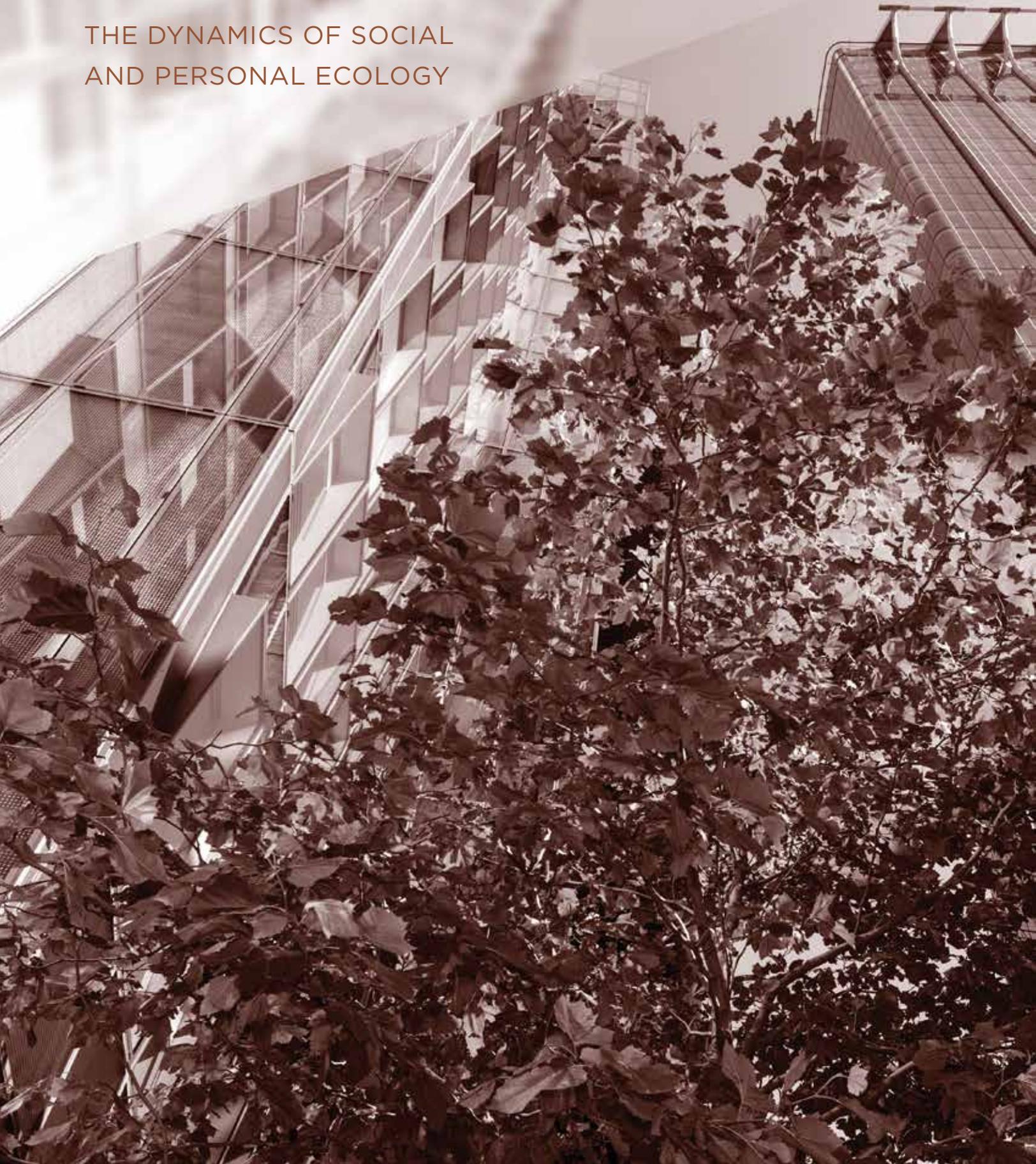


# OUR LIVING ENVIRONMENTS

THE DYNAMICS OF SOCIAL AND PERSONAL ECOLOGY



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**A**long with cities, energy, and ecosystems, our more immediate environments have also been the focus of efforts to make our lives ecologically healthy and more responsible. Such environments encompass where we live, the products we consume, the foods we eat, and our personal health. We have invested strategic grants in these areas and consider the initiatives we have supported to be essential to the development of a new culture.

