and are happy to do something for the community while having stable jobs.

The interviewee sees no significant barriers to the program or those it serves. She notes that ALMA is socially accessible to disadvantaged community residents. However, she suggests that ALMA could sustain its model better in the long term with more advertising and food options. Specifically, she recommends adding hot food items like a hot breakfast to bring more people together at the farm.

Regarding the quality of produce and crops, the interviewee notes that ALMA's quality is excellent. She suggests that the organization could explore “delivering boxes of veggies and meal kits to people's homes, as her husband experienced in Vermont, for a fee of, for instance, \$100 a month.” Such a program could help families access healthy food options delivered to their doorstep, which could be a sustainable source of income for ALMA.

Finally, the interviewee highlights ALMA's efforts to foster social inclusion and trust in the effort toward food security. ALMA not only sells fresh food to the community but also does a lot of giveaways, which is an excellent way to support the community. The interviewee notes that abundant high-quality, affordable produce benefits children who need healthy food options.

10. According to another interview, the stakeholder learned about ALMA Farms through their active presence on Instagram, which stood out as unusual for community gardens and urban farms. The stakeholder was impressed with the organization's productivity and organization in

growing various crops and always having something growing in each bed, making the farm more than just a community garden. The stakeholder also noted that there is very little wasted time and a fast turnaround after harvest. Additionally, the events and programming for kids were appealing, and the “environment was well-landscaped,” adding depth and value to the experience.

The stakeholder is involved with ALMA Farms as a creator/entrepreneur and uses their resources to connect as a garden. The interviewee has access to resources and enjoys tapping their partners to connect them to ALMA Farms to help expand their reach. The stakeholder noted that “ALMA's mission is game-changing, and the levels of professionalism are impressive, with Richard and Erika being full-time employees who are passionate about their work.”

The stakeholder has visited ALMA Farms twice a month and appreciated the inter-team culture and sense of community. The interviewee also noted that many people working with ALMA Farms are coming out of the prison system, and the rehabilitation and support they receive are essential. The team dynamics are impressive, and the stakeholder noted that ALMA Farms is excellent at building team dynamics due to their experiences and understanding of who these people are. Richard and Erika's previous work experience with Homeboy Industries gives them a good understanding of the community they are serving.

The stakeholder noted that ALMA Farms has a safe and inclusive culture where everyone has an implicit understanding. It is hard not to feel cohesive between ALMA and the community. They also noted that the farmstand is open to the public, and the foot traffic is high, especially during peak times such as watermelon season. Again, all produce sells out quickly.

ALMA Farms offers formerly incarcerated individuals an opportunity to become agents

of health, safety, and community, and the stakeholder noted that “expansion is key.” While ALMA Farms has a couple of other farms/spaces to increase production, the challenge is scaling the culture if they have to expand and hire more people. The stakeholder noted that ALMA Farms is very conscious about where they grow, and it is relatively small to date, but they are selective.

The stakeholder identified the primary facilitators of the program and those it serves as external/operational ones. The primary barrier identified is the challenge of keeping people employed, as there is only so much they can do with their operating budget. The stakeholder noted that turnover rates are low, but they want to hire more people if expansion opportunities arise.

The stakeholder also confirmed that ALMA Farms is socially accessible to disadvantaged community residents. Moreover, they are about to launch a series of brunches with low-cost meals/food, making it more accessible.

The stakeholder identified strengths in ALMA Farm's model and culture, noting that it is one of the most impressive cultures the interviewee has seen in a nonprofit business. ALMA Farms treats everyone like family and team members in every sense. The stakeholder also noted that ALMA Farms could sustain this model. Finally, the stakeholder pointed out that the quality of produce/crops is prolific, and the raised beds are well-spaced.

11. One of the other interviewees is a board member and chair at Alma Farms. The interviewee loves Alma Farms' mission, plan, and the energy and ideas of Richard, the first person they met. They are in charge of organizing and conceptualizing board meetings and work with the board to develop ideas, initiatives, questions, concerns, and issues. The interviewee said

that all board members think that Alma Farms restores their sense of their values and ethics, “benefiting them spiritually, morally, intellectually, and artistically.”

The interviewee has visited Alma Farms twice a month and said that it is a mission-driven organization, and everyone is as much a team as they are a family. Richard and Erika run Alma Farms with vigor and seriousness and never lose sight of the people's spiritual, emotional, psychological, and professional growth. The interviewee said they are cautiously excited about the growth and reiterate the importance of growing so that Alma Farms' values, morals, and ethics are growing alongside them. The interviewee is advised caution about the approach to growth and wants to know who will pick up the slack in work, vision, community, and inspiration when external factors change.

The interviewee said that day to day operations of Alma Farms are best suited for Erika and Richard, and the board's goal is to support them. One thing that the board talked about was building an entrepreneurial start-up culture within Alma Farms. They discussed how Alma Farms could become a financial opportunity for team members and how team members can create their own dishes and sell them at the farm stand. The interviewee said they want Alma Farms to tell team members' stories better and more robustly.

Regarding Alma Farms' impact on the community, the interviewee noted that Alma Farms had become a marquee destination for the greater Compton area. The farm stand opens at 8; if someone arrives after 9, much of the produce is gone. The interviewee said that seeing how many people count on Alma Farms as a regular food source has been amazing.

Regarding the opportunity for formerly incarcerated persons to become agents of health, safety, and community, the interviewee said Alma Farms's work is crucial. The interviewee said

that the farm and the process of planting, growing, harvesting, and creating compost are real things that happen daily and provide powerful metaphors for people rebuilding their lives.

The interviewee said Richard and Erika “bring a unique approach to thinking about life, the world, and the land that makes Alma Farms so singular.” Their in-depth training and tradition in faith-based social justice movements/organizations lend an incredible balance between theoretical, philosophical, idea-based team building, direct action on the ground, and strategic organizational skills.

The interviewee did not identify any major barriers to the program and those it serves. When asked if Alma Farms is socially accessible to disadvantaged community residents, the interviewee did not provide a direct answer.

Regarding strengths/weaknesses of the program model or culture, the interviewee said that Alma Farms can sustain its model in the long-term. However, the question for Alma Farms is what it wants to be in 5 or 10 years. If Alma Farms intends to grow, “it needs to have structures that allow it to grow in a responsible and generative way in order to maintain its character and quality.”

Furthermore, when asked how ALMA fosters social inclusion and trust in the effort toward food security, the interviewee responded positively, indicating that ALMA is doing well. The interviewee also spoke about the complications of working with local ordinances, city policies, county policies, rental agreements, and community leaders and political figures. The interviewee mentioned that such difficulties come with the territory of urban farming. However, ALMA tries to be careful and proactive in working with local ordinances and community leaders to overcome such complications. Overall, this interview highlights that ALMA is providing fresh

produce at a reasonable price, making an effort to be accessible to the community, and fostering social inclusion and trust in the effort toward food security.

12. In one of the other interviews conducted by our research team, the stakeholder stated that she learned about Alma Farms through word of mouth. The organization's focus on providing opportunities for formerly incarcerated people and combining urban farming stood out to her. As an executive director, her role in the program is to provide grants and funds. She has visited the original Alma Farms location twice and “was very impressed with how the space was built and maintained.” Although she has never been present during the programs, she is aware of their work during the pandemic to address food insecurity and provide groceries to families in the area. Additionally, she knows they host many school visits and offer employment opportunities to formerly incarcerated individuals.

When asked about the organizational culture of Alma Farms, she deferred to discussing the organization's long-term vision. However, she noted that she appreciated the “non-judgmental, welcoming approach” that Alma Farms takes with formerly incarcerated individuals, recognizing the need to treat them as whole people rather than just a label.

