



The Big Garden: Growing Food and Community

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Food Insecurity and Food Deserts

- Food insecurity
 - Over 17 million families were food insecure in 2010
 - That means those families weren't sure if they were going to have enough food at some point during that year
 - Food insecurity can depend on where you live.
- Food Deserts:
 - Food deserts are concentrated areas short on access to healthy food – fresh produce and meat – even while convenience stores and fast-food outlets flourish

Scope and Compounding Factors

- These areas experience both poverty and obesity
- Barriers to accessing healthy food are economic (poverty) and physical (lack of reliable transportation, no nearby access to healthy food).
- This is an urban and rural problem
 - Urban areas, including Omaha, have food deserts affecting thousands of people
 - Rural food deserts affect thousands more often due to access issues

What are community gardens?

- “Any piece of land gardened by a group of people.” – American Community Garden Assn.
- **Benefits of Community Gardens:**
 - Produces nutritious food
 - Reduces family food budgets
 - Increases green space
 - Beautifies neighborhoods
 - Stimulates social interaction
 - Reduces crime
 - Creates an opportunity for inter-generational and cross-cultural interaction

The Big Garden

- A project of United Methodist Ministries based in Omaha
 - UMM was founded in 1966 with a mission to alleviate poverty, hunger and racism in the metro.
- The Big Garden started in 2005 with a grant from the USDA to start 12 gardens in east Omaha
 - Since then we have expanded and now have 41 gardens in the Omaha Metro
- In 2009 we began establishing gardens in small towns and rural areas of eastern NE and northeastern KS
 - We now have 40 rural gardens

Our Approach

As a faith based nonprofit, we're uniquely positioned with connections both in the faith community and the nonprofit community.

We partner with other organizations to help utilize their otherwise unused capacity and potential. Each site is managed locally. Local needs and circumstances determine how the garden operates

- Some sites are true community gardens where members from the neighborhood adopt a plot and use the produce themselves
- Some are pantry gardens where the produce goes directly into the food pantries and homeless shelters
- Some are educational gardens, where we partner with schools to teach general horticultural practices

Our Approach (Cont.)

- Before a site goes in, we have a series of meetings to make sure that there is adequate capacity and community buy-in. We help fund the initial cost of the garden also work on basic horticultural skills with a site leader or a few dedicated members.
- From there, the site leader works at each site with community members regarding horticultural skills and community involvement.
- As each garden progresses, we work on helping with fundraising and provide other forms of support as needed.

Grant Process Basics

- Contact Matt Freeman (mfreeman@biggarden.org) directly to receive and application and instructions.
- You will complete The Big Garden application and resources checklist, and upon our selection and approval, funds will be dispersed through the United Methodist Health Ministry Fund after verifying that your church is part of the Healthy Congregations Network.

Other Grant Process Info.

- Plan on a maximum amount of \$2,700.
- Existing Gardens ARE eligible. They will simply have to make a case for how they can expand or enhance their work.
- We will accept applications as long as funds are still available, but we will be giving awards as we approve applications. The sooner we receive your application, the better.

Formal Relationship

- A representative from each approved congregation will enter into a “Garden Agreement” with The Big Garden, making you a formal partner in our network.
- We will allot the one-time award, provide technical assistance in planning the site, and offer other support as necessary [community building programming, etc.]
- As a member of The Big Garden, you will have access to ongoing assistance and support from Big Garden Staff, and will be eligible to re-apply for funding in the future.

Garden Sites



Garden Sites



Garden Sites



Garden sites



Garden sites



Garden sites



Other Work

Food from the Nebraska Farmer's Cooperative going to the Open Door Mission for quick turnover through their large meal program.



Other Work

Food being tithed by farmers for distribution. We'll often get this out through food pantries inside Omaha.

Some produce is flash frozen by a Mormon group in town so that distribution doesn't have to be immediate.



Questions?

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The Big Garden

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