One of the most ambitious efforts to change the ways in which we relate to our inhabited environments has come from the Living Future Institute, which evolved out of the work being done by the Cascadia Region Green Building Council (CRGBC). When we started our philanthropic work, green building was an active trend in architecture. Earthships and solar-powered homes that were pioneered in the 1970s were early realizations of ambitions to construct more ecologically friendly living spaces that used renewable energies.

We provided a grant to the CRGBC in 2008 to bring together municipal representatives in the Pacific Northwest region. CRGBC was a national leader in green building and wanted to consolidate regional green building practices and standards. We saw the potential for national influence. The recession hit soon after, which limited the government funding that might have supported many of their initiatives. But it was a meaningful step forward.

We started to develop a relationship with Jason McLennan, the head of CRGBC, who was cultivating a reputation as one of the leading green architects in the country. His vision for a comprehensive approach to building would not only encompass the building itself — its materials and its use of energy — but its impact on the surrounding environment. This ultimately took the form of the Living Building Challenge, which the CRGBC launched and which was adopted by both the U.S. and Canadian Green Building Councils. The challenge was based on 20 imperatives that covered water and energy use, the building’s impact on human and environmental health, the sourcing of the building materials, social justice implications, and the natural aesthetics of a building and its surrounding land. The most rigorous and comprehensive of all the green building standard regimes, it has been evolving steadily since it was introduced, as more organizations and businesses take on the challenge.

The Living Building Challenge became the central dynamic of the Living Future Institute, which Jason created a few years after our grant to CRGBC.

## **BUILDINGS AS LIVING ENVIRONMENTS**

LIVING FUTURE INSTITUTE



Flansburgh Hawaii Preparatory Academy Energy Lab, Kamuela, Hawaii. *Courtesy of Living Future Institute*

By then he was working on the integration of the CRGBC, the remains of the Natural Step network in North America, Ecotone Publishing, and the new building challenge — all under one organizational umbrella. At the time, a number of organizations and businesses were putting resources into developing social media platforms that would allow them to build communities of interest and practice around them, grow their networks, and spread their message. We offered a grant in 2011 to help them develop their social media platform.

As we would in other cases, we saw the support of social media development as a key leverage point in the early development of an organization or growing network. Jason now refers to our grant at that time as catalytic, “a strategic bit of funding at the right time.” Others were also providing funds at a time of early growth, so we were part of a small group of funders who saw the potential of his work.

By 2015, the institute staff had increased from the dozen people who worked with him when we provided the grant to more than 30; the number of active projects had increased from about 50 to 260; and the institute was a \$4 million-a-year operation. They were also branching out. They launched the Living Product Challenge in April 2015, building upon the central tenets of the building challenge by developing production standards for material products that would be “nontoxic, transparent, ecologically regenerative, and socially equitable.”

They were encouraging people to move beyond just shrinking their environmental footprint by actively contributing to positive developments by planting trees and gardens — regarded as net positives for the environment. They were also developing affordable housing pilot projects to apply the Living Building Challenge beyond the early adopters, who were often affluent leaders in the environmental domain.

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**SUSTAINABLE  
PRODUCTION AND  
CONSUMPTION**

SUSTAINABLE PURCHASING  
LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

The work of the Living Future Institute is part of a growing interest in changing the way industrial products and our most intimate living environments are designed. Many were inspired by the 2002 publication of a book called *Cradle to Cradle*, by Michael Braungart and William McDonough, in which the authors — a chemist and an architect — offer a variety of examples of how products and living environments could be built to be ecologically safe and cost efficient. We knew this would be one of the most challenging, and most essential, frontiers of environmental change work in coming decades.

