|  |
| --- |
| **Social Return on Investment for Urban Agriculture** |
| **Background/Objectives**  Public health systems and not-for-profit groups that support vulnerable and disenfranchised people are struggling to operate under the current economic and social environment calling for austerity. Investments in public health services have decreased threatening health, well-being and equity. Demonstrating value of programs or policy changes is becoming increasingly important. An urban agriculture program (the Garden Patch) run through the Saskatoon Food Bank and Learning Centre in Saskatchewan, Canada relies on corporate and individual donations in a time of a shrinking economy. The objectives of our study were to provide evidence of the assumed effect on society that the Garden Patch has, and the value of this program to the investors. Understanding the social return on investment (SROI) can help to direct funds into the community gardening program and show the social benefits for future urban agriculture projects.  **Methods**  SROI is a method for measuring financial value relative to the resources invested. Working with program stakeholders, we identified intended and unintended changes along with the inputs, outputs, and outcomes. Applying financial proxy values on the outcomes allowed for cost/benefit ratio calculation demonstrating the value of the program.  **Results**  The SROI analysis showed that the Garden Patch is an important part of the Saskatoon Food Bank & Learning Centre, harvesting over 17,000 lbs of food and offering multiple workshops to enhance capacity building in urban agriculture. We calculated the social value and provided funders with their return on investment. The benefits that participants gained stretched beyond food, to improved physical and mental health, and greater social connectedness.  **Discussion**  The SROI analysis shows that a garden that is associated with a Food Bank benefits food insecure clients and enhances the city socially and aesthetically. This credible, comparable, and broadly accepted social impact measurement approach is valuable for both organizations’ sustainable growth, and for decision makers faced with increasingly challenging budget decisions that have real effect on the lives of vulnerable people.  **Keywords**  Social Return on Investment; Urban Agriculture; Food Bank |