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CULTIVATE IOWA: A GUIDE FOR GROWING HEALTHIER IOWANS, ORGANIZATIONS AND COMMUNITIES THROUGH FOOD GARDENING AND PRODUCE DONATION

Developed by the Iowa Food Access and Health Work Group

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The Iowa Food Systems Council is a member-based non-profit organization whose charge is to monitor Iowa's food and health landscape, encourage and coordinate connections between food system leaders and decision-makers, and identify policies, programs and research that cultivate a resilient and sustainable food system - a system which builds a healthier food economy, a healthier environment and healthier Iowans. For more information go to www.IowaFoodSystemsCouncil.org.

INTRODUCTION

Why Food Gardening & Produce Donation?

Where Iowans live, work and play have a tremendous impact on their health. Healthy communities require addressing the underlying causes of poor health rooted in social, economic, and physical conditions that determine an individual's health risks and opportunities. A key component of maintaining the wellbeing of Iowans, and the communities in which they live, is regular access to safe, nutritious and affordable food throughout life. Yet, hunger, food insecurity and poor diet continue to deteriorate the health of Iowans. One solution to this health crisis is to encourage all Iowans to grow some of their own food.

Food gardening provides the opportunity to increase food security, self-sufficiency, and improve household diets through increased access to fresh, nutrient-dense fruits and vegetables. Produce donation ensures that, at the community level, the highest quality and healthiest foods are available to those who need it the most.

What is Cultivate Iowa?

Cultivate Iowa is an evidence-based social marketing campaign of the Iowa Food Systems Council's Food Access & Health Work Group. The mission of **Cultivate Iowa** is to promote the benefits of food gardening and produce donation to create a sustainable future and healthier communities in Iowa. **Cultivate Iowa** encourages low-resource Iowans to consider food gardening to save money, and gardeners to plant or harvest extra produce to donate to food pantries or other community organizations.

Where Can I Access Cultivate Iowa Materials?

The **Cultivate Iowa** website has many resources to support individuals, organizations and communities in promoting food gardening and produce donation. Promotional resources include a brochure, postcard, posters, marketing guide, promotional handout, newspaper ads, radio and TV spots, social media posts, and a series of reports. Many materials are available in English and Spanish. An agency logo may be added to all materials. All materials are available for free to download and print at www.cultivateiowa.org/partner-resources/.

What is the Purpose of the Guide for Growing Healthier Iowans, Organizations and Communities?

The purpose of this Guide is to provide practical strategies to encourage greater food gardening and produce donation across Iowa. Specifically, this Guide highlights a continuum of strategies that not only impact individual knowledge and behavior but also affect policy, system and environmental changes that best support food gardening and produce donation. The framework for the strategies (see page 8) was adapted from the Spectrum of Prevention.¹

Who May Use This Guide?

Anyone! This Guide is designed to be used by any individual, organization, coalition or community interested in promoting food gardening and/or produce donation as strategies for improving access to healthful foods and strengthening food security within their community. Not only is the Guide ideal for community-based organizations such as WIC clinics, maternal and child health centers, local public health agencies, food pantries and other organizations that provide services to low-resource Iowans; but can be used by public officials, churches, master gardener groups, senior centers, cooperative extension offices, civic groups, community planners and developers, home and garden retailers, and schools and universities.

¹ The Prevention Institute. The Spectrum of Prevention: Developing a Comprehensive Approach to Injury Prevention. Available at

IOWA CHAMPIONS: FOOD GARDENING

Regular access to safe, nutritious and affordable food throughout life is essential for the wellbeing of Iowans and the communities in which they live. Yet, hunger, food insecurity and poor diet continue to deteriorate the health of Iowans. One solution to this health crisis is to encourage all Iowans to grow some of their own food.

When gardeners are asked why they grow vegetables and fruit, responses are often, "I like to work outside," "I like the taste of fresh food," "It saves me money on my grocery bill," and "It's rewarding to start something from seed, watch it grow and produce delicious food." Although a rising number of Iowans are growing food, food gardening can play an even greater role in strengthening individual, household and community food security while improving the health of all Iowans. Below are three examples of Iowa champions and how they incorporated food gardening into the services they provide.