One of the most compelling efforts toward this end is the Sustainable Purchasing Leadership Council (SPLC). After a couple of years of internal development, the council held its official national launch at its annual summit in Washington, D.C., in May 2014. The council, led by sustainability strategist and social entrepreneur Jason Pearson, was created by a founding circle that includes global companies, government agencies, civic associations, and nonprofit organizations, and now has a membership that represents the broad sweep of production and purchasing sectors. Their stated objective is to “establish widely accepted purchasing standards that will drive market transformation toward sustainability along entire supply chains of purchased goods and services.”

By 2014, the council had 90 organizations and businesses participating on its various technical advisory teams. The council was in the process of developing for members standards and guidance aimed at reforming the core of our industrial economy, a critical step if society is going to transform itself into an ecologically more benevolent state.

BRI provided them with their first philanthropic grant, which was used to invite public advocacy and environmental organizations to the 2014 summit. SPLC included the World Wildlife Fund, the Forest Stewardship Council, and the World Resources Institute — each of which has global networks and reputations as standard bearers for ecologically responsible practices. By then the council had already developed a system for collecting membership dues.

Following the national launch in May, the council formalized its structure and practice standards. In early 2015, it released *Guidance for Leadership in Sustainable Purchasing*, a 200-page handbook to guide strategic action by purchasers. Member companies piloted the handbook over the following six months. Over time, SPLC will refine and further develop those standards, offer a rating system for participating members, and develop ways to measure impact and social change.

The council actively engages both purchasers and suppliers to build the markets of the future. A key part of their vision is to take purchasing practices beyond the limited domains of individual businesses and organizations in a collective effort to change entire economic sectors. They envision harnessing the power and innovation capacity of economic markets to advance a future that is truly environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable.

## **SUSTAINABLE PURCHASING LEADERSHIP COUNCIL FOUNDING CIRCLE**

Aflac  
 American University  
 Apex Clean Energy  
 Arizona State University  
 Bloomberg  
 Caesars Entertainment  
 California Department of  
 General Services  
 The CarbonNeutral Company  
 CIPS Sustainability Index  
 City of Portland, OR  
 City of San Francisco, CA  
 Dell  
 The District of Columbia  
 Domtar  
 Ecolab  
 Emory University  
 Fair Trade USA  
 FedEx  
 Goodyear  
 GreenCircle Certified  
 JCPenney  
 King County, WA  
 Lockheed Martin  
 Michigan Department of  
 Environmental Quality  
 Michigan Department of  
 Technology, Management  
 & Budget  
 Michigan State University  
 Minnesota Materials  
 Management Division  
 Minnesota Pollution  
 Control Agency  
 Office Depot  
 Portland Community College  
 Province of Nova Scotia  
 SciQuest  
 SCS Global Services  
 Social Hotspots  
 Database Project  
 UL Environment  
 U.S. Department of Agriculture  
 U.S. Department of Energy  
 U.S. Environmental  
 Protection Agency  
 Waste Management

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**THE DEVELOPMENT  
OF ENVIRONMENTAL  
MEDICINE**

CENTER FOR INTEGRATIVE  
MEDICINE AT THE UNIVERSITY  
OF ARIZONA

As we developed our eclectic and holistic approach to our philanthropic work, we were able to see that virtually every sector of society was in some way embracing the challenge to better understand its relationship to natural environments and advance the adoption of ecologically responsible practices. One of the most intriguing areas, one that has not traditionally been seen as a domain of environmental change work, is that of public health. Over the years, the impact of pollution and stress on human health has received attention but, more often than not, as a social justice issue or a challenge to stop the source of pollution. Doctors themselves have not often been educated to fully understand the impact on individual health from environmental factors in ways that will make them more effective.

“In the interest of well-being, I advise you to guard against nature deficit disorder by letting nature into your awareness as often as you can, any way you can. Watch the ever-changing shapes of clouds, admire trees, listen to the wind, look at the moon, at birds, at mountains. And when you do, be aware that you are part of nature, connected through it to something much larger than yourself that transcends and will survive you.”