Regarding Alma Farms's impact on the local community, she stated that “it is hard to quantify the visual impact of turning an empty lot into a beautiful, fertile space.” However, she knows that Alma Farms has helped dozens, perhaps hundreds of families in the area by providing fresh food and groceries. Although the employment part is small, the opportunities provided for those who have returned home from incarceration are essential.

In terms of offering formerly incarcerated individuals the opportunity to become agents of health, safety, and community, she wishes that the approach to state punishment was different.

However, she recognizes the importance of programs like Alma Farms in providing skill-building and meaningful experiences. She believes the progress creates a need for additional services and supports the concern for "healing."

Regarding the major facilitators of the program and those it serves, the executive director noted that funders and food businesses are important partners. She is still determining the current roster of partnerships and whether recruitment into employment continues through a halfway house or residence fit after incarceration. Regarding barriers to the program and those it serves, "hiring can be a challenge, and staff capacity has been a concern."

When asked about the social accessibility of Alma Farms to disadvantaged community residents, the stakeholder stated that although the community is sprawling and car-centric, Alma Farms is trying to serve people in the LA neighborhood. She is less familiar with the specifics of the other locations but believes they are similar.

Finally, the interviewee identified strengths in Alma Farms' focused and ambitious mission, clear priorities, and ability to move fast when the right fit presents itself. The stakeholder also believes it can be challenging for non-profits to keep their priorities centered and avoid the temptation to expand in other directions to impress funders or attract additional funding. At the same time, the stakeholder thinks that Alma Farms has managed to stretch funds to keep going and grow into other locations. Overall, she believes Alma Farms has a clear mission and can sustain this model.

13. The interviewee became involved with ALMA Backyard Farms in 2020 during the pandemic when she was laid off. She heard about the program through a food giveaway event, where she received a grocery kit. This initial experience with the program motivated her to

become a volunteer, leading to a job offer. The interviewee describes the organizational culture of ALMA as “being like a family, with everyone being supportive and empowering.” The stakeholder feels that the program has positively impacted the community by creating job opportunities, providing access to quality organic food, and serving as a place of refuge where people can come together and feel a sense of community.

One of the key strengths of ALMA identified by the interviewee is the program's ability to provide a new chance at life to formerly incarcerated people. The program helps ease them back into society without the stigma of being a former inmate. The Peas in a Pod program, which involves working in the garden, has been particularly impactful in helping people “find a new sense of purpose.” The interviewee also highlighted partnerships with organizations and companies as major program facilitators, such as Thrive Market, local farms, Gasal Foundation, and Pressed Juicery. She notes that partnerships like these create brand exposure for Compton and contribute to food justice.

The interviewee identified some challenges with the program, including the demand for produce, which sometimes causes them to sell out in an hour, making it hard to turn people away. The interviewee also noted the challenge of having enough food for everyone and the potential risk of not having a reliable food source. However, the interviewee does not see these challenges as major barriers to the program.

Regarding the quality of the produce and crops, the interviewee shared that the food is reasonably priced, “with everything under \$10, and sometimes under \$5.” She finds the produce fresh and delicious and notes that it lasts for at least two weeks in the crisper. ALMA’s produce is significantly better than Whole Foods’, which only lasted a week.

In terms of fostering social inclusion and trust, the interviewee believes that ALMA has created opportunities for social inclusion by being open to everyone and being critical about how they engage with the community. She notes that ALMA fosters trust by creating a safe space for people impacted by the economy to consume quality organic food and “interact with others in a safe and welcoming environment.”

Overall, this interview provides valuable insights into the effectiveness of the ALMA Backyard Farms program. The program's organizational culture, focus on community-building, and job opportunities have positively impacted the community, particularly for formerly incarcerated individuals. The program's partnerships with other organizations and companies have facilitated its success. The challenges identified by the interviewee, such as the demand for produce, do not appear to be significant barriers to the program. Finally, the interviewee's positive experience with the quality of the produce and crops supports the program's mission of providing quality organic food to communities that lack access.

14. The interviewee described ALMA's organizational culture as “uniquely tight-knit” and positive. The organization is committed to uplifting each other's personal and professional success. Additionally, the interviewee noted that the job training program offered by ALMA empowers formerly incarcerated individuals to start a new career and reconnect with their community. This experience of being able to play a role in caring for others and giving back to the community helps recognize personal power to do good.

The interviewee described ALMA's impact on the community as advantageous to community health and community building. ALMA offers a second chance at life for formerly incarcerated individuals. The interviewee noted that it is difficult to measure the impact of the

kid's program, but the goal is to connect children with their environment and “empower them to feel like stewards of the earth.” The program provides children access to green spaces and empowers them to receive personal benefits from which they have been systematically separated. The interviewee highlighted that it is crucial to empower the next generation of leaders and communities to receive these benefits.

Besides that, the interviewee discussed ALMA's long-term vision, which includes a project in Riverside. Although the project's status has changed in the last few months, the interviewee could not provide more information.

Moreover, the interviewee highlighted funding and labor as the main barriers to ALMA's expansion. She noted that the leadership team is good at problem-solving, and the organization's efficiency is incredible. However, funding is still challenging, and there could always be more. The interviewee also pointed out that the policy landscape of urban agriculture is pretty thin, and “there is no playbook for setting up an urban farm.” For example, land access barriers encountered for the first time, utility questions, and permits take longer because there is no procedure. The interviewee also noted that ALMA does not own any land yet and leases land in Compton from the Archdiocese.

The interviewee also mentioned that ALMA is socially accessible to disadvantaged community residents. The Compton farm site is located in an area with poor access to healthy food, and most people who come to the farm stand are from the community that ALMA serves. The interviewee was also asked how ALMA gains traction in getting the word out, to which she answered that they have an Instagram account and other social media platforms to reach their audience.

Overall, this interview provided valuable insights into ALMA Backyard Farms' effectiveness in providing job training to formerly incarcerated individuals while focusing on sustainability and local agriculture. The interviewee described ALMA's impact on the community, the organizational culture, the long-term vision, and barriers and facilitators to the organization's expansion. The interviewee also confirmed that ALMA is socially accessible to disadvantaged community residents. These findings contribute to a better understanding of the effectiveness of ALMA's programs and the impact of urban agriculture on disadvantaged communities.

To sum up, ALMA Backyard Farms is clearly and intentionally making a positive difference in the communities that they serve. The relationships that Richard and Erika have fostered have led to meaningful connections that support the long-term health and sustainability of the program. ALMA Backyard Farms can strengthen its operation with the possible implementation of the feedback from data collected in these interviews.

Quantitative Research

Disclaimer: Identifiers or keys were stored in a separate, password-protected, or encrypted file.

We will not share any highly sensitive information via email. Our team has also fulfilled the applicable Human Subjects Training requirements.

Upon final approval from Pepperdine's Institutional Review Board, our research team gathered data by email from the main stakeholders involved in the ALMA programs.

Based on self-reported data, ALMA prices most produce under \$5 (peaches are the highest priced), but most produce costs \$1 - \$2.

After locating the market price, ALMA drops the cost from \$0.50 to \$1.00. This process

suggests that ALMA lowers the cost of local produce. However, due to an ordinance prohibiting food distribution onsite in San Pedro, only the Compton farm is open as of April 2023. The founders hope to reopen the San Pedro site at a later date.

