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EXTENSION

BENTON- FRANKLIN MASTER GARDENER

Community Gardening and Plant a Row for the Hungry

BY THE NUMBERS

- 521 Master Gardeners trained from 2012-2014.
- 30,893 Master Gardener hours logged from 2012-2014.
- 48,167 pounds of produce grown in the Plant-a-Row program from 2012-2014.
- 32 community gardens mentored from 2012-2015.
- 24 new gardens developed from 2012-2015.
- 332 raised beds built from 2012-2015.
- \$1,750 in grants received from 2012-2015.
- \$42,000 worth of in-kind donations of materials and services received from 2012-2015.



2015

ISSUE

USDA indicates that food insecurity is a lack of “access to enough food for an active, healthy life,” with 1 in 7 Americans living in food insecure households. It is estimated that 16 million children in our country consistently face hunger or unhealthy diets that can impair their cognitive and physical development, as well as their academic achievement. This is not just a national problem; 12.6% of Benton County and 10.1% of Franklin County residents are food insecure.

RESPONSE

In 2011, Americorps volunteer Nathan Finch worked with the WSU Extension Benton-Franklin Master Gardeners to provide coordination, leadership, and technical assistance to local community gardening efforts and to promote the Plant-A-Row Program (PAR) that encourages home gardeners to donate produce to local food banks. When Finch left the area, Master Gardener Bill Dixon took on the leadership of the Master Gardener Community Gardens/PAR Team.

Since assuming leadership, Dixon annually has contacted local nurseries and garden centers to get donations of garden seed often disposed of at the end of the gardening season. He also has contacted local high school Future Farmers of America clubs to ask for donations of transplants leftover after their plant sales.

With the support of Marianne Ophardt, Benton County WSU Extension director and Benton-Franklin Master Gardener program director, the Community Gardening/PAR Team has focused its efforts on helping those families most in need. This has included working with garden sponsors to build gardens in the lowest-income and highest population density neighborhoods in the two counties. The team works with local cities, schools, service groups, and churches that already have community gardens or want to establish new ones. Team members provide information on community garden construction, organization, and management, plus mentor community gardeners throughout the area to help teach people how to garden.

In 2015 the Community Gardening/PAR Team has partnered with the Master Gardener Education Team to launch a food gardening education program targeting low-income families. In 2015 they taught 13 “Introduction to Food Gardening” classes, and 12 “Growing Food in Containers” classes where all participants were provided with free containers, potting mix, seeds, and transplants provided by local nurseries and our Master Gardeners. These classes taught by team members reached about 400 low-income families.



QUOTES

"They receive perhaps their first exposure to growing food and flowers and get a new skill - maybe how to use a shovel properly, how to test the soil and learn what soil needs, how to plant seeds according to their size. They get one-on-one time with the correctional officers, who use this time to mentor and model positive personal interactions in the freeing environment of sunshine and dirt." Chris Dougherty, Benton-Franklin Master Gardener

"... One of the gardeners at Keewaydin Plaza told me that for him gardening was therapy. It gets him outside, and he gives everything he grows away. For me, it makes me feel good to see people taking advantage of the opportunity to grow their own food, even if they give it all away." - Bill Keatts, Benton-Franklin Master Gardener Veteran

"The Jay Perry garden provides the opportunity to succeed at an effort that provides a visible return and to provide some elements of a healthy diet. Family life is also enhanced. The Jay Perry garden is an excellent example of families working together." - Bernie Saffell, Benton-Franklin Master Gardener Veteran

IMPACTS

Our Benton-Franklin Master Gardeners are making a difference. They have continued to promote the PAR program, soliciting donations of garden seed and transplants to share with gardeners throughout the area who are willing to grow a little extra in their gardens and donate some of their produce to local people in need. Over the last three years, Master Gardeners have distributed more than 11,000 seed packets and 7,000 transplants to gardeners in the community, and it is estimated that more than 48,000 pounds of produce have been donated to local food banks. Master Gardeners also have donated 6,583 pounds of produce harvested from the vegetable garden in their Master Gardener Demonstration Garden.

The Master Gardener team has supported the burgeoning local interest in establishing community gardens. In 2013, team members helped the City of Kennewick organize and build its first in-park community garden at Jay Perry Park. Since then, the team of 60 Master Gardeners under Dixon's leadership gave 2,340 hours of volunteer service to help establish 11 new community and food gardens and mentor 24 community gardens, teaching novice gardeners how to plant and care for their gardens.

It would be hard to say which of these gardens is making the most impact on community hunger, but the new garden established in 2014 at the Benton-Franklin Juvenile Justice Center may be the most rewarding. For the first time in more than 10 years, the youth incarcerated there have been allowed outside the facility for an activity. The youth helped build the bed, select the crops, planted the garden, and harvested the produce. Master Gardeners mentored both the youth and staff. Participation in gardening was viewed as a reward, with only youth that were exhibiting good behavior allowed to participate in garden activities.

The youth worked with kitchen staff to decide what crops would be planted and how they would be used for meals. Tomatoes, peppers, and onions, for making fresh salsa, were the most highly desired. As a result, more fresh produce was introduced into the diets of the juvenile justice youth, they gained access to fresh air and physical activity, and they experienced greater self-esteem by growing their own produce and contributing extra to local food banks. Staff and youth felt that this garden was very successful and the Master Gardeners are helping them expand the garden in 2015.

A large part of this team's success is due to the time, effort, and dedication of Bill Dixon who gave 877 hours of service to the Master Gardener program in 2013 and was recognized for his efforts as the Benton-Franklin Master Gardener of 2013.



Master Gardener Program

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