

Allen County

Local Churches Lay the Groundwork to Healthy Food

Summary

Churches and gardens? This combination has proved to be a valuable solution to making healthy food affordable in neighborhoods and communities. Churches with summer youth programs can give children firsthand experiences on how to grow, prepare and enjoy fresh produce. In addition, churches can offer garden plots to members and/or neighbors. By creating more ways people can access affordable healthy food, the rates of chronic disease will decrease, one neighborhood at a time.



Challenge

In Allen County, two in five adults are obese, well above national and state averages. The rate is disproportionately higher among those living in low income communities in Lima, Ohio. Nearly one in two low-income residents are obese, placing them at risk for chronic diseases like diabetes and heart disease.

A healthy lifestyle helps prevent these chronic diseases, but residents in a number of Lima communities have limited access to healthy and affordable foods, due to lack of transportation and income challenges. Neighborhood community gardens can help make these foods more available, but land, water, and leadership are needed to make these gardens successful.

Solution

Churches have interested members, land, and water - three key resources that are needed to start and sustain the gardens into the future.

In February 2012, the Creating Healthy Communities (CHC) program, in partnership with the West Central Ohio Health Ministries Program, invited an urban farms coordinator from Cincinnati to present a community gardening workshop. Participants learned about and shared resources available to start and maintain gardens. Two Lima churches started gardens as a result of this effort, The Elm Street Church and The Future Church.

Your Involvement is Key

The Allen County motto is "Real American Strength." You can help Allen County stay strong by creating neighborhoods, workplaces, schools and churches that support health instead of disease. Creating gardens that provide local fresh fruits and vegetables is one solution. Find out if your own faith-based or community organization is interested in starting a garden.

Help us continue to create health in our community, where we live, work, play and pray.



Results

The Elm Street Church of the Brethren partnered with members of Salem Mennonite Church, a rural church, who shared their gardening expertise to help get the gardens started. Together they built 10 raised-bed gardens. The 167 pounds of produce grown supplied community meals for church members and donations to the local food pantry.

The Future Church of Lima garden served the produce to their summer school program, as well as church and community members. The program director, Nicole Hughes, reported

that the children ran to the garden every day to see how their garden was growing. "They measured each day, and that helped with math skills. The older ones learned to chop and sauté them (the vegetables) and share them at lunchtime." The children gave 42 pounds of food to church members, the community, and the soup kitchen. "It was an amazing project for the children and community," she added.

"Many [kids] had never had those vegetables before, and almost nobody had gotten to cook them before. Without the Creating Healthy Communities program, this garden would not have been possible. We already have plans to expand the garden next year!"

-Nicole Hughes, The Future Church Program Director

Future Directions

The Creating Healthy Communities program will continue to work with churches and faith-based organizations to increase access to healthy foods by building community gardens to sow the seeds of good health.

In 2013, the project plans to assist Our Daily Bread Soup Kitchen with developing their garden, the Lima Allen County Neighborhoods in Partnership (LACNIP) with their community gardens, and will work with with other groups interested in increasing access to affordable foods in Allen County.



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