

Community Garden Project

Engaging youth in healthy gardening activities

Garden Statistics

Number of Participants (children):

Latino	35
Mer. Elem.	326
Mer. Park	15
Good Shep.	57
4-H	3
TOTAL	436+

Produce harvested (pounds):

Latino	1208*
Mer. Elem.	480**
Mer. Park	815**
Good Shep.	630**
4-H	450*
RECAP	9846*
RG Heirloom	1236*
TOTAL	14665

* produce donated to area food pantries

** produce utilized by participating low-income families

Nationally, thirty-three million people including 13 million children live in households that experience hunger or the risk of hunger. This represents one in ten households in the United States.(1)

In 2003 in Rock County, 8,705 children, or 22% of all children in the county, received Wisconsin Foodshare assistance. The number of children in the FoodShare program increased by 90% from 1999 to 2003. On average, 5,405 or 13% of the county's school children participated daily in free or reduced school lunch programs. In 2002, 41% of WIC participants stated that they often felt "food insecurity," or lack of access to a variety of healthy foods. Sixteen percent reported experiencing hunger. Clearly the young families of Rock County present a large potential audience for nutrition and food money management education. They need to learn every strategy to get the most health benefit from the food assistance they receive. The act of growing fresh vegetables at or near home may be one avenue in helping achieve this.

Our goals are to:

- Increase food security activities
- Develop capacity among existing community food resources in low income and underserved communities in the Rock County area
- Improve economic self-sufficiency
- Increase community access to culturally appropriate and nutritious food
- Make connections between community members, organizations and resources to ensure the viability and longevity of county-wide food system.

Specific goals include: Improve family fruit and vegetable production, consumption and access in low-income neighborhoods.

- Improve accessibility and utilization of diverse, sustainable seed and plants.
- Increase interaction among people in low-income neighborhoods.
- Strengthen relationships between low-income/resource people in neighborhoods with both city, county and extra-neighborhood resources.
- Increase production of fresh perennial foods in public and semi-public neighborhoods.
- Expand access to fresh perennial foods for low-income residents.
- Expand economic activity associated with existing community gardening.
- Increase food production in existing community gardens.



Sources:

(1). ERS Food Assistance and Nutrition Research Report No. (FANRR) 21, United States Department of Agriculture, March 2002

Gardens and Education Programs:

	Year Founded	No. Participants Youth/Adult	Education Program
Latino Garden	2004	35 youth 10 male 25 female	8-week program with Janesville Boys and Girls club emphasizing garden skills and nutrition
Merrill Elementary School	2006	326 youth	Spring program: Pre-k thru Fourth; 4-week summer school program; Summertime lunchroom composting project
Merrill Park*	2006	15 youth	Community based program working with participating neighborhood families
Good Shepherd*	2005	57 youth 9 adults (8 families)	Center based summer program utilizing vegetables for nutrition education and in-class projects
4-H	2006	1 family	Demonstration garden at Rock County Community Garden

* Space in the garden designated to families for their own gardening endeavors and vegetable production.

Impact

In 2006, over 436 youth participated in a gardening program in Rock County. Participants were introduced to the benefits of gardening and fresh grown produce. Our hopes are to continue gardening programs to educate more youth and families to connect them gardening and nutrition concepts. We also hope to expand this program in order to encourage more families to take part in gardening in order to augment their own food budgets.

Produce harvested from each garden was used by participating families. Additional produce was donated to area food pantries. Including produce from the RECAP garden at the Rock County sheriff's department and from Rotary Gardens' heirloom tomato collection (tended by MGVs), over **14665** pounds of produce were donated in 2006.

In order to better facilitate the donation of fresh produce to area food pantries, a directory of area resources was initiated. The directory was posted on the Rock County UW-Extension website for gardeners to reference when looking to donate their produce.



Community Partners

Rock Prairie Master Gardener Assoc.
Merrill Elementary School and staff
Rock-Walworth Head Start and staff
Janesville Boys and Girls Club
Rotary Gardens
Anna Kokity