Johnston American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association, Johnston, Iowa

One in eight seniors in Iowa are at risk for hunger, and many lack high quality diets.¹ Even food secure older adults lack many vitamins and nutrients found in garden produce. In addition to nutritional benefits, gardening can have social and physical benefits for seniors. Engaging in creative activities or learning a new skill has been shown to ward off dementia and other cognitive disorders associated with aging.²

The Johnston American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association (AHEPA) 192 used the Cultivate Iowa campaign to engage senior residents in food gardening. In addition to messaging, donated seeds from Seed Savers Exchange were used by residents to create "Salad Bowl" container gardens. A planting event showed residents how they could grow food in limited space. When complete, the pots were arranged on the outdoor patio of the senior housing facility for maximum sunlight. The Johnston AHEPA seniors appreciated the gardening activity as a way to connect to memories of childhood and family gardens.



Photo courtesy of Kelly Renfrow,
Johnston AHEPA

² Sauer, J. (2013). 2013 Survey of Iowans 18+. AARP. Retrieved from: <http://www.aarp.org/>.

Pottawattamie County WIC Agency, Council Bluffs, Iowa

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) in Pottawattamie County designed a food gardening outreach project to inspire WIC clients to participate in food gardening. They used the Cultivate Iowa Marketing Guide³ and adapted a gardening lesson plan, "Grow Your Own Garden" from the California WIC program to use with clients. The food gardening outreach project included hanging Cultivate Iowa posters in WIC clinics, distributing brochures and vegetable seeds to clients, providing information to clients about local gardening resources, such as community gardening classes, and how to start a container garden.

WIC staff found that demonstration was important, so they provided clients with a container garden kit that included soil, a cut off milk jug and vegetable seeds. In addition, WIC staff started a container garden in the WIC clinic reception area to illustrate food gardening to clients and promote Cultivate Iowa messages. Seeds were started in plastic cups and seedlings were distributed to clients. Three plants were transplanted to larger containers and were cared for in the WIC reception area. These plants produced tomatoes throughout the fall and winter inside the office with little effort.

Through this demonstration, families were engaged in the process and happy to receive plants and seeds. WIC staff received many positive comments from parents, grandparents and children about the plants growing in the clinic. Staff was enthusiastic about this project; they donated soil, cups and milk jugs, and helped care for the plants. By demonstrating practical application of Cultivate Iowa messaging, the Pottawattamie WIC program inspired clients to plant and grow flavorful and fresh food.



Photos courtesy of Kris Woods,
Pottawattamie County WIC

HACAP Food Reservoir, Cedar Rapids, Iowa

The HACAP Food Reservoir is a food bank in eastern Iowa that serves seven counties. In 2013, HACAP Food Reservoir distributed more than 2.7 million pounds of food to 97 partner agencies. However, only 9,000 pounds of fresh produce was distributed, and the demand was growing. To meet this increased demand for fresh fruits and vegetables, HACAP Food Reservoir employed two new initiatives. First, they partnered with local growers and farmers' markets and encouraged increased donation of excess produce. Second, they incorporated gardening education into their services to partner agencies and clients. Partner agencies and clients were invited to a "Community of Garden Starters" event to make their own container garden using donated buckets and seedlings. Clients also received Cultivate Iowa materials and seed packets.

This two-pronged approach of encouraging food gardening and produce donation within emergency food programs has increased the opportunity for low-resource Iowans to access fresh fruits and vegetables, which strengthens household and community food security.



Photo courtesy of Amanda Pieper,
HACAP Food Reservoir

³ Available at www.CultivateIowa.org/partner-resources/.

IOWA CHAMPIONS: PRODUCE DONATION

Iowa gardeners were integral in the development of the Cultivate Iowa campaign. A statewide survey of Master Gardeners showed that while gardeners are interested in produce donation, many are unaware of the need for fresh produce at food pantries and the opportunities within their community to donate. Much of Cultivate Iowa's messaging focuses on creating awareness among gardeners of the fresh produce needs of emergency food programs.

Master Gardeners across Iowa are central to promoting produce donation within their communities. For example, Polk County Master Gardeners have distributed Cultivate Iowa materials, incorporated produce donation concepts into their weekly lecture series, and have utilized some of their greenhouse to grow produce for area food pantries. In Dubuque, the County Extension Master Gardeners have distributed Cultivate Iowa materials, provided trainings, hosted events and shared their food gardening expertise through community service hours. They also support beginning gardeners through the Master Gardener Call Center, where volunteers hold "office hours" and answer gardening questions from the community.

Research has shown that having a mentor or support network is vital to learning new skills such as gardening.⁴ In Iowa, low resource Iowans who know someone who gardens are more likely to garden themselves.⁵ The following Iowa champions have demonstrated innovative initiatives that grow gardens and supply more fresh fruits and vegetables to food pantries and other community organizations.

