

TRANSCRIPT: THE FUTURE OF COMMUNITY GARDENS: GARDENING IN LOS ANGELES

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HOST LEAD:

LAST SUMMER, A GROUP OF FARMERS IN SOUTH CENTRAL LOS ANGELES WERE KICKED OFF THE LAND THEY HAD BEEN TENDING FOR A DECADE. SOUTH CENTRAL FARM FED 350 FAMILIES, MOST OF THEM WORKING-CLASS IMMIGRANTS FROM LATIN AMERICA. THE NEIGHBORHOOD HAS A LONG HISTORY OF CRIME, BLIGHT AND POLLUTION. THE FARM HAD BEEN AN OASIS FROM THOSE PROBLEMS. WHEN A DEVELOPER BOUGHT THE LAND, HE SPARKED A THREE-YEAR BATTLE THAT'S ONLY NOW BEING RESOLVED. CLARE ABREU REPORTS.

TRACK:

ACTIVISTS ORGANIZED A FESTIVAL OF DOCUMENTARIES AND FOLK MUSIC IN OCTOBER TO RAISE PUBLIC AWARENESS ABOUT THE FARM.

PENA: WELL, IT WAS A VERY INTERESTING TRANSNATIONAL COMMUNITY. YOU HAD MEXICAN AMERICANS; YOU HAD AFRICAN AMERICANS, LAOTIAN AMERICANS. AND YET DESPITE ALL THOSE ETHNIC DIFFERENCES, THEY STILL MANAGED THOSE 14 ACRES.

DEVON PENA, AN ANTHROPOLOGIST FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON, SPOKE AFTER THE FILM SCREENING. HE'S BEEN STUDYING THE SOUTH CENTRAL FARMERS AND THEIR PLANTS FOR YEARS.

PENA: MOST OF THE PLANTS ARE FAMILY HEIRLOOM VARIETIES THAT HAVE BEEN KEPT IN THE SAME FAMILY AND FAMILIES FOR GENERATIONS. WE'RE TALKING LITERALLY THOUSANDS OF YEARS...YOU KNOW HOW WE MAY HAVE A FAMILY HEIRLOOM THAT'S CHINA OR CRYSTAL? THEY HAVE SEEDS.

THE IMMIGRANTS RELIED ON THESE SEEDS NOT ONLY TO CONNECT THEM TO THEIR PAST, BUT ALSO FOR FOOD AND MEDICINE. FAMILIES DEPENDED ON THEIR CROPS, BECAUSE GROCERY STORES WITH PRODUCE ARE SCARCE IN SOUTH CENTRAL L.A. AND THE MEDICINAL PLANTS TREAT EVERYTHING FROM ACNE TO KIDNEY PROBLEMS.

JUAREZ: WE WILL CONTINUE TO STRUGGLE FOR THAT PIECE OF LAND BECAUSE THAT IS WHERE THE NEED IS AT.

THAT'S RUFINA JUAREZ REPRESENTING THE ACTIVISTS AT THE OCTOBER PROTEST. BUT MANY OF THESE ACTIVISTS WERE NEVER FARMERS AND AREN'T FROM SOUTH CENTRAL L.A. THEY JUMPED ON BOARD WHEN THE FARM WAS THREATENED. BUT AS THE ACTIVISTS CONTINUE TO FIGHT, SOME OF THE REAL FARMERS HAVE MOVED ON.

IN FEBRUARY, MONTHS BEFORE THE EVICTION, LOS ANGELES MAYOR

ANTONIO VILLARAIGOSA'S OFFICE ALLOTTED ALMOST EIGHT ACRES FOR A NEW FARM. THE STANFORD AVALON COMMUNITY GARDEN LIES BENEATH POWER LINES A FEW MILES SOUTH OF THE OLD FARM. IT NOW HAS ALMOST TWO HUNDRED PLOTS AVAILABLE FOR FAMILIES. PEDRO BARRERA IS RELIEVED TO BE AT STANFORD AVALON. HE'S ONLY UPSET THAT HIS SEEDS WERE LOST IN THE MOVE FROM SOUTH CENTRAL.

PEDRO: THE LEADERS FROM OVER THERE, THEY DON'T LET US TO TAKE ANYTHING, NOTHING. NO PLANTS, NO SEEDS, NO TOOLS, NOTHING. BUT LITTLE BY LITTLE WE'RE STARTING TO BRING BACK AGAIN.

TO BARRERA, THE SOUTH CENTRAL ACTIVISTS WERE JUST ANOTHER THREAT TO HIS COMMUNITY AND THEIR GARDENING NEEDS.

PEDRO: WE ARE NOT ARGUING PEOPLE, WE ARE NOT A PROBLEM PEOPLE, WE REALLY LOVE TO DO GARDEN, SO THIS IS WHY WE ARE HERE.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA'S COMMON GROUND GARDENING PROGRAM HELPS BARRERA AND OTHER LOW-INCOME RESIDENTS RUN COMMUNITY GARDENS. PROGRAM MANAGER YVONNE SAVIO HAS SEEN A LOT OF COMMUNITY GARDENS SHUT DOWN, ONLY TO SPROUT UP IN OTHER PLACES.

YVONNE: THERE'S ALWAYS SOME THAT ARE BEING DEVELOPED. ALWAYS SOME THAT ARE TRYING TO STRUGGLE TO KEEP ALIVE. AND OTHERS THAT HAVE NOT MANAGED AND HAVE GONE UNDER. BUT IT ALWAYS SEEMS TO BE STAYING ABOUT THE SAME NUMBER.

SAVIO SAYS DEVELOPMENT IN L.A. MAY BE ENCROACHING ON NEW AREAS, BUT THIS DOESN'T SPELL DOOM FOR COMMUNITY FARMS. PEOPLE WILL CONTINUE TO SEEK NEW GARDENING SPACES FOR HEALTHY AND INEXPENSIVE FOOD, AND GREEN HAVENS.

MAYOR ANTONIO VILLARAIGOSA CUTS STANFORD AVALON'S GRAND OPENING RIBBON WITH A MACHETE NINE MONTHS AFTER THE FARM BROKE GROUND. LOCAL POLITICIANS AND RESIDENTS SEE IT AS A HAPPY ENDING TO THE TUMULTUOUS FIGHT FOR SOUTH CENTRAL. MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA HAS EVEN HIGHER GOALS.

VILLARAIGOSA: WE'RE COMMITTED TO CONTINUE THE EFFORT OF SECURING MORE SITES FOR COMMUNITY GARDENS. I'VE SAID I WANT TO MAKE L.A. THE GREENEST BIG CITY IN AMERICA. AND WE'RE GOING TO DO THAT.

FOR INTERN EDITION, I'M CLARE ABREU.