



## Creating Policy, Systems, Environmental Change: Success Story and Lessons Learned

### Title

Yuba County School and Community Edible Garden Project

### Intervention Summary

The Needs Assessment conducted in fall 2012 indicated that there was a strong need for nutrition and physical activity changes in the community for both school age children and adults of low-income households as evidenced by obesity and inactivity rates that exceeded the state average. Data confirmed that 41% of Yuba County's youth were considered to be overweight or obese. With regards to adults, obesity rate was 32% compared to the state's average of 24%.

School-based nutrition education programs are critically needed in the county to improve health outlook. Data from Yuba County's Community Nutrition Assessment survey showed that 42% of CalFresh recipients did not consume the recommended amounts of fruits and vegetables, while 24% consumed snack foods that were high in fat or sugar on a regular basis. Forty-six percent also reported they could not afford to purchase healthy meals for their families.

Environmental and systems changes are needed to increase access to healthy foods. Twelve percent of Yuba County residents have limited access to healthy foods, a rate that is four times higher than the state average (12% vs. 3%). The addition of community gardens in low-income neighborhoods will increase access to fresh fruits and vegetables, as well as encourage physical activity.

In FFY15, support to school gardens expanded from two to five schools and after school programs, namely, Kynoch Elementary School, Allyn Scott Youth Community Center, Arboga Elementary School, Olivehurst Elementary School, and Lindhurst High School. The total garden size increased by 482 ft<sup>2</sup> from 1,798 ft<sup>2</sup> to 2,280 ft<sup>2</sup>. A total of 100 new edible plant varieties were introduced, increasing the produce harvested by 254 lbs., from 101 lbs. to 355 lbs. *Garden-Enhanced Nutrition Education (GENE)* lessons were provided at all schools to supplement the gardening efforts along with education. The GENE curriculum goes hand-in-hand with the promotion of community gardens. GENE includes MyPlate, Fruit and Veggie Nutrition, Farm to Fork, edible tastings, and other SNAP-Ed nutrition education activities. Below are some of the comments from students and teachers.

- *I help our parents make healthier choices when we go shopping together*

- *I help my parents make healthier choices when we are making meals.*
- *We are grateful for the gardening lessons and nutrition education, the kids go home and tell their parents what they learned.*

The community gardens at Marysville, Pathway Treatment Center, and Salvation Army Depot Center were provided with additional gardening tools, and seeds or seedlings. Each site was connected to the Yuba-Sutter County Master Gardener.

The Mercy Housing at Wheatland, which is a low-income housing, was assisted in initiating a community garden for adults and children in FFY14. Last October, the whole residential housing was renovated. We continue to collaborate with the Mercy Housing coordinator, residents, and community partners to determine whether there is interest to support an edible landscaping project or activities. Edible landscaping will include the growing of fruit trees and individual gardens in front of each unit. This will increase the residents' access to fresh fruits and vegetables and also meet the residents' preferences to have their own garden.

In addition, other community garden sites are currently being identified by working with faith-based organizations and the Yuba County FRC's, with the main goal of increasing availability and access to fresh fruits and vegetables.

### **Description of Barriers Encountered and Identified or Proposed Solutions**

At present, we have encountered the following barriers at school sites: 1) Produce harvested are not allowed to be used in the school cafeteria. We are currently working with the district food service director to ensure that the garden produce meets all state and county standards to be allowed to be served in the cafeteria. 2) Vandalism of school gardens. School, community, and police officers patrol the area, especially, during holidays to prevent vandalism, and 3) There is a need to increase involvement and support of parents and community.

### **Future Directions/Sustainable Success**

Our short term goals that have been generated from schools and community partners include:

- Identifying community partners that can assist existing community and school gardens; potential partners include Master Gardeners, Boy Scouts, Faith-Based Organizations, and Parent Teacher Association.
- Identifying businesses from which to request donations to provide non-SNAP-Ed eligible expenses such as for fences, watering systems, etc.
- Continue to work with the school district food service director, to ensure that the garden produce meets all state and county standards to be allowed to be served in the cafeteria.
- Re-assessing the garden sites and gardener strengths and needs in order to identify other PSE changes that are required.
- Adding other eligible school and community sites to the FFY16 approved site list.

Long term goals include:

- Developing community gardeners that have a voice as a group, in order for them to have stewardship of land, environment, and the community.

- Producing extra food from the community gardens that can be sold at the farmer's market or provided to food banks to help others in the community.
- Making produce from school gardens available for sale in fundraisers in school activities.

**Contact information about this Narrative**

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