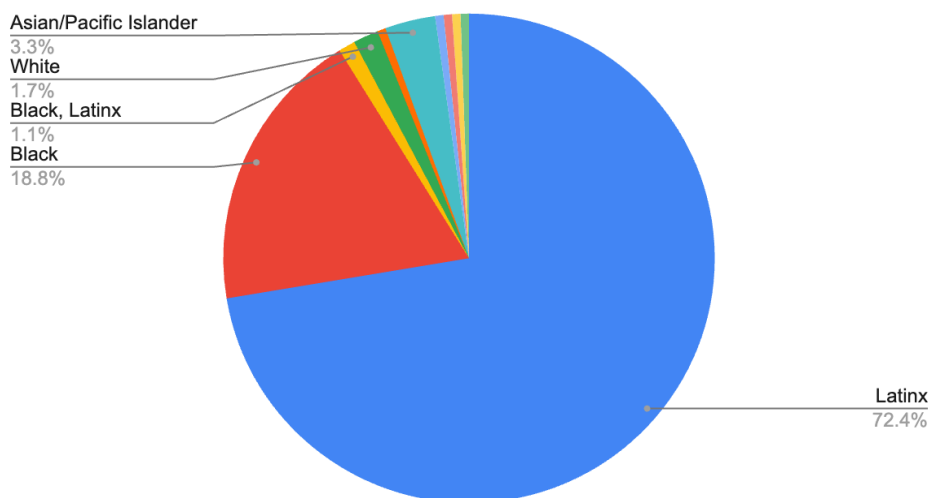
In Compton, the Farm Stand sells about \$4,000 worth of produce. The trainees (usually between five and ten part- and full-time employees) sell or distribute 90% of produce and share 10% with partner agencies serving low-income communities. Partner agencies either receive large amounts of the same crops to generate bulk meals¹⁸, and other partners¹⁹ create smaller diverse meals using bunches of produce like kale, radish, and celery. The farm also has relationships with ten chefs.

During the pandemic, ALMA served 250 households and distributed over thirty pounds of products, including produce, prepared food, and beverages. With the help of Excel data analysis tools and the data visualization software package Tableau, the research team cleaned raw data and coded variables for data presentation.

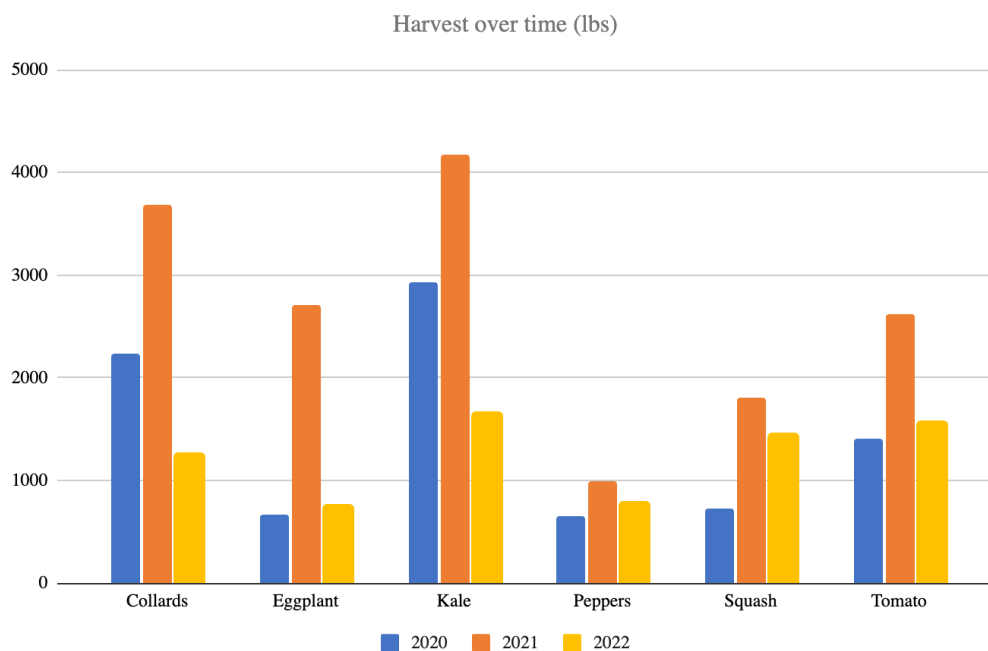
¹⁸ Some partners receiving bulk contributions include Bracken's Kitchen (Orange County), Curt's Kitchen (San Pedro), San Pedro Meals on Wheels, Compton Food Bank, and Neighborhood Housing Services.

¹⁹ Partners receiving smaller bunches of produce create smaller diverse meals; namely, Project Q, Alexandria House, and Community Fridges.

Count of Ethnicity [Etnicidad]



A considerable portion of Los Angeles residents benefited from ALMA's 2020 Grocery Kit distribution. For approximately 38% of respondents, this was their first time picking up a bag. However, nearly 62% of respondents were returning beneficiaries, indicating strong retention in ALMA's base of return visitors. Self-reported accounts of ethnicity also show diversity across Grocery Kit recipients, approximately 72% identified as Latinx. Another 19% identified as Black, 1% as Black, Latinx, 3% as Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1% as White.

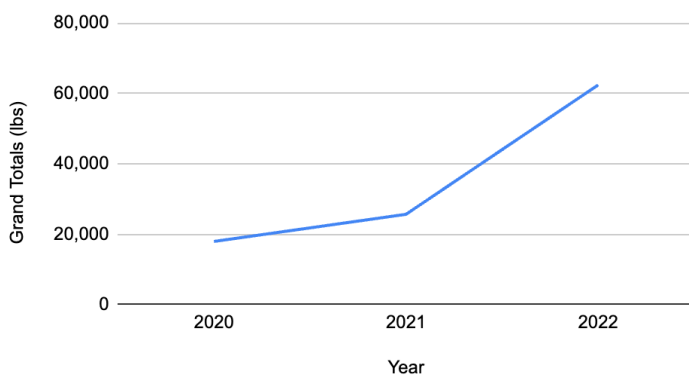


To capture some of the most popular crops year-to-year, the table above pulls six of the top ten yielding crops from 2020, 2021, and 2022 to show yield over time, starting with the first year of tracking. Because data was only available for the first quarter of 2023, the data is not represented here. Because the top crops change year-to-year, we isolated and compared the variables that are consistent year-to-year. Please see below for a more descriptive breakdown of the harvest, showing that top-yielding crops over the years recorded 2020 - 2022 included kale, tomato, squash, collards, peppers, and eggplant, in that order and the year 2022 yielded the most produce. For grand totals, please see below.

| | | | | top yielding crops | | | | | |
|-----------|-------|----------|----------|--------------------|--------|-----------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------|
| | | | | 2020 | | 2021 | | 2022 | |
| Histogram | | | | Beans | 554 | Beets | 734 | Banana | 678.7 |
| | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | Collards | 2,238 | Cauliflower | 694.3 | Broccoli | 506.3 |
| Collards | 2,238 | 3,680.20 | 1,251.05 | Citrus | 1,813 | Collards | 3,680.20 | Collards | 1,251.05 |
| Eggplant | 659 | 2,701.50 | 748.4 | Chard | 1,564 | Cucumber | 629.8 | Cucumber | 925.8 |
| Kale | 2,935 | 4,169.10 | 1,654.55 | Eggplant | 659 | Eggplant | 2,701.50 | Eggplant | 748.4 |
| Peppers | 647 | 990.4 | 778.5 | Kale | 2,935 | Kale | 4,169.10 | Kale | 1,654.55 |
| Squash | 718 | 1,807.20 | 1,455.25 | Mustards | 725 | Mustards | 685.4 | Peppers | 778.5 |
| Tomato | 1,412 | 2,613.60 | 1,563.30 | Peppers | 647 | Peppers | 990.4 | Squash | 1,455.25 |
| | | | | Squash | 718 | Squash | 1,807.20 | Tomato | 1,563.30 |
| | | | | Tomato | 1,412 | Tomato | 2,613.60 | Watermelon | 954.4 |
| | | | | | 13265 | | 18705.5 | | 10516.25 |
| | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | 13,265 | | 18,705.50 | | 10,516.25 |

| Year | Grand Totals (lbs) |
|------|--------------------|
| 2020 | 17,964 |
| 2021 | 25,673.10 |
| 2022 | 62,393.25 |
| 2023 | 1,981.50 |

