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# Veggielution

## A revolution in community farming

BY APARNA PRAKASH



PHOTOGRAPH BY RACHEL OLMSTEAD

While a student at San Jose State University, Mark Medeiros started growing vegetables in the backyards of friendly neighbors. There was a lot of weeding and watering to do, so he posted flyers around the campus to bring in other students to help. Soon he met Amie Frisch, who shared his passion. The two of them decided they wanted a bigger venue for growing crops, and together they found Emma Prusch Park in San Jose. On one acre of the park's land they started Veggielution, a community-supported farm.

It's a place where people get back to their roots—literally. “A community farm is the perfect vehicle to foster a sense of ownership and stewardship for our local environment,” Medeiros says.

In 2010, more than 1,000 Veggielution volunteers worked for 7,000 hours and grew 15,000 pounds of vegetables. Some volunteers take home the fresh produce, but most of it is given to the soup kitchen Loaves and Fishes, and restaurants including GoodKarma and Vegetarian House. “The soup kitchen is really happy to get the fresh produce,” Frisch says.

Focusing on seasonal vegetables, Veggielution grows broccoli, cauliflower, garlic, potatoes, carrots, peas, potatoes, beets, arugula, and other salad greens. Staple crops also line the fields—tomatoes, squash, corn, peppers, and cucumbers—along with some of what Medeiros calls “less common but culturally important crops, such as taro, okra, and blue corn from Michoacan. We also grow a whole lot of flowers, herbs, and native plants.”

Everything produced at Veggielution is organic. “We religiously use only organic, sustainable practices on our farm including cover crops, crop rotations, making our own compost and worm castings, using animal manure for soil fertility, controlling pests through creating habitat for beneficial insects, and using drip irrigation,” Medeiros says.

Only about 30 percent of Veggielution's produce is sold at Emma Prusch Park's farm stand and the San Jose Downtown Farmers' Market. Medeiros says, "Our goals are less about profit and more about producing community benefits." The farm is maintained by the money made at the stand and farmers' market, and from grants and individual donations.

Once a month, Veggielution organizes a family day with special activities for children, including bug catching, making vegetable structures, and tasting fresh vegetables. "We love having kids out here, because it is really important for the kids to feel that they give back to the community."

Another of Veggielution's community programs is Cooking Matters, a free six-week cooking course for low-income mothers. A volunteer chef and nutritionist teaches how to make simple meals from the farm's produce. The women then take home fresh vegetables to cook for their families.

If you'd like to be a part of Veggielution, volunteer workdays are held every Wednesday and Saturday. The farm stand is open on Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. To learn more, visit [www.veggielution.org](http://www.veggielution.org).