

impact

University of Idaho Extension programs that are making a difference in Idaho.

Twin Falls community gardens increase access to healthy foods and provide education

AT A GLANCE

University of Idaho Extension educators collaborate with partners to supply fresh produce to those in need by building gardens, teaching gardening and nutrition classes, and providing support.

The Situation

According to the needs assessment conducted by the Twin Falls Community Transformative Grant Committee, increasing access to healthy, affordable foods and physical activity are important components of building healthy communities and improving children's health. Parents and students also responded with a strong desire to learn about healthful eating habits, gardening and meal preparation classes, as well as opportunities for outdoor activities and less screen time.

Our Response

An interdisciplinary partnership between the University of Idaho Extension horticulture and family and consumer sciences educators in Twin Falls County was formed, in collaboration with Eat Smart Idaho, to help meet the needs and provide a foundation for gardening and nutrition education. The team received the Community Transformation Grant totaling \$43,999, from the City of Twin Falls through the Blue Cross of Idaho Foundation for Health, and \$4,300 from SNAP-Ed funds, to pilot the community garden project. The goal is to create systemic and environmental change in the community to increase access to healthy food.



Students at Hollister harvested produce from their garden.
Photo credit: Susan Ettesvold, Eat Smart Idaho.

The collaboration of horticulture and family and consumer sciences brings master gardeners and Eat Smart Idaho team members together to help facilitate education and expand reach. The team worked with existing partners to implement the project. These partners included schools, childcare centers, a homeless shelter, a refugee center, and faith-based organizations that serve low-income and food insecure populations. Each of them assisted in putting in either raised beds, garden pots or utilizing existing garden space to grow food in community gardens.

At each location, gardening classes were offered to teach adult participants how to grow their own food using the Idaho Victory Garden Course as the model and materials for the classes. Following the gardening

classes, nutrition and cooking classes were taught using the produce from the gardens. Eat Smart Idaho nutrition instructors taught a series of classes to participants using evidence-based curricula including “Families Eating Smart and Moving More” to adult participants, “Choose Health: Food, Fun and Fitness” to school-aged students and “Go Glow Grow” to preschoolers.

Program Outcomes

In 2021, the team established 14 garden sites, offered over 65 gardening and nutrition education classes, as well as taste testing activities, reaching 776 low-income youth and adults, and harvested approximately 350 pounds of produce and herbs.

Some of the project highlights include:

- Field trips and nutrition classes were offered to refugee groups. Through field trips to the garden, taste testing of the fresh produce and cooking classes, refugees tried new foods and learned what foods grow well in the area and how to prepare them.
- The entire Hollister school students, teachers, staff, along with community members participated in the garden setup and helped plant the seeds. Students later harvested and tried the produce during the summer school program.
- Valley House, a local homeless shelter, enjoyed the gardens and classes at their facility. With the expansion of their facility, a new building was being constructed and additional raised beds were added

to provide more produce for the residents. They also added a classroom facility in the new building to make providing classes and programming easier for partner organizations.

This project was quickly picked up by the local newspaper and television station and multiple articles and news stories helped spread the word regarding the project. This publicity brought additional partners to the project and in-kind donations to help keep the project going. It is estimated that approximately 900 lbs. fresh produce worth about \$2,500 was harvested so far in September 2022, which has been utilized by refugees, Eat Smart Idaho program participants and community members.

The Future

The project has expanded into school classrooms early in 2022. The team has established herb gardens in 19 classrooms this fall so that students can actively participate in the process of growing food. Through gardening activities and nutrition education classes, students gain a better knowledge of growing foods, take pride in their accomplishments, try new foods, learn healthy behaviors and build an increased awareness of the environment. The project will be replicated by other Eat Smart Idaho districts for a statewide impact.

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

The project was funded by the City of Twin Falls through Blue Cross of Idaho Foundation for Health, the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare (SNAP-Ed), Chobani and Moss Greenhouses.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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