Master Gardener Program: Furnishing the Hope Center

The Situation
North Dakota is the land of plenty. Leading the nation in the production of agricultural crops such as spring wheat, canola, flax, honey, pulse crops and sunflowers, one can forget that hunger exists in this great state. However, one in ten people in North Dakota depend upon food pantries to keep hunger at bay. Approximately, 30% of all food pantry clients are children. The number of senior citizens utilizing food pantries has dramatically increased to 9 out of 10 visitors.

Food pantries typically receive large donations of canned and boxed goods from donors. Fresh fruits and vegetables are usually in short supply and are especially valuable for maintaining a healthy diet.

Extension Response
Bill Hodous and NDSU Extension Master Gardeners in the Devils Lake area started a coffee meeting called Helping Others (8 regular members and 8 others joining every other week). The goal was to increase access to fresh produce, to those who cannot grow a garden or are in financial hardship.

The purpose of this project was to collect surplus home-grown fruits and vegetables from the community to support the Local Hope Center. Master Gardeners staffed two collection points strategically distributed across Devils Lake on Tuesday and Thursday evenings and then delivered the produce to the Hope Center the following morning.

The collection points were advertised through Master Gardener grant posters, by word of mouth, by Bill’s weekly horticulture column and Bill’s three times a week radio show.

The Ramsey County inspiration came from the success of the Fargo-Moorhead Master Gardeners Success in 2016. The Helping Others club also saw the great demand for Community Garden gardens and potential surplus of garden produce. The Devils Lake community has seen a great rise in retirement complexes and the need to sustain low-income households.

Impacts
In 2017, Master Gardeners, and other Helping Others Club members, in Devils Lake, collected and delivered over 315 lbs. of produce to the Hope Center. In addition, club promotion led to a collection of an additional 815 pounds.

This group will expand their efforts in 2018 and has set a goal of 2000 pounds for community members plus the additional pounds delivered to the Hope Center. A lofty goal but providing gardening produce for 98.5 families will be a successful venture and saves the average low income and senior citizens approximately $15.00/week (per the USDA Official USDA Food Plans: Cost of Food at Home at Four Levels), and supplies 1/5 of the daily diet (My Pyramid or now MyPlate) plus health benefits of undetermined cost.

Feedback
The Helping Others garden club was 100 percent in favor of moving forward in 2018 and expanding their efforts to include offering gardening advice at the community gardens. Those utilizing the Hope Center garden produce averaged 11.5 pounds per visit. Three of the Helping Others club are going to obtain Master Gardener expertise in 2018.

Public Value Statement
NDSU Extension Master Gardeners and Helping Others club members are working to feed the hungry and Senior Citizens with healthy choices to improve their health and save on their budgets.

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