

SOUTH CREEK AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

overview of the project

The South Creek Agricultural Education Partnership Program, led by Liverpool City Council, worked with vegetable growers, grower associations and local councils to foster relationships and establish strategies to implement best management practices for vegetable growing with Non English Speaking Background (NESB) market gardeners in the South Creek catchment.

The South Creek catchment covers an area of 620 square kilometres extending from Liverpool in the south and drains to the Hawkesbury River at Windsor in the north representing 30% of the Sydney region. There are approximately 2000 market garden farms in the Sydney region, and 59% of these are operated by people from diverse cultural backgrounds who have low English literacy. Raising awareness of sustainable farm management practices should reduce or eliminate the nutrient and pesticide runoff from market gardens resulting in improvements in water quality in the catchment.



A factsheet for NESB gardeners in Chinese

how the project was carried out

The program had two main phases. The first was to develop processes and staff skills in five local councils — Liverpool, Penrith, Blacktown, Fairfield and Hawkesbury — on how to interact and engage with NESB market gardeners. A training manual and fact sheets for the councils were prepared and eight training sessions on 'Working with NESB Clients' were conducted with 150 council staff attending. The workshops introduced participants to the issues and barriers that exist when interacting with NESB communities and how to work more effectively with these groups.

The second phase of this program involved working with NESB market gardeners to promote sustainable farming practices. This included an organic farming bus tour, eight soils workshops and eleven fact sheets translated into four different languages (Khmer, Chinese, Arabic and Vietnamese). The fact sheets cover issues to assist market gardeners in working more effectively with government agencies, their local community and to undertake better farming practices. The fact sheets covered topics such as Development Applications, Putting up a Farm Shed, Water Reuse Systems, Farm Dams and Organic Farming among others.

outcomes now and in the future

A total of 80 market gardeners have been involved in this program. The bus tour, workshops and fact sheets provided participants with practical skills in sustainable farming practices, as well as encouraging information sharing and relationship building between participants.

This project has established good relationships between vegetable growers, local councils and the community. This has been achieved through proactive efforts to solve issues between councils and growers and by providing information to market gardeners in their own language on areas where they were struggling to meet council and environmental requirements. Providing the market gardeners with information, services and suitable contacts within

the councils has changed their perception of dealing with councils. Council staff are also better equipped to deal with the cultural and linguistic barriers that previously existed.

This program has resulted in a lot of useful information about effective methods of working with NESB market gardeners. This has been compiled into a comprehensive paper on 'How local government can engage with market growers on non-priority issues'. The paper highlighted the importance of providing commercial advantage, alternatives to current practices and gaining the trust of the growers as major factors when working with NESB groups. The Environmental Trust is currently working with Department of Primary Industries to expand the outcomes of this program to other council areas.

benefits, challenges & lessons learned

Initially there was a high level of cynicism between market gardeners, government agencies and some grower organisations, which had resulted in little or no interaction with each other. Growers were perceived as difficult to contact, resistant to ideas, and unresponsive to letters and meetings. Growers considered that organisations were inconsistent, did what they wanted regardless of input and took up too much of their time. Both parties spent time listening and explaining their perspectives and this has led to better working relationships that will be sustained into the future.

NESB farmers are aware of the environmental issues associated with market gardening however acting on these issues is a relatively low priority for them in comparison with economic survival. This is due to the high capital cost often associated with making environmental improvements. This project has provided participants with simple information on procedures and sustainable farming practices to assist them to take steps in the right direction.