

Meigs County

Youth Action for a Healthy Community

Summary

Meigs County ranks 85th out of 88 counties in Ohio for overall health. Thirty-two percent of adults are obese and 44% of 3rd graders are overweight or obese in Meigs County, significantly higher than the state and national average for children. In efforts to change this statistic, the Creating Healthy Communities (CHC) community garden project has helped to create access to healthy foods for county residents in need. With the support of Judge Scott Powell of the Meigs County Juvenile Court, two new community gardens were installed in Syracuse and Pomeroy. These gardens involved 40 at-risk youths who volunteered to ensure that needy community members have access to fresh healthy produce.

Challenge

Low-income residents of Meigs County have limited access to affordable fresh fruits and vegetables. While there are numerous private plots for gardens in the county, most families receiving food assistance do not have the opportunity or resources to make their own gardens. This limits their access to and consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables and subsequently increases their risk for chronic diseases. Therefore, the Meigs County CHC coalition embarked on implementing community garden projects to assist in filling the fresh fruits and vegetables gap for vulnerable residents in the county.

Solution

The CHC coalition assessed various community organizations to determine their readiness, capacity and willingness to implement a community garden. Based on the assessment, the Meigs County Juvenile Court Community Diversion program was selected to lead the implementation process. With funding from the Creating Healthy Communities Program, materials were acquired to implement two gardens, yielding a variety of vegetables in Syracuse and Pomeroy. Forty at-risk youths from the Community Diversion Program participated in preparing the soil, planting, seeding, tending the crops and harvesting for a total of more than 170 volunteer hours. The work on the gardens was coordinated by Mr. Ronnie Vance, Juvenile Officer.



Your Involvement is Key

CHC's main goal is to address chronic disease risk factors of poor nutrition, tobacco use and sedentary lifestyle through policy, systems and environmental change. Meigs County residents can get involved in CHC activities by contacting the Meigs County Health Department and participating in the CHC coalition activities. Promoting access to healthy food is just one way of reducing chronic diseases in the county. You can help prevent chronic disease by becoming involved in projects like community gardens, installation of playground equipment and more.



Results

As a result of hours of hard work, the gardens produced an immense amount of vegetables totaling more than 500 pounds. The adolescents harvested three varieties of cabbages, broccoli, brussels sprouts, and cauliflower. Other vegetables produced include zucchini and yellow squash, cucumbers, potatoes, two varieties of sweet corn, three varieties of peppers, tomatoes and green beans. Kale, turnip greens, collard greens, turnips and beets were harvested later in the fall. The garden project made significant impacts on two vulnerable demographics in the community, specifically, residents without access to fresh fruits and vegetables and 40 at-risk youths. The adolescents actively participated in starting and completing the project while acquiring work

and life skills through the program. Portions of the harvest were sent home with the youths as well as donated to the Mulberry Community Center Food Pantry run by Meigs Cooperative Parish.

“Many of the young people participating in our garden project felt a sense of achievement in doing something worthwhile to help their neighbors and community. They were also enthusiastic consumers of fresh vegetables, many for the first time.”

-Ronnie Vance, Juvenile Court Officer

Future Directions

The prevailing health situation in the county must serve as a wake-up call for community involvement and action. The ultimate goal is to have not only community gardens, but to also have gardens at schools and worksites tended by students and employees to highlight the importance of fresh fruits and vegetables for community health and wellness.

The Meigs County CHC coalition will continue to work on healthy eating, active living and tobacco-free lifestyle initiatives that are necessary in communities, workplaces, schools, and healthcare in order to prevent chronic diseases.

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