

Community Gardens Promote Healthier Lifestyles and Volunteerism

The Situation

Many Kansans want to grow their own fresh produce but lack garden space at their residences. Some live in apartments, mobile homes, or group housing. Others are challenged by poor soil or lack of sunlight for proper growing conditions. Individuals who grow their own produce may be able to stretch their food dollars; increase their access to fresh, nutritious food; make wiser food choices; and increase their physical activity.

Some communities have considered establishing community gardens but lack the leadership skills, horticulture knowledge, or funding to make the plan a reality. These groups often look for guidance on how to move forward with their garden projects.

What We Did

K-State Research and Extension teamed with the Kansas Health Foundation to establish the Kansas Community Garden Grants project. The objective is to increase Kansans' access to fresh, healthy produce by expanding the number of community gardens in the state. We set a goal of establishing 60 new gardens over a three-year period. The Kansas Health Foundation provided seed money for each community to receive up to \$5,000 to establish a new community garden.

In July 2013, agents and specialists hosted a two-day Kansas Community Garden Conference to help ensure the success of these projects. The conference included tours, general sessions, breakout sessions, and a panel discussion so attendees could develop skills as local garden leaders.

A website (www.KansasCommunityGardens.org) provides access to the grant application and educational resources for new and existing community gardens. Videos, developed by K-State, answered Frequently Asked Questions about community gardening. Sixteen videos available on the website have been viewed more than 8,700 times. Links are provided to K-State horticulture Web pages and other community gardening publications and resources.

Outcomes

In the first two years of this three-year project, 59 gardens received grants worth a total of \$250,000. As a result of this project:

- 1,170 new allotment plots were created,
- 452,995 square feet of space were developed into communal gardens,
- community garden projects across Kansas now total 859,153 square feet, and
- more than 3,500 individuals participated in grant-funded community garden projects.

Success Stories

A community leader commented on the garden's impact for their city: "The Lyndon Pride Community Garden is a tremendous addition to the city of Lyndon. In addition to being a source for fresh vegetables in the community, it serves as a visual reminder of progress and a testament to the spirit of volunteerism."

Another participant mentioned the change in attitudes toward foods: "Children pop cherry tomatoes in their mouths like candy, and parents stand by in amazement that their kids are voluntarily eating vegetables."

People from another garden praised the conference and area Extension Master Gardeners: "Our plan for the future is to start the education programs at the beginning of the gardening year when people are looking forward to spring and the growing season. We want to bring some of the Master Gardeners here from Lawrence as speakers, and we will work on getting more of the participants to attend the conference that was held in Manhattan this last year. It was excellent, and I feel a real motivator."

Contact

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