

SOIL SAFETY by Julieta Kusnir

As a radio producer, I gravitate towards health stories focused on equity. Our health is intertwined with whether we have access to healthy food, parks, public transportation, and community spaces. Our environment plays a huge role in the decisions we make. Living far away from a grocery store makes eating healthy even harder. Until recently, there were no grocery stores in West Oakland. West Oakland, once a bustling industrial hub, is now a low income neighborhood which has experienced systematic disinvestment. To combat malnutrition and obesity which are both prevalent in West Oakland, community organizations focus on urban gardening. Like in many urban centers, gardens make fruits and vegetables affordable and accessible.

To explore urban gardening, I went to a backyard dig organized by West Oakland's [City Slicker Farm](#). I was fascinated by the dedicated volunteers shoveling dirt early on a weekend morning. This was especially intriguing given the current media coverage on the dangers of urban gardening. In many urban neighborhoods, lead and other heavy metals are often found in the soil. These elements can cause severe health consequences. This radio piece allowed me to address the fears around urban gardening and offer solutions. It also touched on the important food safety issue of food insecurity. I feel fortunate to be able to explore the impact having a garden can have on our health as well as the opportunity it can provide to create community and reconnect with our agricultural roots.

It was a great pleasure to work with The California Report's Health Dialogues, particularly in shaping this story.

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