



Land-grant universities tackle food access issues

For many Americans, access to healthy foods is a challenge. Extension personnel across the country have undertaken initiatives to help people learn to grow their own foods, spearheaded food donation efforts and helped bridge the gap during the COVID-19 pandemic to make sure people in rural areas and those in poverty can get the food they need.

Successful examples include:

- In **Idaho**, an Extension program called Harvest Heroes helps military veterans facing food insecurity learn gardening skills to grow their own vegetables, berries and herbs, with the excess being donated to local food banks and shelters. Participants — some of whom suffer from mental health issues and physical challenges — report learning useful skills, enjoying therapeutic benefits from gardening and appreciating the opportunity for fellowship with other veterans.
- **Georgia** Extension personnel in rural Telfair County, which ranks 153rd of the state's 159 counties for poverty, packed boxes of fresh fruits, vegetables, dairy products and meat to deliver weekly to residents in need. SNAP-Ed materials are included in the boxes, as are links to online videos showing how to prepare recipes using that week's ingredients. Recipients say the deliveries have provided them much-needed hope; in a rural area where feelings of isolation and poverty issues have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the boxes are a reminder that someone cares about them.
- Seventy-one volunteers donated 713 hours, valued at \$20,349, to gather leftover produce from harvested fields to provide to those in need in Appling County, **Georgia**. The overall health of Appling County residents is below state and national averages. With the help of volunteers from local 4-H programs, the Appling County Senior Center and Pineland Adult Mental Health Service Center, this gleaning program not only donated fresh produce to Appling residents, it also provided education to empower them to eat a healthy diet and become physically active, with the goal of improving their overall health.

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Youth, Family, Community

- The **Alabama** Cooperative Extension System launched “Grow More, Give More,” a program that teaches best management practices for productive residential food gardens. The program also encourages these growers to donate some of their harvest to residents in need of fresh, healthy food. More than 18 tons (36,753 pounds) of fresh produce was donated across Alabama with the help of Extension Master Gardeners and other volunteers.
- Growing Together is a multistate food access program that increases the availability of fresh produce to SNAP-eligible clients. Purdue Extension Master Gardeners in **Indiana** engaged with community partners and volunteers to create or expand donation gardens to meet the needs of limited-resource residents. Nearly 7,200 pounds of produce were grown and distributed to 33 organizations that reached over 1,000 Indiana residents.