

### **Executive Summary: West African Community Garden Project**

West Africa is home to 16 countries, each with a rich and diverse cultural heritage. Over the past 50 years, Washington State has become home to more than 20,000 West African immigrants, who have brought with them a deep appreciation for culturally relevant and traditional foods. However, accessing these foods has been a long-standing challenge for the community, given the complex logistics of importing food from Africa. Shipments can take months to arrive, during which time food may spoil or lose its authentic flavor. These extended shipping times, combined with packaging standards that often don't meet USDA requirements, lead to high costs and frequent confiscations by U.S. regulatory agencies. The result is limited access to authentic and affordable West African produce.

For West African seniors in Washington, these limitations are compounded by significant lifestyle changes. Many elders have spent their lives growing their own food in a subsistence lifestyle, but now face language barriers, social isolation, and a sedentary lifestyle in the U.S. Without access to the fresh, familiar foods they grew up with, many have turned to processed foods, contributing to a rise in obesity, diabetes, hypertension, and other health issues. Many of these seniors have expressed interest in a community garden as a way to stay active and healthy while reconnecting with the food and lifestyle they knew back home.

The West African Community Garden will be a powerful tool in addressing these challenges by providing a space for the West African community to grow culturally familiar produce. It will offer a much-needed resource for newly-arrived migrants—especially young men who, due to cultural norms, may not have had the chance to learn how to garden or cook in their home countries. Through this project, they will gain the skills to grow and prepare traditional foods, fostering self-sufficiency and cultural connection.

The garden will also serve as an educational resource for youth in our community. The Washington West African Center runs an after-school program, and we plan to use the garden to teach preschool through K-12 students about West African foods—from cultivation to cooking. This hands-on learning will allow them to carry forward their cultural heritage, understanding not only how to grow and cook these foods but also the cultural significance behind them.

Additionally, the garden will support the bi-weekly LUMO West African Food Cup, through which we distribute 150 boxes of culturally relevant groceries to community members every other Friday. Rising food costs and limited access to West African ingredients make it increasingly challenging to sustain this program. By growing some of these ingredients locally, we can help meet the demand for culturally significant food while addressing food security concerns in our community.

#### **In summary, the West African Community Garden will:**

1. Provide elders with a familiar and active lifestyle through gardening.
2. Teach newly arrived migrants—especially young men—how to grow and cook culturally relevant foods.
3. Educate youth on West African agricultural and culinary traditions.
4. Enhance food security by supplying fresh, culturally significant produce to meet the community's needs.

This project will promote food self-sufficiency, improve community health, and preserve cultural traditions for the West African community throughout Snohomish County and Washington State. The West African Community Garden represents a vital initiative that will address immediate food needs, improve quality of life, and build a bridge to sustain cultural heritage across generations.

### **SCRIPT FOR COMMUNITY GARDEN VIDEO:**

“Big News, Snohomish County!  
The West African Community Garden is here!

We’re excited to announce that the Washington West African Center (WAWAC) has partnered with Grace Lutheran Church in Mukilteo to launch a community garden for the 2025–2026 growing season—and YOU can be part of it!

Imagine having your own space to grow fresh, healthy food right here in our community! The Washington West African Community Garden is your opportunity to plant, grow, and harvest your own fruits and vegetables hassle free.

This garden isn’t just about growing food. It’s about reclaiming tradition, promoting wellness, and building community. Whether you’re a seasoned elder who misses farming back home, a newly arrived migrant ready to learn, or a youth excited to get your hands dirty—we’ve got a garden bed waiting for you!

FREE garden beds and seeds available!

Come grow fresh, culturally relevant foods like potatoes, onions, carrots, cassava, okra, egg plant, lettuce, hot peppers, and more!

Why Join?

- Stay active and healthy
- Grow the foods you love and miss
- Learn traditional West African gardening & cooking
- Support food security in our community
- Pass down cultural knowledge to the next generation

Also supporting the LUMO West African Food Cup—feeding 150 families every two weeks!

Spots are limited, so sign up now and let’s grow together!

To reserve your free garden bed and seeds, contact us at:  
info@wawac.org | 253-235-2132

#WestAfricanGarden #FoodIsCulture #GrowWithWAWAC #SnohomishCounty #CulturalConnection  
#FoodJustice #MukilteoGarden #WestAfricanCommunity #LUMOWestAfrica”

This garden is open to everyone! Whether you're experienced or new to gardening, this is an opportunity for you to have your own garden bed and grow the crops of your choice. .

We have seeds available for you to start with, or you can bring your own. This is more than just a garden—it's a place to connect, share knowledge, and preserve our rich agricultural traditions.

Join us in creating a sustainable food source for our community. Sign up for a garden bed today and be part of this exciting journey!"

Sign up for a bed here

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSck7\\_zPZLr\\_-rPdrcfMT\\_CgKZHIA7GnHM8Br9tTKdfYuvd9lQ/viewform](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSck7_zPZLr_-rPdrcfMT_CgKZHIA7GnHM8Br9tTKdfYuvd9lQ/viewform) or

for more information, contact WAWAC at 425-758-3269, email [info@wawac.org](mailto:info@wawac.org), or visit [www.wawac.org](http://www.wawac.org). Let's grow together!"