Grand Totals (lbs) vs. Year

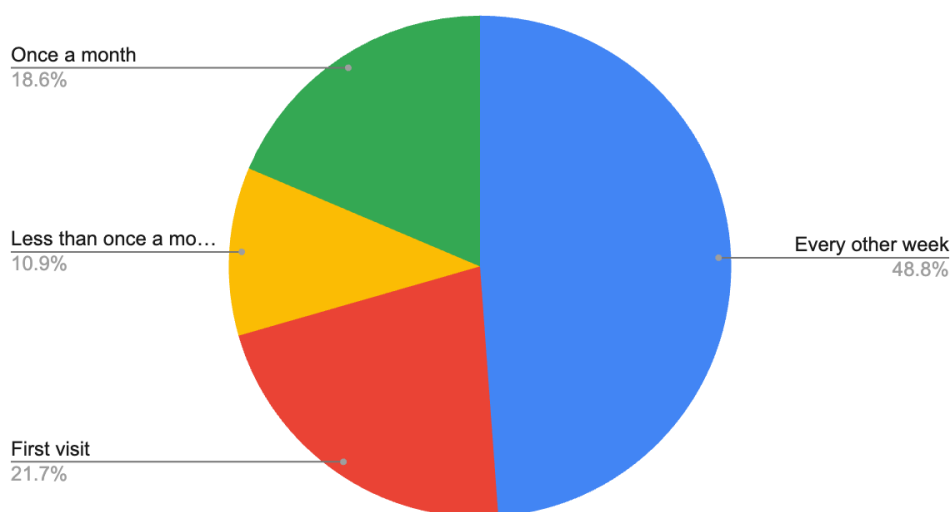


Over time, the crop yield increased, even if a singular crop showed variance in production in a given year. The data above also indicates ALMA’s staple crops throughout the years and the level of variance that might occur in farming on-site. Though 2022 yielded the highest number of crops, the top-yielding crops were higher in 2021. Because the total yield in 2022 was higher, this must mean that ALMA either produced a wider variety of crops in 2022 or that a different set of crops was most popular. Year-to-year (2020-2022), that variation looked like 48, 71, and

59 total crops. Thus, ALMA did not produce a wider variety of crops. On the contrary, the top crops (besides the strongholds kale, tomato, squash, and collards) also included cucumber and watermelon. One person in the qualitative interview section did highlight the popularity of watermelon last summer and how fast it went, which helps to indicate the community enthusiasm around a particular crop, which might not immediately surface but becomes confirmed in the quantitative assessment.

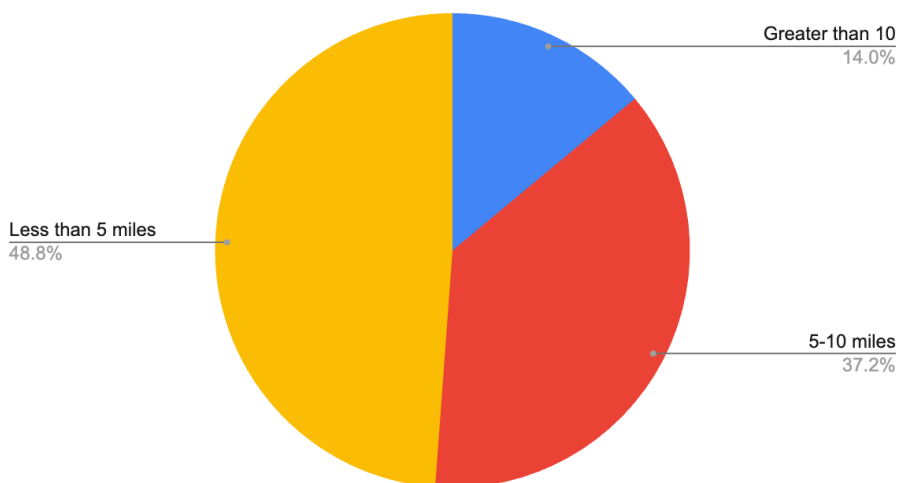
During the pandemic in July 2020, a self-reported survey offered the following information:

Count of How often do you visit the farm?



The first table shows that most of the respondents for the 2020 Grocery Kit distribution were not first-timers. Nearly half of the respondents (about 49%) report visiting ALMA “every other week,” and about 19% of recipients visit at least “once a month.” Seeing that approximately 22% of recipients reported this as their first visit, it can be concluded that ALMA continues to reach new audiences and expand its local influence.

Count of How far did you travel to get to the farm?



According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, census tracts qualify as food deserts if they meet low-income and low-access thresholds²⁰:

- 1) **Low-income:** a poverty rate of 20 percent or greater, or a median family income at or below 80 percent of the statewide or metropolitan area median family income;
- 2) **Low-access:** at least 500 persons and/or at least 33 percent of the population lives more than 1 mile from a supermarket or large grocery store (10 miles, in the case of rural census tracts).

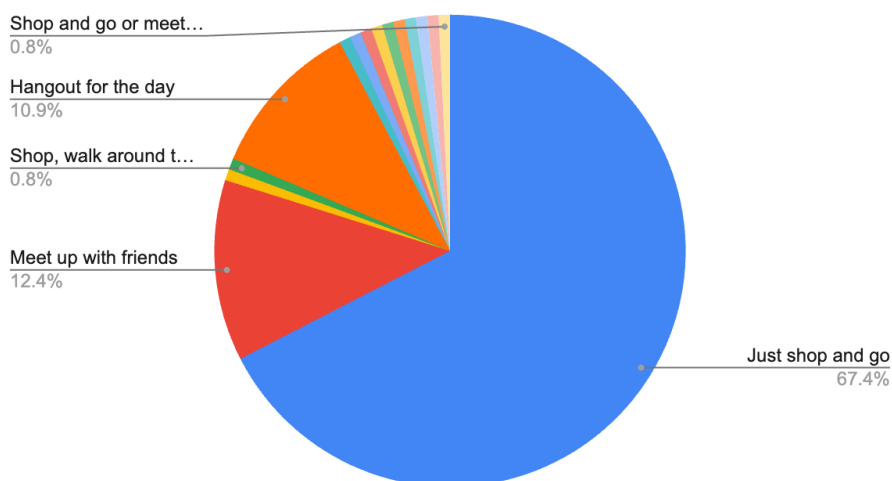
The Compton Chamber of Commerce confirms that some of the poorer areas of Los Angeles County (including Inglewood, Compton, Bell, East Los Angeles, and South Central Los Angeles) have plenty of "food deserts" and "food swamps,"²¹ the latter of which they name as an "equally strong predictor of obesity rates as the absence of full-service grocery stores."

²⁰ Ploeg, M. V., Nulph, D., & Williams, R. (2011, December 01). *Mapping Food Deserts in the United States*. Economic Research Service, United States Department of Agriculture. (<https://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2011/december/data-feature-mapping-food-deserts-in-the-us/>)

²¹ Compton Chamber of Commerce. (2023). *Target Region: Greater Compton Area*. <https://www.comptonchamberofcommerce.org/compton-nutrition-demographics#:~:text=While%20food%20deserts%20are%20nonexistent,%22%20and%20%22food%20swamps.%22>

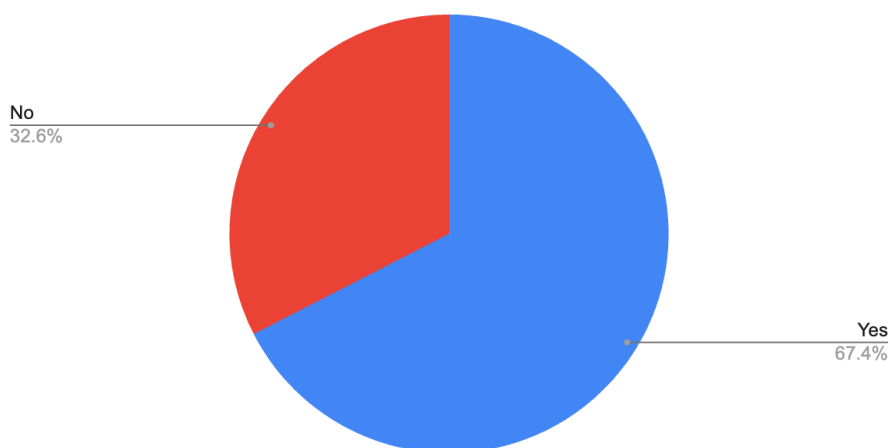
Understanding this in the context of the graph above, one can see that nearly half of those who received kits in July 2020 lived in the immediate (within 5 miles) vicinity of the urban farm. About 37% live within 5 and 10 miles. The Compton Chamber of Commerce also notes that only 75% of all regional food retail outlets sell fruits and vegetables, compared to 90% of those in West LA. They also have about half the selection and are more likely to be damaged or spoiled, meaning that Compton residents have less access to variety and quality. Some folks (14%) traveled over 10 miles to reach ALMA's distribution event.

