

RECAP Garden Program

As part of the multi-county:
Teaching Gardening Life Skills (and More) to Jail Inmates

Garden Statistics

- Garden size: ½ acre

of produce raised:

- **9846 pounds total**

Including:

- 5385 pounds misc. produce donated to food pantries or utilized by county facilities
- 300+ pumpkins donated to youth fundraiser (Spotlight On Kids)

Distribution:

- 20 % to county institutions
- 80 % to food pantries

Program Participants:

47 Inmates (2006)

- 27 Male
- 16 Female
- 28 White
- 11 African American
- 1 American Indian
- 3 Latino

796.75 hours of community service were provided by RECAP over 161 visits to the gardens.

Most hours served by one inmate: 50

Least hours served by one inmate: 5

Program structure:

Wednesdays and Fridays,
11am to 3pm

Individual and Master

Gardener Volunteer hours:
957.75 hours

In cooperation with the Rock County Sheriff's Department, Rock County UW-Extension educators provide hands-on life skills development opportunities to individuals (inmates) enrolled in RECAP (Rock County Education and Criminal Addiction Program).

Program Outcomes:

- Inmates increased knowledge of gardening and related life skills through a hands-on gardening and nutrition education experience.
- Inmates learned how to plant, grow, maintain, and harvest a vegetable garden.
- Inmates increased their knowledge of nutrition and food safety.
- Produce, harvested and collected from project, supplemented prison meal programs and area food pantry fresh produce offerings.

Other Outcomes:

- Cognitive benefits involve learning new skills and language. Through gardening, prisoners may improve their decision-making and problem-solving skills, as well as learn to follow complex instructions. They are able to work in a supervised setting while at the same time increasing their awareness of the world around them.
- Social benefits are derived from working within a group-learning setting to share, to relate, to compromise and to work towards a common goal. The social interaction by working in a group helps prisoners to feel better about themselves.
- Psychological development includes an improvement of self-esteem and self-confidence. Working with living plants allows the participant to feel a sense of responsibility. Knowing that they must nourish and care for this living plant helps prisoners feel more productive and motivated.
- Physical improvements result from prisoners working in the fresh air, moving their bodies and adapting to physical changes in a non-threatening environment.

Evaluation was conducted at the end of each day by Master Gardener Assistants; "what did you learn today?" and was recorded for qualitative data. Amount of produce harvested was collected for quantitative data.

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Impact

"My wife and kids go to Echo [food pantry]. Even though I'm in here, I still feel like I'm providing for them." Chip.

"I need to be a good role model for my kids... I like that the community garden gives back to the community..." Chris.

"I already know how to rototill... it's now learning how to work with others." Gary.

In addition, several meals were prepared for the RECAP participants inside the jail. Each menu consisted of vegetables harvested from the garden.

269 meals served many from garden produce; this includes 3 in-house meals from garden produce.

"There was noticeable improvement in attitude after the inmates ate the vegetable soup for lunch in the unit." Lyle Yaun, RECAP Community Service Coordinator

Rock County UW-Extension Nutrition Education program also participated by providing weekly programs on healthy eating utilizing the produce from the garden.

"... whole grain bread is better for you than white breads... you need 5-9 serving of fruit and veggies per day...." Anthony.

"... vegetable soup really ain't all that bad! I did not pick anything out of it and I ate it all. I would NEVER even try it had I been on the outside." Tammy.

Conclusion

As part of the RECAP education program, incarcerated individuals are taught life skills in order to better manage their lives outside of the prison system. As part of this training, the Rock County Garden Program offered participants with a constructive activity, gardening, which they can choose to participate with once released. With such, individuals are presented with an opportunity to find positive outlets once on their own. In addition, they can provide fresh, locally grown produce to their family and friends.



"...I never had a garden before but would like to have one now that I know more." Carl.