

## Community garden impacts families

### The Situation

A recent Gallup poll reported that 73 percent of American families were concerned about the rising costs of food. Idaho is ranked the 29<sup>th</sup> hungriest state in the nation (2010 Idaho Hunger Summit). Meals on Wheels (2009), ranks Idaho as 15<sup>th</sup> worst in the nation for seniors at risk of hunger. Today one in eight Idahoans (200,000 of Idaho's 1.55 million residents) are now enrolled in the Federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as the Food Stamp Program. By participating in SNAP families are able to fill a basic need, that of keeping food on the table.

Karen Vauk, President and CEO of the Idaho Foodbank said, "This growth in food stamp use month after month closely reflects what we're seeing across the state, and that is the need for free emergency food." In 2009 the Idaho Food Bank delivered 8.8 million pounds of food to more than 142,200 people, a 29 percent increase over the previous year. Rosie Andueza, SNAP Program Manager with the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare said, "Idahoans have that 'boot strap' mentality or they rely on religious organizations." Many religious denominations and faith communities are using their property to establish community gardens to help feed needy families. These groups already serve as social and spiritual "anchors" for their communities, it follows that they would help those who are food insecure.

### Our Response

In 1997, University of Idaho (UI) Horticulture Extension Educator, Susan Bell, and UI Advanced Master Gardener volunteer, Dian Roberson, discussed a community garden project on land owned by the Vineyard Christian Fellowship where Roberson was a member. The garden began that year with 6 raised



vegetable beds to teach gardening skills to interested church members while sharing produce with the needy. In 1999, the garden was moved to a more favorable site on church property and expanded. Today the garden covers 2/3 acre and, because of its huge impact on feeding the local community, it was named the Garden-O-Feedin.

### Program Outcomes

The Vineyard's Garden-O-Feedin brought fresh fruit and vegetables to the tables of thousands of families for 13 years, as part of the Vineyard Community Fellowship Food Pantry. A spokesperson for the Vineyard food pantry noted that 75 percent of the families obtaining pantry food participate in SNAP.

The productiveness of the garden was made possible by numerous donations of supplies and labor. University of Idaho Master Gardeners assisted in the garden for the past 13 years with the construction and

ongoing work of soil preparation, sowing, watering, weeding and harvesting. Other volunteers such as Vineyard Church members, Eagle Scouts, Girl Scouts, UI Nutrition Advisors from the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP), and other groups worked with food pantry recipients or in the garden regularly.

The garden served as a teaching site to hone the horticultural and food preparation skills of volunteers and food recipients. University of Idaho Master Gardeners helped teach groups and individuals at the garden while EFNEP Nutrition Advisors taught indoor food preparation and nutrition classes. The success of the Vineyard Garden attracted attention from visitors from 13 different states and 3 countries (England, Africa and Mexico). The garden inspired two other faith communities in Boise to establish vegetable gardens of their own, and stimulated 3 Vineyard ministries in California, Arkansas and Texas to start similar gardens to feed the needy and elderly.

**The Future**

The Vineyard Garden continues to be a doorway to food and education for the community. The University of Idaho Master Gardeners will continue to assist in maintaining the garden and teaching horticulture classes. University of Idaho Nutrition Advisors from the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program will also continue to teach low-income food recipients how to prepare fresh produce and other commodity foods from the Vineyard food pantry.

Over the past 25 years, the University of Idaho Master Gardener Volunteer Development Program has trained thousands of volunteers who reach out into communities to teach gardening and assist in developing community gardens like this one.

Vineyard Garden Statistics

Year	Pounds harvested	Families served	Total family members	Volunteers assisting	Volunteer hours donated	Garden size
2004	4,000	t	t	t	t	12 beds
2005	7,000	t	t	t	t	12 beds
2006	13,750	t	t	t	t	1/3 acre
2007	20,775	1,281	4,108	115	3,712	1/3 acre
2008	25,161	1,332	4,708	150	5,023	2/3 acre
2009	31,322	1,810	6,260*	200	4,693	2/3 acre

t = no data collected

\*In 2009, an additional 75 residents from City Light Home for Women and Children were fed every Saturday for 14 weeks with produce from the garden.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

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