Faith and Grace Gardens, West Des Moines, Iowa

Supporting a healthy community is at the heart of the Faith and Grace Gardens in West Des Moines. This commitment provided inspiration to launch the statewide Cultivate Iowa campaign. Led by volunteers from St. Timothy's Episcopal Church and Covenant Presbyterian Church, the gardens have provided nutritious vegetables to low-resource Iowans for more than 13 years. In 2013, the Faith and Grace Gardens provided more than 11,000 pounds of fresh produce to seven organizations that serve low-resource Iowans in the greater Des Moines area.



Photo courtesy of Tim Goldman

Over the years, hundreds of volunteers have become engaged in gardening, produce donation, healthy food access, and healthy eating and living. Family nights during the growing season include a potluck, educational programs, harvesting and weeding. Recently, refugee communities have become connected with the Faith and Grace Gardens and have offered their agricultural skills and introduced new varieties of produce. The Faith and Grace Gardens has partnered with Dowling Catholic High School and provides gardening and entrepreneurial experiences to students, including the production, cultivation and marketing of worm castings. Their efforts have encouraged other faith organizations to start more than 20 gardens in the Des Moines metro to specifically feed low-resource Iowans.

⁴ Sauer, J. (2013). 2013 Survey of Iowans 18+. AARP. Available at <http://www.aarp.org/>.

⁵ Danforth Richey E, Tagtow A. Cultivate Iowa: A Season in Review. Results of the Iowa Food Gardening Social Marketing Initiative. December 2013.

Waverly Sharing Gardens, Waverly, Iowa

The Waverly Sharing Gardens started in the aftermath of the 2008 Cedar River flood that devastated the Cedar Valley and much of the community of Waverly. As part of flood mitigation efforts, FEMA determined that permanent structures could not be built on 99 properties in the flood plain. Community leaders joined together to apply for grant funds and create a community garden in part of this space. The Waverly Sharing Gardens' goal is to provide healthy, nutritious and locally grown vegetables to low resource families in the Cedar Valley area via food banks and pantries. In addition, the Waverly Sharing Gardens aim to educate local residents about hunger in the community and the need for healthy food donation. Cultivate Iowa materials were used to support their educational outreach.

The Waverly Sharing Gardens leveraged many community resources, including donations from garden retailers, support from city government, guidance from ISU Extension and Outreach staff, and volunteer time from local individuals and organizations. After several years of produce donation, the community held a food insecurity gathering, and a taskforce was created to explore how to expand the impact of the gardens. The taskforce identified the following lessons for success:

1. *Secure City Support:* Secure support from the city government early in the process. City support lends legitimacy to the process and garners benefits from the experience that city staff have in managing and facilitating community issues. In larger cities, it is valuable to approach housing or social services staff, as their daily work sensitizes them to the importance of ending hunger.
2. *Be Citizen-Led:* The process should be led by active citizens who have passion and experience with fighting hunger. Food banks and pantries, schools and institutions of higher education, faith-based organizations, local government, and social service providers should all be represented. Waverly's initiative centered on establishing partnerships between area churches, schools, the city government, and food pantries.
3. *Be Inclusive:* While a taskforce may be limited in size, networking and fact-finding gatherings should be as inclusive as possible. The City of Waverly identified and invited 20 leaders from faith communities, schools, homeless and housing services, and emergency food providers. These leaders also invited additional organizations in which they were not as familiar.



Photos courtesy of Ron Lenth,
Bremer County Extension

Fresh Produce Program, Newton Correctional Facility and the Food Bank of Iowa, Des Moines, Iowa

Food gardening, or horticultural therapy, can be a strategy to reduce stress, improve mental states, boost morale, and can offer incarcerated individuals new skills, leadership development and a sense of civic engagement.^{6,7}

The Food Bank of Iowa has a longstanding history of sourcing fresh local produce for distribution across 42 Iowa counties. Partnerships with farmers and gardeners and corporate gardens paved the way to partner with the Newton Correctional Facility in 2012. The Newton Correctional facility dedicates 12 acres of land to plant fresh produce to benefit the Food Bank of Iowa and its partner agencies. More than 175,000 pounds of fresh vegetables were harvested and distributed to low resource families throughout Iowa.



Photo courtesy of Nathan Crozier,
Food Bank of Iowa

⁶ Stigsdotter U. A garden at your workplace may reduce stress. WCDH. *International Academy for Design and Health*. 2003:147-157.

