

# Richland County

## Pounds of Produce and Bushels of Benefits through Community Gardening

### Summary

Activities of the Raising Richland Community Garden Network with collaboration from the Creating Healthy Communities (CHC) program and local funding resulted in the growth and expansion of community gardens throughout Richland County. Neighbors, schools, organizations, churches and community volunteers united in planting and harvesting hundreds of pounds of fresh produce during the summer of 2012. A wide variety of fruits and vegetables were shared with families, food pantries and meal programs benefiting residents who lack access to healthy food.



### Challenge

Like many communities across the nation, Richland County experiences chronic disease as its leading cause of death. The incidence of diseases such as heart disease, diabetes and some cancers are directly related to lack of access to healthy foods and physical inactivity. A recent community health assessment showed:

- 73% of adults in Richland County were overweight or obese
- Only 6% of adults ate 5 or more daily servings of fruits and vegetables as recommended for a healthy diet

Access to fresh, healthy foods can be impacted by financial pressures, unemployment, and transportation difficulties to travel to a full service grocery store or farmers market. The availability of quick, inexpensive and often less healthy foods creates a default choice for many. Strategies to improve the availability and ease of consumption of fruits and vegetables are a necessity for our community.

### Solution

To encourage the development of gardens, community partners have organized and hosted an annual Raising Richland Community Garden Summit. Held in the spring, this workshop educates, inspires and connects gardeners of all varieties. A garden grant program, funded by the Richland County Foundation, was developed by the North End Community Improvement Collaborative with support from its partners. This provided supplies for the creation or expansion of gardens. The Raising Richland Community Garden Network provided a forum for sharing of resources and talents and continues to offer on-going communication and learning opportunities.

### Your Involvement is Key

A community garden is planted and harvested for the benefit of one or more families. The success of community gardens rests in the sharing of resources and talents.

Consider the assets you have in land, labor or materials. Join the movement to make fresh healthy food an easy choice for everyone.

Currently a gardener? Consider planting an extra row and sharing with neighbors, friends or with a local food pantry.



## Results

The annual Community Garden Summit, garden grant program and activities of the Raising Richland Community Garden Network have led to the expansion of community gardening efforts throughout the county. The number of gardens has grown from 17 to more than 26 gardens in 2012. Contacts for the Raising Richland Network have more than doubled to more than 280 interested gardeners and community members.

Survey results from gardeners who received grant funds in 2012 all documented the sharing of garden produce with local families, church members or community food programs. More than 2,000 pounds of produce and an additional 1,250 ears of sweet corn were harvested.

Less tangible benefits from community gardening were also reported. Survey results showed that 90% of respondents believed that their garden did something positive for their community, and that the garden brought people together in a cooperative effort. Fifty percent of the garden organizers indicated that gardening led them to consume more fruits and vegetables, and 80% reported increased physical activity because of their gardening.

“What a blessing to be part of a community who shows how much they care. Gardening is hard work, but what a privilege to be able to plant, grow and harvest fresh produce for families in need.”

-Patricia Constance, Village of Lucas Resident

## Future Directions

The whole community benefits from community gardening. Future plans to support gardens include:

- The Third Annual Raising Richland Community Garden Summit: Thursday, March 14, 2013
- Pursuit of grants and local funding
- Outreach to schools and businesses with opportunities for volunteerism or the creation of new gardens
- Long-term planning and collaboration to enhance the local food system



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