Count of How long do you spend at the farm?

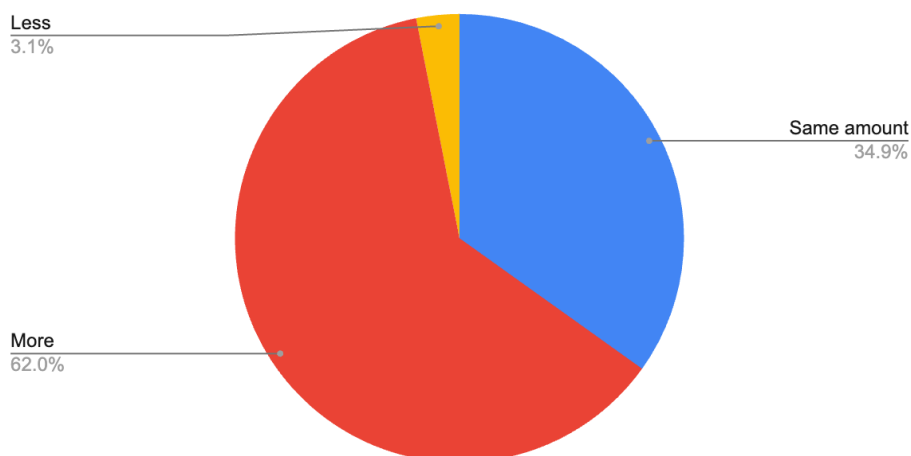


According to the chart above, most people who shop at ALMA (67%) “just shop and go,” visiting ALMA primarily as a source of produce and food. However, another 33% stay for various reasons, mainly relating to community and other nearby activities, making ALMA a potent site for connections.

Count of Have you tried any new or unfamiliar fruits or vegetables at ALMA's Farm Stand?



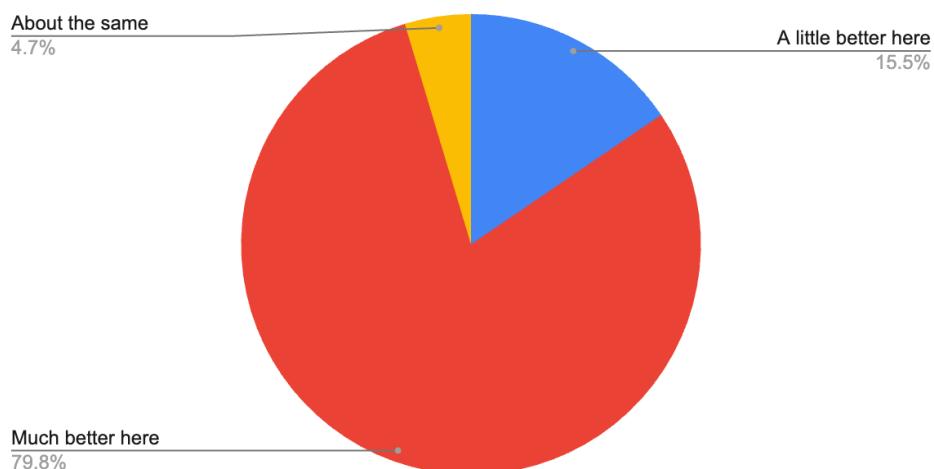
Count of Do you eat more, less or the same amount of fruits and vegetables as a result of coming to the Farm Stand?



For context to the graph above, please recall the citation that Compton's region offers far fewer and far more inferior produce. On the other hand, 67% of ALMA's attendees who frequent the Farm Stand receive exposure to "new and unfamiliar fruits or vegetables," thereby elevating both diverse exposure and access in a food-poor regional environment. Based on the subsequent graph, this alimpacts on the amount of produce consumed due to ALMA's Food Stand.

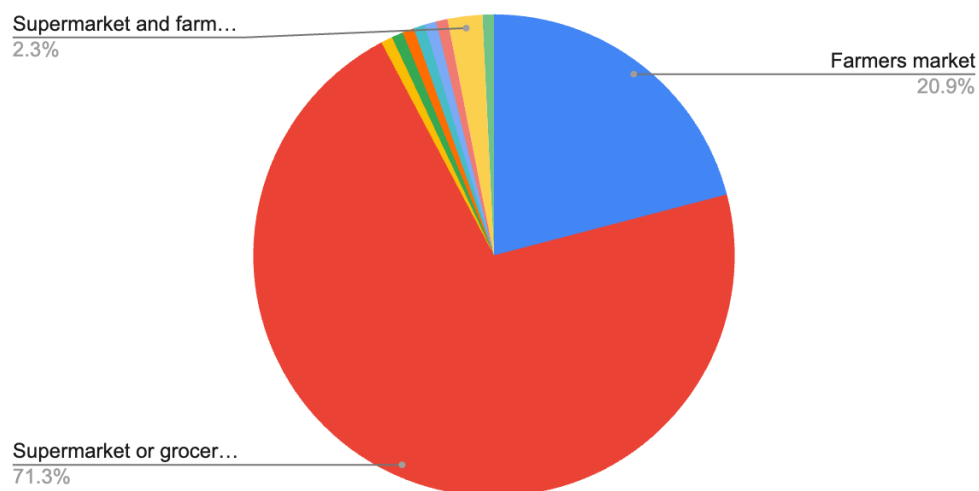
Approximately 62% of respondents attested to this effect.

Count of How would you rate the fruits and vegetables sold at the Farm Stand, compared to other places in your neighborh...



In addition, nearly 80% of respondents confirmed that the quality of produce sold at ALMA's Farm Stand was better than other neighborhood options. This directly impacts the ability to access healthy and quality food.

Count of If you don't source your produce from us at the farm, where do you go?