– Andrew Weil, M.D.

Dr. Andrew Weil, who founded the Arizona Center for Integrative Medicine at The University of Arizona in 1994, had been thinking about how to more fully integrate an understanding of the environment’s impact on individual health among health care practitioners when we met him in 2008. Andrew is a renowned pioneer in integrative medicine, which brings together the best of the world’s different healing systems in a practice that focuses on mind, body, and spirit. His many books over the years have taught millions of readers in North America about ways to stay healthy that do not always depend on institutionalized medical treatment. The center has been at the heart of a movement to change the overall practice of medicine. Health care practitioners, he has realized, are potentially powerful social change agents.



“The Center was built,” according to its website, “upon the premise that the best way to change a field is to educate the most gifted professionals and place them in settings where they can, in turn, teach others.”

Sensing that there was a new frontier in the field of medicine, we offered the center a first grant to develop an educational module with which to teach health practitioners about the negative effects of various environmental influences — including widespread pollution in the air and water, the coming effects of changes in the weather associated with climate change, and the food we eat. By 2015, the center had established an educational module for its new students.

“Your original gift in 2009 allowed us to bring together a group of experts to strategize and develop an action plan to educate health professionals about environmental influences on individual and global health,” wrote the center’s director, Dr. Victoria Maizes, in a June 2015 letter. “You then helped us create and deliver an educational module on environmental health. We now have an Environmental Health and Medicine program available for medical schools, nursing schools, and residencies. The module for health professional training has reached thousands of health care providers.”

BRI provided the center with a successor grant in 2015 that would help it develop the environmental medicine component of a broad effort to involve the public, called the Integrative Health Self-Care programs. We saw a chance to follow our earlier support for the education of health care professionals with support for a next level of development, which would allow the center to use what they had learned from developing the online module for environmental medicine to help individuals be more effective guardians of their own health.

The 12-week program will use an interactive online format to educate individuals around the world on the health benefits of getting adequate sleep, regular physical activity, and good nutrition, as well as having healthy relationships with others, protecting oneself against stress, developing a sense of spirituality, and maintaining a balance with the environment around us. It will be a primary part of the 100 Million Healthier Lives Campaign that is supported by more than 500 organizations, including the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and the MacArthur Foundation.



“We now have an Environmental Health and Medicine program available for medical schools, nursing schools, and residencies. The module for health professional training has reached thousands of health care providers.”

– Victoria Maizes, M.D.

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## OUR FOOD SYSTEMS

Over the past decade the sustainable food movement has evolved rapidly, connecting a new generation of local organic farmers with communities and restaurants all over the country. All three entities have made it a point of pride to source locally and in ways that are ecologically sustainable.

### SLOW MONEY

Slow Money, a decentralized movement that started in 2009, was an early mover in the effort to connect local farmers with investment capital. Like many others at the time, we had noted the early emergence of local, organic farms in communities around the country. Slow Money had identified the key to expanding the growth of those local food movements. A new generation of entrepreneurs was starting to rebuild local food systems, they pointed out, but the capital available to them was insufficient.

At that time, Slow Money had more than 1,000 attendees at their first two national gatherings, from more than 30 states and six countries, and had raised \$2.5 million to invest in local food initiatives.



Blackstone Ranch Institute provided a grant in early 2011 to bring together 25 of Slow Money's best leaders to consider ways to consolidate a national leadership structure without losing the spontaneity and local sovereignty of a decentralized, largely self-organizing network. We saw this as an important early growth point for the network, one that would help them develop a deliberate national leadership presence in what had been a highly decentralized movement. While the gathering was not decisive, it was an important early step toward the development of Slow Money as a national movement.

Since then, the network has continued to grow and has an impressive list of hundreds of individuals who have invested in the effort. By 2015, they were in 46 states and had raised \$40 million since 2010 to support more than 400 small food enterprises around the country.

