

IMPACT

University of Idaho
Extension

Canyon County, 208.459.6003, Fax: 208.454.6349
501 Main St., Caldwell, ID 83605

Community garden projects grow local leaders and “tons” of fresh food to spare

The Situation

Interest in community gardens is increasing as more Idahoans struggle with unemployment, economic hardship and food insecurity. Treasure Valley Extension offices are approached by dozens of individuals, faith-based groups and community organizations every year requesting information and resources related to starting or participating in community gardens.

Community gardening is essentially an educational process that helps people help themselves to improve nutrition, diet and health. Studies show urban community gardeners may be three and a half times more likely to consume the recommended five daily servings of fruits and vegetables (Alaimo, et. al. 2008). Youth and adults involved in community gardening projects also enjoy increased social cohesion, social support and social connections. The presence of community gardens can even increase home values in poor neighborhoods by 9.4% (Been, Voicu, 2006).

However, good intentions and green thumbs do not ensure success. Many community gardens never even get to the planting stage, others are deserted after a rough first season. Education, communication and organizational skills are needed for both organizers and gardeners to create and sustain a project.

Our Response

University of Idaho Extension horticulture educator Ariel Agenbroad successfully sought University of Idaho Extension Critical Issues funding to present **Growing Together: a Treasure Valley Community Gardening Conference** in April 2010 with Extension and community partners. The conference offered a hands-on approach to horticultural and leadership



Small fruit and berry basics was a popular Growing Together conference workshop led by guest presenter and Extension Educator Tony McCammon. Photo by Ariel Agenbroad.

education, and gave participants opportunities to learn, connect, communicate and collaborate.

Program Outcomes

Fifty individuals attended the one-day conference, held both indoors and outside, at the Vineyard Boise's conference facility and Garden O' Feedin'. Attendees represented a diverse group of youth and adults from thirteen Idaho communities. Surveys collected at the conference indicated:

- 100% of respondents found the information useful.
- 100% of respondents felt the conference met their educational/networking needs.
- 100% planned on making changes to community garden projects based on information learned.
- 100% were confident in their ability to access gardening information from University of Idaho Extension.

A follow-up survey of conference attendees in fall 2010 found that respondents had made significant progress in starting and sustaining garden projects in their communities. Inspiring success stories were shared:

- 92% of respondents had participated in a community garden project as an organizer, gardener, volunteer, advisor or donor; 84% for the first time.
- Projects included neighborhood, food pantry, entrepreneurial, refugee, church and school gardens in seven different communities across the greater Treasure Valley.
- Food grown in community gardens was enjoyed by thousands of gardeners, neighbors, volunteers, individuals, seniors, youth and families.
- Gleaning efforts collected leftover crops from cooperating farmers' fields and redistributed the produce to dozens of local charities and food banks.
- **The amount of fresh produce grown, gleaned and donated through these projects topped ~90,000 pounds!**
- **92% of respondents plan on being involved again next year in community gardening projects.**

Of special note were Dale Anderson and Paulette Blaseg, University of Idaho Master Gardeners in Canyon County who co-founded a nonprofit organization, Trinity Community Gardens, Inc., in 2010. They were responsible for growing, gleaning and distributing a staggering 76,000 pounds of produce through their ever-increasing network of gardens, cooperating farm partners, volunteers and emergency food providers.

With the poverty level in Canyon County at 12%, food insecurity is likely to continue. Community gardens of all shapes and sizes are playing a significant role in easing Treasure Valley hunger, improving nutrition among those gardening or receiving food assistance during the summer months, and increasing community cohesion and collaboration.

The Future

Survey respondents were positive about their efforts, but many expressed a desire for additional education and information. Some merely thought they needed more experience. Some of the educational needs they expressed included:

- "How to keep volunteers motivated and showing (up)."
- "More about growing veggies."
- "Better pest and weed control without use of toxins."
- "Working with other organizations who have land."

Project partners anticipate being able to offer this kind of conference again. One attendant surveyed suggested "working

with us (partners in attendance) to hold this conference every other year" in the region.



Several thousand pounds of green beans gleaned by volunteers and inmates organized by Idaho Master Gardeners Photo by Shelia Anderson.

"St. Cuke" oversees a faith-based community garden in Caldwell, Idaho. This garden, tended by 25 volunteers, including Idaho Master Gardeners, provided food for ~200 individuals throughout the season. Photo by Ariel Agenbroad.

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

Idaho Master Gardener/ Advanced Master Gardener Volunteers, Vineyard Fellowship, Tony McCammon, Susan Bell, Ron Galloway, Sustainable Community Connections, Farm Service Agency, Trinity Community Gardens, Inc., Global Gardens, BUGS, Idaho Food Bank, Zamzows.

References

Alaimo, K., Packnett, E., Miles, R., Kruger, D. *Fruit and vegetable intake among urban community gardeners*. J. Nutr. Educ. Behav. 2008;40:94-101.

Been, V., Voicu, I. 2006. *The effect of community gardens on neighboring property values*, NYU Law and Economics Working Papers, NYU School of Law.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Ariel Agenbroad, Extension Educator-Horticulture
University of Idaho Extension, Canyon County
501 Main St.
Caldwell, ID 83605
Phone: 208.459.6003
Fax: 208.454.6349
E-mail: ariel@uidaho.edu