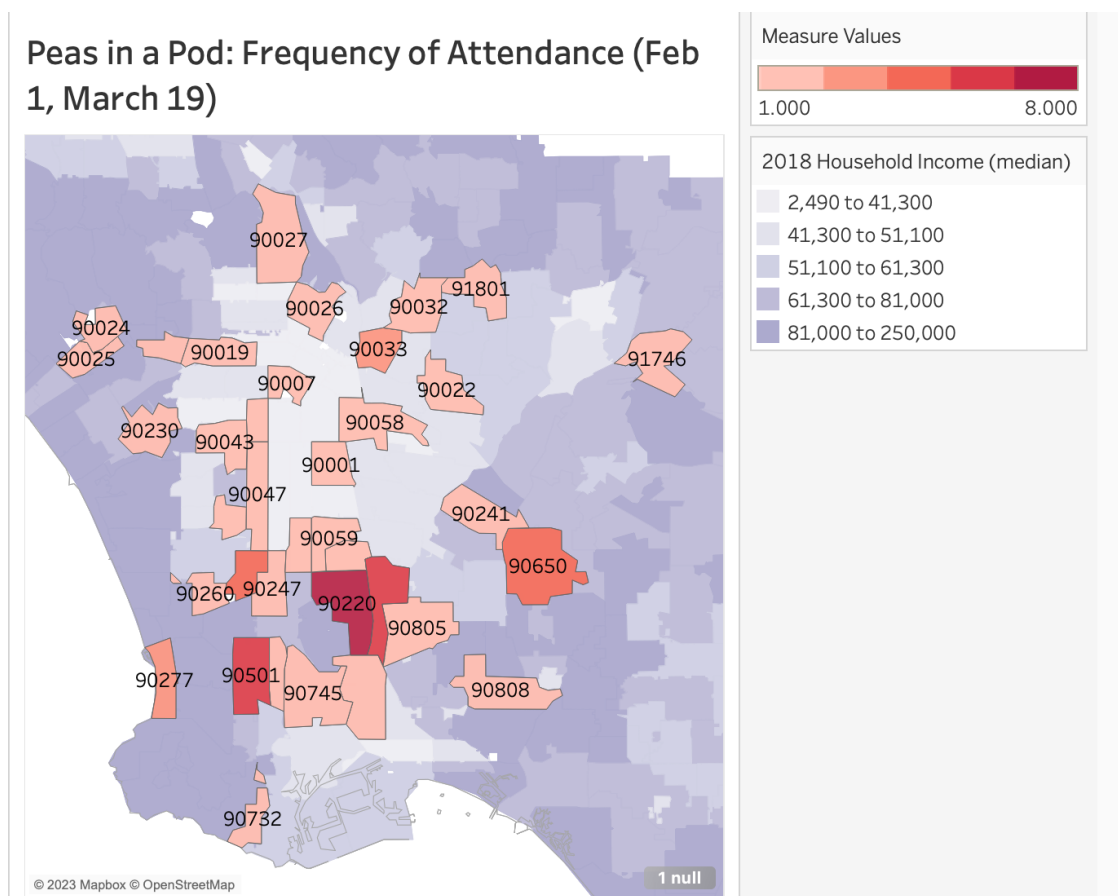


From left to right, the slivered portions represent the following: food bank (yellow), Trader Joe's (green), corner or convenience store (orange), both supermarkets and corner stores (teal), supermarket and farmer's market (light blue), "left question blank" (peach), and Sprouts (green). If consumers don't shop at ALMA, they will mostly (71%) otherwise rely on supermarkets or grocery stores. Farmer's markets are the second-most popular options for respondents at 21%, which shows that ALMA's audience is familiar with locally-sourced produce.

When asked, "What's one thing you'd improve or make better at ALMA?" nearly half of the attendees (49%) at this particular Farm Stand (who completed the survey) stated that they would not change anything. The second-most number of attendees present (34%) indicated that they wanted "more" — more "of everything," more live music, more variety and volume, more hours and days/weeks open, more farmland, more tables, and more support from organizations in the neighborhood. Others (4) wanted to see the San Pedro location reopen and more kids' activities (although it is unclear if they knew about the Peas in a Pod program). Less than 1% weren't sure. The same amount (6 people, or 1% of attendees) recommended advertising, marketing, and more promotion to Compton residents or calendar notices to existing attendees. It is impossible to say that this singular survey from a week in 2022 represents all attendees' perspectives over time or the present perspective. However, it suggests that resources would best serve attendees' interests through expansion and that resources would be best spent building on existing programs rather than advertising them, depending on the weight ALMA gives this feedback, weighing it against the stakeholder interview responses our team conducted as well.

During the quantitative portion of the study, much of the data collection regarding program metrics and experience came directly from the founders and lead stakeholders.

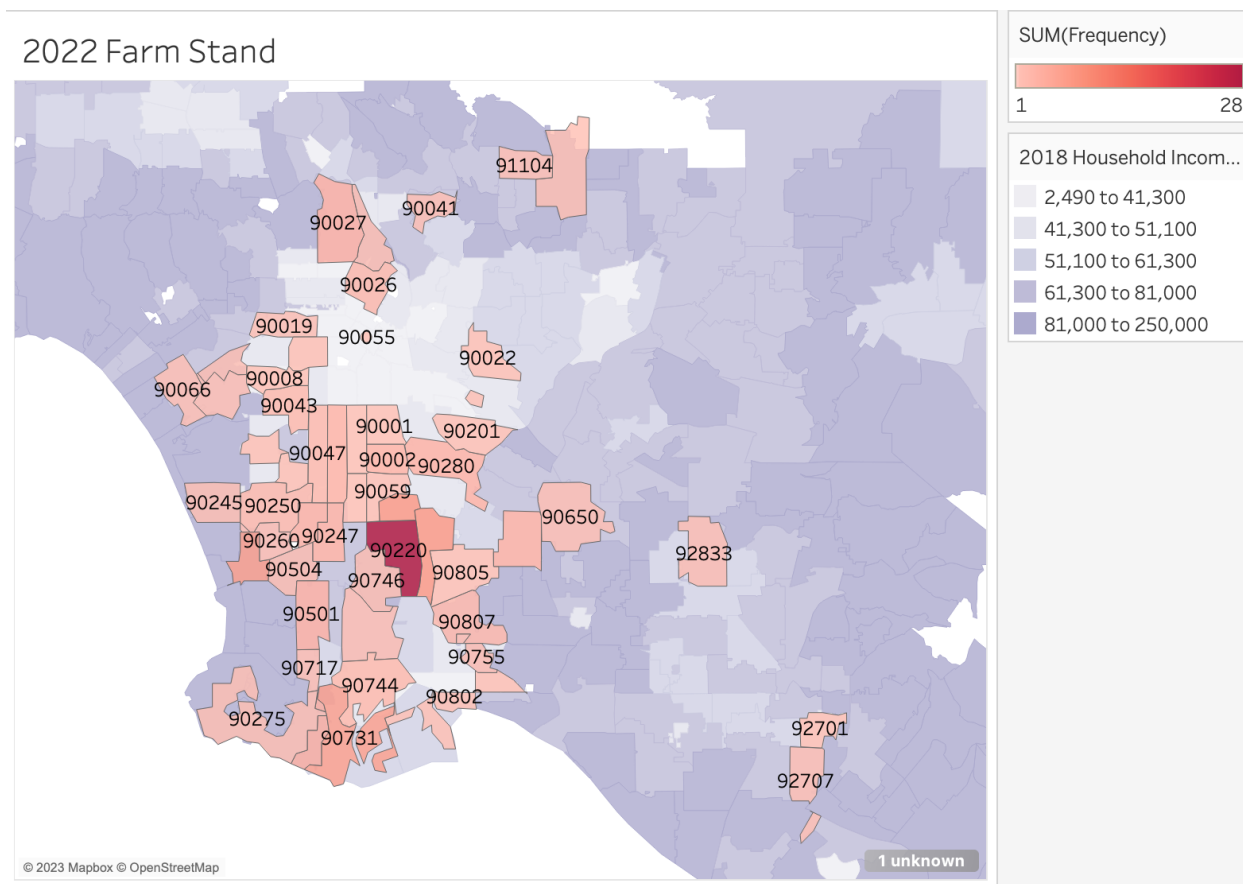
Due to IRB protocols, the team could not visit the farm to collect details such as demographic information or feedback. Fortunately, the farm kept various files and raw materials on harvests and programming, allowing our research team to explore patterns, group data, and present and draw conclusions from data using tables and heat maps.



For instance, the heat map above uses data from two Compton Farm Stands in February and March of 2022. The data uses a colored measure to represent the frequency of attendance from a particular zip code (by visits during two visits in February and March).