⁷ Lindemuth A. Designing Therapeutic Environments for Inmates and Prison Staff in the United States: Precedents and Contemporary Applications. *J Mediterranean Ecol*. 2007;8:87-97.

ADVANCING SYSTEM CHANGES THROUGH FOOD GARDENING & PRODUCE DONATION

To make long lasting impacts that ensure households and communities have regular access to healthful food, comprehensive and systemic strategies must be in place. The following framework, adapted from the Spectrum of Prevention, promotes a multifaceted range of strategies that organizations and communities could consider for effective promotion of food gardening and produce donation.

Tier	Strategies to Promote Food Gardening & Produce Donation
<p>1. Strengthen Individual Knowledge and Skills</p> <p><i>Enhance an individual or household's capability of boosting food security and access to healthful foods through food gardening or produce donation</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find great ideas to promote food gardening and produce donation from the Cultivate Iowa Marketing Guide (see page 10) • Place Cultivate Iowa brochures in racks, on front counter, in bags provided to clients or include with other mailed materials • Distribute Cultivate Iowa brochures or postcards at meetings and events • Place posters in high-traffic, high-visibility areas • Assemble a Cultivate Iowa bulletin board or exhibit for waiting rooms, at community events, or community gathering spaces such as public libraries and community centers • Provide Cultivate Iowa brochures and postcards to lawn and garden centers • Include Cultivate Iowa messages in newsletters and email to clients, networks or community members • Place Cultivate Iowa newspaper ads in the local paper • Partner with an outdoor advertising company to place a Cultivate Iowa billboard in a high traffic area • Grow and donate vegetable seedlings to a food pantry • Include 'How To Garden' videos on your website or show them in a reception or waiting area • "Like" Cultivate Iowa on Facebook and Twitter and share or re-tweet posts • Request donated seeds from Seed Savers Exchange or other seed companies and distribute them within your community
<p>2. Promote Community Education</p> <p><i>Reach groups of people with information and resources to promote food gardening and produce donation</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tailor the Cultivate Iowa press release to promote food gardening and produce donation to the community • Organize a container gardening workshop with Master Gardeners • Host a Food Gardening 101 class at a food pantry • Launch a gardening tool loan program for gardeners to borrow tools and equipment to start and maintain their gardens • Start a seed library at your local public library • Share information with groups on the use of SNAP benefits to purchase vegetable and fruit seeds and plants
<p>3. Educate Providers</p> <p><i>Inform providers who will transmit skills and knowledge of food gardening and produce donation to others</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present gardening and produce donation information to other community groups such as Rotary and Kiwanis clubs • Reach out to hospitals, health care providers and public health officials to promote gardening and produce donation to advance community health • Encourage school gardens to donate extra produce to a food pantry or food bank • Encourage food pantries to register at AmpleHarvest.org to ensure that gardeners know about produce donation opportunities

Tier	Strategies to Promote Food Gardening & Produce Donation
<p>4. Foster Coalitions and Networks</p> <p><i>Convene groups and individuals in the community around food gardening and produce donation to meet broader goals and greater impacts</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish partnerships between congregations and food pantries to grow food for low-resource lowans • Organize a neighborhood food gardening club to exchange ideas, seeds, plants and produce • Host a healthy food access summit and have attendees develop a community food and garden plan • Launch a fundraising campaign to purchase refrigeration equipment for food pantries • Organize a gleaning crew to harvest produce from a farm or garden that would be left in the fields and plowed under. Donate the produce to a food pantry • Join the Iowa Food Systems Council's Food Access & Health Work Group (http://iowafoodsystemscouncil.org/food-access-health/)
<p>5. Change Organizational Practices</p> <p><i>Adapt regulations and procedures by shaping norms that improve food security and access to healthful foods through food gardening and produce donation</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct a community food assessment and plan • Work with businesses to provide incentives to employees who donate produce to food pantries and food banks • Work with food pantries to ensure that produce donation is easy for gardeners by offering easy drop-off locations and times • Work with gardeners or gardening groups to ensure understanding of food safety, storage and distribution protocol of food pantries and food banks • Initiate food gardening curriculum in schools • Serve on a board or committee to encourage allocation of funds for the purchase of fresh fruits and vegetables for low-resource lowans or for the purchase of refrigeration equipment for food pantries
<p>6. Influence Policy and Legislation</p> <p><i>Develop strategies to change laws and policies that influence greater food gardening and produce donation</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the Iowa Food Access & Health Work Group voter's guide to ensure food issues are part of the political conversation⁸ • Revise restrictive covenants for urban and suburban developments to allow food gardens and edible landscaping • Support legislation that place food gardens in schools and correctional facilities • Call the mayor or city council about having regular access to water at community garden sites • Talk with city planners about vacant city property that could be converted to a city orchard • Attend a county board of supervisor meeting to discuss how county-owned land could be used for community orchards or gardens • Meet with state legislators to encourage a tax credit for gardeners who donate fresh produce to food pantries