### **COMMUNITY TABLE AT BABSON COLLEGE**

We also provided a grant in 2013 to the Lewis Institute at Babson College for the development of their innovative Uncommon Table as a way to incubate entrepreneurial food system initiatives by their students, alumni, and a variety of groups interested in sustainable food systems. Babson, which for years has been rated nationally as the best business school in the country for entrepreneurship, fosters a social change ethic among its students and has embedded concerns for sustainability in many of its educational offerings.

Lewis Institute has used the tradition of the common table, which brings together students and various organizations, businesses, and potential investors as a way to help transform the ideas generated in an academic environment into real projects and businesses. Students present ventures they are working on, receive advice from experienced professionals, and often leave with new connections and understanding that moves them closer to realizing their ambitions. A number of their students are food entrepreneurs. Cheryl Kiser, the director of the institute, and Rachel Greenberger, who runs their Food Sol program, requested a grant to help them launch similar efforts in other institutions of higher education.

Rachel Greenberger has noted that what the table format offers is the kind of conversation that now exists in the online world, and that this is how people actually learn — through the informal and probing exchange of ideas and information between those with new ambition and those with experience, connections, and resources. Ultimately, it is a vehicle for challenging the status quo and coming up with innovative business ventures in a dynamic sector that has both commercial promise and social value. It has become a popular model in the Boston and New York areas among food entrepreneurs, companies, academics, and consultants.

They used our grant to take the initiative beyond their world in Boston to introduce it to a small group of other universities interested in doing something similar. The most successful was at New York University's food studies program. There are also now community tables in Rhode Island on a regular basis, and conversations aimed at their development in Vermont. The community table is a model that Cheryl and Rachel hope will also spread to others in the business and organizational worlds.



Meeting of an Uncommon Table at Lewis Institute at Babson College. *Courtesy of Lewis Institute*

## INDIGENOUS FARM PROJECT

In the summer of 2012, we funded a farming project among Native American communities in eastern California that was initiated by Region 9 of the Environmental Protection Agency. Jared Blumenfeld, the director, had taken a train tour of San Joaquin Valley native communities and was moved by the depth of poverty that he saw. Traditional farming practices were disappearing, and there were many health problems, including high rates of diabetes, related to poor diets. He formed a partnership with a collection of young farming advocates from a group of organizations that included Futurefarmers, Planting Justice, and the Greenhorns.

We knew when we provided the grant that much of the challenge of this initiative would be to establish trust with Native American groups that had a long history of being disappointed by the limited commitments of outsiders who came with promises of help. It would be similar to the challenges faced by the organizers of the Native Land Trust initiative and was about building trust.

Jared had previously worked with Amy Franceschini of Futurefarmers, which planted a modern-day version of World War II victory gardens in San Francisco when he was head of the city's Department of the Environment. He asked us if we would provide a seed grant to start similar garden projects among some of the native communities he had seen. He thought he could use his network of EPA representatives on tribal lands in the West to spread the practice.

At the time, there was an emerging group of young Native American community activists interested in reviving agriculture in their communities that was part of the broader national trend supporting local food initiatives. Anya Kamenskaya of the Greenhorns, an organization of young farmers who were encouraging their peers to become farmers as a way of restoring community food systems and local ecologies, went to work in the Owens Valley in eastern California to start a pilot garden project with the Big Pine Paiute tribe. Owens Valley is a focal point for the region's Native American communities.

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While Anya cultivated good relationships with those she worked with, the challenge of building a network of other tribal areas that would champion

her initial work was a big one. The EPA representatives on native lands were not able in the end to make her campaign the priority that was initially envisioned, and Native American communities were dealing with a variety of challenges — including a chronic lack of funding support for this sort of effort — that made it difficult to gain momentum.

But the Big Pine Paiute tribe around Bishop did have some resources and was able to make this project a priority. Their work with Anya was progressing. By the middle of 2014, Anya was able to report that a group of 30 tribes from the region had recently come together and wanted to develop a three-year plan to build a coalition that would initiate similar projects in other places.



Garden Project of Big Pine Paiute tribe in Owens Valley in eastern California. *Courtesy of Futurefarmers*