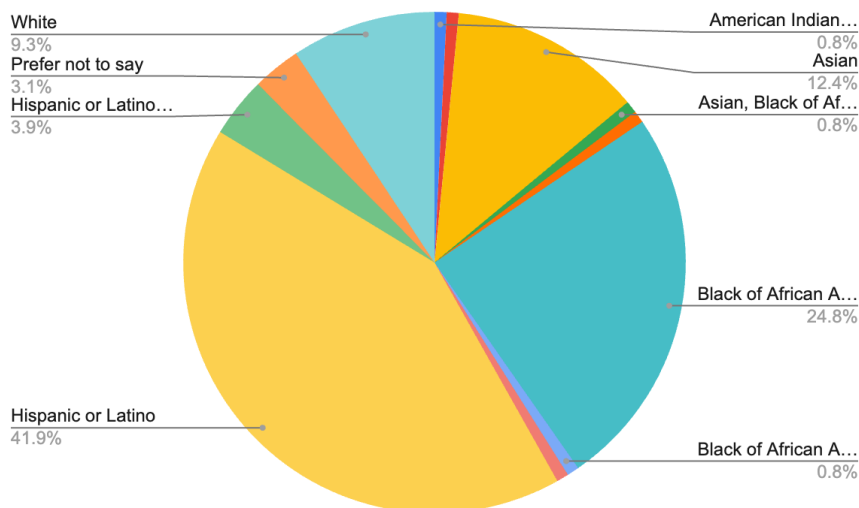
For reference, the Compton location is based at 801 E Redondo Beach Blvd, Compton, CA 90220. The site falls within the reddest zone, representing the highest ratio of children's

attendance (8) within a zip code. Note that the parts of the map shaded purple represent the scale for 2018 Household Median Income for comparison purposes and identifying the financial distribution of attendees in the vicinity relative to ALMA's location within the 90220 zip code. One can observe that ALMA attracts the strongest attendance from within its zip code in Compton but has a strong presence that sprawls north into Griffith Park, to coastal San Pedro down south, east into La Puente in the City of Industry, and into West LA. Based on the map, ALMA reaches a vast sprawl of LA youth within relatively close proximity and not exclusively within Compton.



By comparison, 2022 Farm Stand attendance (129) saw far more traction in the immediate vicinity and beyond the stretches identified in the previous map. Attendees came from

as far as Altadena and Pasadena, nearly 25 miles by car up north. Folks in Santa Ana and Orange County drove approximately 30 miles to attend the Farm Stand. It shows that ALMA is capturing not only the intended audience but also consumers external to the food desert.



The graph above represents self-reported data on ethnicity at the Farm Stand, indicating primarily Hispanic or Latino and Black or African American ethnicities (66.7%). For context, in a region where 40% of residents are diagnosed with obesity, the Compton Chamber of Commerce specifies that “the populations with the highest rates of obesity and Type II diabetes in the region are non-white minorities: Latinos diagnosed with Type II diabetes are 13.5 percent, and blacks are 12 percent.” Based on the chart above, ALMA effectively reaches populations most impacted and vulnerable to the identified health risks.

Conclusion & Potential Policy Implications

The results of this study provide evidence that affirms the effectiveness of restorative justice and environmental stewardship programs in Southern California’s criminal justice system.

ALMA's model, which is focused on addressing issues related to incarceration, food justice, and recidivism by providing training and employment opportunities to formerly incarcerated individuals as well as repurposing unused land into productive urban farms, could provide a profound framework for evaluating and fostering success in Southern California with similar programs.

Moreover, ALMA's holistic approach suggests an effective model of success for other programs, which can help minimize any harmful and unintended consequences of similar initiatives. In addition, the excellence in leadership, integrity, value, and culture demonstrated by ALMA provides evidence of how a holistic approach to designing a restorative justice model can inform a dynamic model that re-humanizes the formerly incarcerated through community and offers the opportunity to build on existing skills and reenter the workforce. This dynamic approach to addressing environmental stewardship through the lens of equity and sustainability addresses both the urgent and long-term needs of historically oppressed communities and individuals who experience cyclical trauma through the cycles of poverty, criminalization, and recidivism. To implement local solutions in the immediate area of Los Angeles, we view ALMA's current model as an example of an organization that successfully and directly addresses recidivism and food injustice in low-income neighborhoods.

Our findings illustrate the effectiveness of ALMA's approach to these challenges through restorative justice and environmental stewardship. We found in our stakeholder interviews that ALMA's program directly benefits the low-income Los Angeles neighborhoods that experience firsthand the consequences of overcrowded prisons and food justice first-hand. By capturing how well ALMA designs and implements solutions, our study evaluates mechanisms for change, best practices, and improved strategies while minimizing bias and maximizing generalizability.

In order to support the development of restorative justice, we sought to understand and measure if there was not only a significant, immediate, and tangible impact but also a potential for long-term success (this includes financial sustainability). Furthermore, our evaluation assesses the economic viability associated with minimizing food waste, increasing access, and maintaining the affordability of urban-produced nutritious food for urban populations.

Accordingly, we identify both opportunities and challenges in the current program model and assess the quality and effectiveness of the program based on the collected data. This is performed by using information from stakeholder interviews, data we have consolidated from crop production information provided by ALMA through Excel sheets, the use of tableau, and other information such as participant and community impact, which we gathered directly from ALMA or related partners within the networks of ALMA. The recommendations and findings here will benefit the entire initiative by identifying opportunities, challenges, risks, and successful areas of the program. ALMA undeniably demonstrates how restorative justice and environmental stewardship solutions are effective within their established frameworks. As a result, ALMA's current program could have significant implications for other program models' success. In addition, we see that ALMA has the potential and opportunity to scale their impact further. The conclusions and recommendations we provide are through empirical evidence found in both existing comparative research and direct testimonies from internal and external stakeholders, data collection, and other community impact measures.

Answers from interviewees agreed on the tangible effects of ALMA's program. Success was evident locally, systemically, and through individual testimonials of witnessing the lives of incarcerated individuals transformed. The holistic approach that ALMA uses to understand systemic challenges and address recidivism and solutions according to this context is evident in

the implementation of their program's regenerative model. For example, the strategic geographic location of the farm directly increases access to food equity; by providing an oasis in a food desert.

By increasing access to healthy produce in a historically disadvantaged area that has historically experienced food inequity, ALMA is solving one issue. The culture and environment ALMA maintains through its interpersonal communications, inclusivity, environmental stewardship, accessibility, and spiritual practice make it excel beyond an ordinary food equity project. ALMA is a family, and the principles they stand by are affordability and accessibility. During the pandemic, they provided free grocery bags to local struggling families. Next, every interviewee commented on the leadership of Erika and Richard, complimenting how much they care, excel, and have cultivated strong rapport and relationships throughout this process. There is great trust and respect among stakeholders, investors, volunteers, and program participants. Since its conception and collaboration with Homeboy Industries a little over a decade ago, ALMA has strengthened its network and social capital organically by upholding its integrity in vision, the value of people and environmental stewardship, and their inseparable value and cultivation of community and family within the immediate space and the community at large. These unique characteristics reach beyond any "program design" or "model" that make ALMA's program not only successful explicitly but implicitly. ALMA's model is genuinely restorative because it provides a sanctuary of belonging, safety, therapy, and healing through relationships in their farming program. Although other organizations could implement a similar model, without these implicit uncompromised values that anchor the mission, including strong leadership and people who are invested in seeing change, it would be impossible to replicate ALMA's model successfully with just explicit and systematic steps. Thus, the evidence of ALMA's passion,

leadership, and spiritual commitment makes them successful in creating equity, demonstrating environmental stewardship and restorative justice, and excellent in their approach and function. We cannot provide specificity on how or if ALMA's program has directly impacted recidivism rates (as we would need further detail on participants who have been in the program or are currently in it). However, other evidence strongly suggests that ALMA's program is a successful model that can reduce recidivism.