⁸ Future of Food in Iowa. A Voter's Guide. Available at <http://iowafoodsystemscouncil.org/food-access-health/>.

FOOD GARDENING & PRODUCE DONATION RESOURCES

Cultivate Iowa Materials and Tools

<http://www.cultivateiowa.org/partner-resources/>

- Brochures, posters and postcards
- Marketing and Take Action Guides
- Growing Solutions: Cultivating Health & Food Security in Iowa
- Iowa Food Gardening Social Marketing Initiative Executive Summary

Container Gardening

Grow Iowa – Container Gardening Guide for All Iowans (Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship)
http://www.iowaagriculture.gov/Horticulture_and_FarmersMarkets/pdfs/GrowIowaBooklet.pdf

Container Gardening! (Seed Savers Exchange)
<http://blog.seedsavers.org/blog/container-gardening?rq=container>

Container Gardening Lesson Plans (California WIC)
<http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/wicworks/Documents/NE/WIC-NE-LessonPlans-Other-Gardening-GrowYourOwnGardenLessonPlanEnglish.doc>

Container Gardening in 4 Easy Steps (Texas Department of State Health Services)
<https://www.dshs.state.tx.us/wichd/nut/pdf/ContainerGardeningEng.pdf>

Let's Get Growing in Containers for Schools (Seattle Tilth)
<http://www.k12.wa.us/ChildNutrition/Programs/CACFP/GardenWorkshopMaterials/pubdocs/Garden-Curriculum.pdf>

Container Gardening Guide (Kids Gardening)
<http://www.kidsgardening.org/node/5261>

Produce Donation

Food Pantry Produce Donations – Grower Information (Iowa State University Extension and Outreach)
<https://store.extension.iastate.edu/Product/Food-Pantry-Produce-Donations-Grower-Information>

Find a Local Food Pantry to Donate Produce.
www.AmpleHarvest.org

Fresh Produce Donation Guidelines for Gardeners (Michigan State University Extension)
http://msue.anr.msu.edu/news/fresh_produce_donation_guidelines_for_gardeners

Plant a Row for the Hungry (Garden Writers Association)
http://www.gardenwriters.org/gwa.php?p=par/par_campaign.html

Farm to Food Bank Donation Tax Credit for Gardeners and Producers
<https://tax.iowa.gov/farm-food-donation-tax-credit>

Seed Donation Programs

Seed Saver Exchange Herman's Garden Program (Decorah, IA) Donated seed is for community and educational groups who will freely share the harvest, and save seed for others. \$10 to cover postage and handling.
<http://www.seedsavers.org/Education/Seed-Donation-Program/>

High Mowing Organic Seed (Wolcott, VT) Provides free seed to farm and nutrition education programs like school and community gardens, senior centers, and seed libraries. Seed is available in bundles of 25 seed packets. \$5.00 per bundle for shipping and handling.
<http://www.highmowingseeds.com/donations.html>

Hart's Seeds (Wethersfield, CT) Seed is available for community garden, school project, church mission or other charitable organization. Available in sets of 100 assorted packets. There is a charge of \$19.95 for shipping and handling of the first 100 packets. Photos of before and after your growing project are requested.
<http://hartseed.com/about-us/donations/>

Community Tools

Community Gardens (CDC)
<http://www.cdc.gov/healthypplaces/healthtopics/healthyfood/community.htm>

Community Food Systems: A Primer for Local Public Health Agencies. (Iowa Department of Public Health)
<http://www.idph.state.ia.us/chnahip/>

CHANGE Action Guide to Develop Policy, System and Environmental Change Strategies (CDC)
<http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dch/programs/healthycommunitiesprogram/tools/change/downloads.htm>

A Sustainability Guide for Healthy Communities (CDC)
http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dch/programs/healthycommunitiesprogram/pdf/sustainability_guide

