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## King '15 Learns About Community Gardens in Australia

Dec. 10, 2013

Amanda King '15

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.— Even though she grew up among the fertile farm fields of central Illinois, Illinois Wesleyan University student Amanda King '15 credits her study abroad experience more than 9,000 miles from home with new insights into the benefits of creating successful and sustainable community gardens.

A native of Peoria, Ill., **environmental studies** major King is studying abroad this semester in New South Wales, Australia. As part of King's program, students must complete an internship, research project or creative project. She is interning at **Cultivating Community**, a nonprofit based in Melbourne, Australia, which provides access to healthy food for people living in public housing.



One of King's tasks has been assisting with the rebuilding of a public housing community garden. Her greatest takeaway is the importance of collaboration in nurturing the people involved in the gardens as well as the plants.

"People create a small community around growing food, sharing knowledge and coming together," said King. She said people tending plots in Cultivating Community's 21 public housing community gardens around Melbourne come from diverse cultural backgrounds, resulting in the cultivation of a wide array of vegetables, fruits and flowers flourishing in the area's climate.

"Tropical fruits such as bananas, pineapples, passion fruit and guava that we import in the U.S. are grown throughout Australia," said King. "Most of the food grown here is available in the U.S., although I have noticed Australians eat heaps of beetroot and pumpkin." King said the most interesting fruits she's sampled are custard apples and black sapote, a species of persimmon.

She said she much prefers working in the gardens and assisting with citywide composting initiatives than the administrative work necessary "behind the scenes" but understands the need to organize events and collaborate with partners for common goals.

When she returns to the United States in December, King plans to use what she's learned to help others establish more sustainable habits. Cultivating Community works to change the way people look at food and food systems, and King hopes to do the same.

"Whether it's starting my own network of community gardens in Peoria or just finding a group of people who want to start something that will make a change for the future, I want to help the environment by helping people make their habits more sustainable," she said. "This internship has helped me realize more than ever my passion for the environment."

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