There are many variables that ALMA considers for those who have been incarcerated, including the sometimes overlooked but essential factors of reintegration and community in the restorative justice model. ALMA's excellence in community collaboration, inclusivity, stewardship, and partnership make them unique in their success compared to similar models. Interviewees demonstrate a history and culture of openness, creativity, and adaptability to new ideas.

Additionally, ALMA has an incredible rapport with the public, local community, nonprofits, stakeholders, investors, and policy advocates. Thus, we see ALMA in an excellent position to increase its capacity and scale its ideas and impact, continue to be trustworthy stewards of future financial gifts and position them to continue to be influential leaders that demonstrate an excellent model for restorative justice and environmental stewardship.

Lastly, we see ALMA as incredibly dynamic, committed to its mission, and integral to many communities. It also offers food justice/systemic equity value. ALMA's specific and unique characteristic that sets its farm and program apart from other urban farms or food justice initiatives are the founders, Erika and Richard, whose story, community advocacy, leadership, commitment to equity, and cultivation of family and community are truly inspiring.

One of the most significant challenges we have heard about was through one interviewee who has firsthand experience in resolving challenges and speaking to current capacity-building challenges. Through several interviews and research, we have better understood the challenges in land ownership and zoning ordinances that hinder growth and future scaling. We affirm that there must be policy changes to help subsidize community farms, to make it affordable to purchase land and sustain them by subsidizing energy and water costs.

A significant recommendation we can provide in addition to policy advocacy for making community farmland more accessible, affordable, and usable is expanding ALMA's restorative justice model to other industries. Just like Homeboy Industries, which assists men and women who have been gang involved or incarcerated with finding employment and providing free social services, we can recommend ALMA to partner with existing organizations that can provide alternative jobs to those who have been formerly incarcerated. A major issue of concern we have learned, both through research and through interviews, is that there are not enough job alternatives for those who have been formerly incarcerated. Most of the current jobs available are extremely labor-intensive and undesirable. Creating a job market similar to farming that provides elements of healing, therapy, and restorative features, could be highly strategic and impactful for the future of released inmates. We suggest that creative partnerships and expansion of employment opportunities will directly reduce recidivism. Although farming is an incredible approach, solution, and program, partnerships can go beyond the food industry if one primary goal is addressing and reducing recidivism. Providing alternative opportunities can be significant to the formerly incarcerated's successful rehabilitation and quality of life for the formerly incarcerated. Jobs that provide sustained employment, stability, a sense of community, healing, safety, growth potential, and perhaps even creative-community-based environments to

complement the restorative process are essential to informing the trauma and isolation many previously incarcerated individuals have experienced during their incarceration. Some specific fields could be ceramics, graphic design, photography, filmmaking, sewing, woodworking, and culinary arts. We conclude that by providing alternative career options for the formerly incarcerated through other types of employment opportunities and partnerships - with churches, other community organizations, and nonprofits in both the public and private sector, there are greater chances of reducing recidivism for the greater incarcerated population who is exiting the system. A complementing effort that would positively impact food security and equity would be to address the implications of recidivism through policy and community engagement initiatives that advocate for increasing food literacy and other restorative justice principles and outcomes.

Appendices

Scope: This targeted literature review explores the role of urban farming and community gardens in promoting restorative justice and environmental sustainability among formerly incarcerated individuals. With existing literature, this review examines the impact of urban farming and community gardens on the physical, mental, and social well-being of formerly incarcerated individuals and how these initiatives can potentially promote community engagement and environmental sustainability.

Review Question: What is the impact of urban farming and community gardens on promoting restorative justice and environmental sustainability among formerly incarcerated individuals?

Inclusion criteria:

- Empirical studies published in the English language

- Studies focused on the impact of urban farming and community gardens on the physical, mental, and social well-being of formerly incarcerated individuals
- Studies examining the potential of urban farming and community gardens in promoting community engagement and environmental sustainability
- Studies conducted in the United States

Exclusion criteria:

- Studies not focused on urban farming and community gardens
- Studies not focused on formerly incarcerated individuals
- Studies not conducted in the United States
- Non-empirical studies (e.g., opinion pieces, reviews)

Search strategy: The following databases will be searched:

- ESA (News and Views on Ecological Science)
- Pepperdine Libraries
- JSTOR

The search strategy includes the following terms and Boolean operators: (urban farming OR community gardens) AND (formerly incarcerated OR ex-offenders) AND (restorative justice OR environmental sustainability)

The search is limited to studies published from 2010 to present. Additionally, we include a manual search of the reference lists for included studies to identify other relevant studies.

Theory

Commonly employed in many research studies, grounded theory (GT) will direct how we construct theory from systematically-obtained data (Tie et al., 2018).²² In a comparative analysis, we can highlight issues of interest in the data and compare examples, identifying similarities and differences that might better explain the experience and coordination of community gardening. As a non-linear strategy, grounded theory allows us to move away from abstract terms and develop a related theory that we can code, sort, and organize using collected data. In this way, our team does not depend on philosophical discussions or debates surrounding community gardening initiatives. Instead, it uses a proven framework of inductive analysis that allows theory to emerge from the research process.

Given our interest in stakeholders' direct insights, another potential method our research team considers narrative analysis. Like other forms of qualitative research, narrative analysis interprets texts or data in storied form. Data can be drawn from case studies, surveys, observations, and other sources. Our research integrates storytelling to investigate how people make meaning of their lives and experiences in both social and cultural contexts (Josselson & Hammock, 2021).²³ As researchers Benjamin Baker and Erin Parcell describe, interpretations of narratives depend on story structure, the purpose of the story, substance, and how the story is performed (2017).²⁴ As researchers explore the collected narratives, certain themes become visible. They note these, compare them with related research, and construct meaning to explain these findings. The researchers write their results, then review and analyze them. Narrative analysis will allow us to understand (and interpret meaningful patterns from) stories constructed from personal experiences.

²² Tie, Y. C., Birks, M., & Francis, K. (2018). Grounded theory research: A design framework for novice researchers. *SAGE Open Medicine*, 7. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2050312118822927>.

²³ Josselson, & Hammack, P. L. (2021). *Essentials of narrative analysis* / Ruthellen Josselson and Phillip L. Hammack. American Psychological Association.

²⁴ Parcell, E., & Baker, B. (Eds.) (2017). (Vols. 1-4). SAGE Publications, Inc, <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781483381411>.

In addition, through hermeneutic phenomenology, our research team considers how experiences, traditions, and culture shape ordinary, everyday practices. Hermeneutic phenomenological research aims to bring to light and reflect upon the lived meaning of this basic experience. As a result, the research team describes phenomena as they appear in daily life before they have been theorized, interpreted, explained, and otherwise abstracted. We understand that this process is tentative, contingent and hardly captures the complete picture of the material analyzed.

Interview Questions

- 1) How did you hear about ALMA Backyard Farms? What stood out or made you want to get involved?
- 2) What is your role or involvement in the program?
- 3) Have you visited ALMA and what was the experience like?
- 4) What is ALMA's organizational culture like?
- 5) Do you know ALMA's mission statement?
- 6) What impact has ALMA made on the community?
- 7) What does it mean to offer the formerly incarcerated the opportunity to become agents of health, safety, and community? Is ALMA successful in getting nearer to this goal, and in what ways could ALMA potentially better achieve this goal?
- 8) What are the major facilitators (if any) to the program and those it serves?
- 9) What are the major barriers (if any) to the program and those it serves?
- 10) Is ALMA socially accessible to disadvantaged community residents?
- 11) Can you identify any strengths/ weaknesses you've observed in the program model or

culture? Do you think ALMA can sustain this model in the long-term?

12) What is your experience with the quality of produce/crops (comparative cost and taste to local options or in terms of diverse options)?

13) How, if at all, does ALMA foster social inclusion and trust in the effort toward food security?

14) Is there anything else you'd like to speak on about Alma Farms?

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