



Extension Snapshot

Local Foods Work



The average unit of food consumed by local residents travels a thousand miles before it arrives on their plate. This results in some lost nutrition and ties food prices to fuel prices which can strap family budgets. Combine those facts with communities that have little or no access to a grocery store and the implications are tremendous. Diets can become less diverse, nutrition can be compromised, and detrimental health conditions can increase. Extension addresses this issue by conducting programming designed to increase access to locally grown food. Following is a brief summary of some current local activities in this area.

“Plant a Row for the Hungry” (PAR) – a program of the Garden Writers Association of America (GWAA) – asks home gardeners to intentionally plant extra food to send to their local food bank. From January through July 2011, local Extension Master Gardener volunteers working at the Peoria PAR garden contributed more than 70 work hours and collected more than 540 pounds of produce for the Community Harvest food pantry.

Twenty-five additional community gardens were established by Peoria County Extension staff in 2009 reaching more than 3000 youth. Master Gardener-led community gardens can be found in Manito and Mackinaw as well.

St. Mary's Church Vegetable Plot in Canton – a plot led by a local Extension Master Gardener - provides fresh produce for the church's food pantry. Volunteers have contributed in excess of 30 work hours since the program began in January yet that plot is still overwhelmed by the demand for produce.



The Junior Master Gardener program, an Extension 4-H program, helps kids learn to explore their world while making a positive contribution to society. Mason County Master Gardeners work with this program and have established a vegetable garden plot at the Mason County 4-H and Junior Show Fairgrounds. Master Gardeners guide local youth in the finer points of establishing and maintaining a garden. A similar model brings the JMG program to the Canton and Peoria areas. Participants have contributed over 150 work hours this year alone.

For more information about the Agriculture and Natural Resource programs in the Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell Extension unit, please contact Matt Montgomery, Extension Educator, Sustainable Agriculture, at mpmontgo@illinois.edu or 309-547-3711.



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