

USF Artist/Activist Recasts “Victory” in Victory Gardens



V is for independence from the industrial food system. “V” is for reducing the number of gas-guzzling miles needed to grow and deliver food to America’s dinner tables. “V” is for spreading urban sustainability. “V” is for the revival of victory gardens that has taken root in San Francisco, thanks in no small part to the work of Amy Franceschini, assistant professor of visual arts at the University of San Francisco.

Franceschini, an artist and graphic designer who founded the artist/activist/gardener collaboratives Futurefarmers in 1995 and Free-Soil in 2002, is the creative mind behind the first edible Victory Garden at San Francisco Civic Center since World War II.

“My intentions were to revive not only a city-supported gardening program, but a personal revival to get politicized and radicalized about the current food crisis,” said Franceschini.

The garden was planted in July with the help of dozens of volunteers and funding support from nonprofits Slow Food Nation and Southern Exposure. At first, Franceschini wavered about whether to keep the Victory Gardens 2008+ name for the 10,000-square-foot Civic Center project, but decided that the historic connotations helped draw attention and, perhaps, more importantly, open a dialogue.

“The name gives us a chance to talk about gardening in a time of war,” Franceschini said. Only, in this case, “victory” depends on weaning control of America’s food supply from agriculture giants like Monsanto, reducing the use of fertilizers and pesticides in the food supply, and cutting corporate welfare subsidies that go to the top 10 percent of the country’s growers, she said.

Growing up in a farming family, Franceschini was no stranger to food politics. Her father was a large-scale farmer and pesticide company owner in San Joaquin Valley and her mother, who separated from her father, became an organic farmer and activist in San Luis Obispo County. But, it wasn’t until she began to research World War II victory gardens, learning in the process that San Francisco was a center of the movement, that she began to think about a revival.

From 1941 to 1943, Americans tended to 20 million victory gardens and contributed 41 percent of the

nation’s total food production. San Francisco’s Civic Center Plaza not only sprouted a whole farmers market of vegetables but also helped spawn 250 family garden plots in Golden Gate Park.

“It helped me to think of the city as a place where progressive ideas can take root,” Franceschini said. “San Francisco is ready for a decentralized and systemic approach to urban agriculture.”

The success of the Civic Center garden is already helping to spread the idea of victory gardens among city residents, with hundreds applying to have their own smaller versions planted in their backyards, on rooftops, or in window boxes as part of a pilot project. Franceschini, who received \$60,000 from the city of San Francisco for a 15-garden pilot, and a cohort of volunteers are rushing to get the gardens in the ground by winter.

For graphic design major Lindsey Boyer ’08, who interned with Franceschini during her senior year,



Slow Food Nation

working on the Victory Gardens 2008+ Web site was more than a way to gain graphic design experience, it ended up sparking an interest in gardening and awareness of food production she didn’t expect.

“Sometimes people want to do things like this, but they either don’t know how or don’t have the means and that is what Victory Gardens 2008+ does,” Boyer said. “It helps people start and learn how to make their own organic garden.” [USF](#)

Gardening for Good:

Volunteers plant the first victory garden at San Francisco Civic Center since World War II.