WSU Master Gardeners are university trained volunteer educators who teach about topics of importance in their local communities that enhance natural resources, sustain communities and improve the health and well-being of Washington residents.

**ISSUE**

Food security continues to be a topic of importance across our nation and in the communities of Washington state. According to the USDA, in 2016 41.2 million people or 12.3 percent of the population lived in homes with food insecurity. These homes lacked enough food for an active, healthy life for all household members. Washington state residents experience the same rates of food insecurity. Research indicates food banks are essential to reducing food insecurity and supplementing food banks with fresh fruits and vegetables assists in providing healthy food choices for hungry families. Additionally, research shows people who grow their own food may eat more fruits and vegetables than those who do not.

**RESPONSE**

The Washington State University Master Gardener Program volunteers taught food gardening to communities across the state in an effort to close the food security gap.

- 4671 adults learned about vegetable gardening, growing small fruits and tree fruit
- 4837 youth learned about vegetable gardening, growing small fruits and tree fruit
- Volunteers organize and teach in 171 community and food bank gardens that help feed Washington families
- 63 tons of produce was donated to local food banks
- Volunteers organized and taught in 71 school gardens
- Residents reported saving $39,000 because they learned to grow their own food from the WSU Master Gardeners

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Impacts of teaching food gardening for the health and well-being of Washington communities.

For instance, in Pend Oreille County, WSU Master Gardener volunteers revitalized a run down greenhouse and garden bed over a three year period. They established a demonstration garden they use as an outdoor classroom to teach vegetable gardening skills to their community members. Twenty-two percent of Pend Oreille County residents are considered low income. The development of gardening skills is well received and improves the health and well-being of the community. Volunteers donated 300 plus pounds of fresh produce to the Newport Food Bank, which is a 400% increase from the previous year.

In Chelan/Douglas County an ongoing partnership with Columbia Valley Community Health centers provides an affordable place for people to grow food, improve physical fitness, strengthen families and friendships as they learn about nutrition and gardening. One thousand pounds of produce was preserved by gardeners; 650 pounds of produce was donated to local food banks; 72 percent of gardeners increased their vegetable consumption from 0-2 servings per day to 3-5 servings per day. Stress levels decreased by 13 percent. Gardeners estimated they saved $2500 by growing and preserving their own food.

In Grays Harbor/Pacific County a partnership between master gardeners and the Roger Saux Medical Clinic Chronic Disease Prevention Program inspired the development of a project to enhance gardening skills, improve access to healthy foods and support a decrease in the incidence of chronic disease. The majority of program participants were low income, Native Americans who live 27 miles from the nearest grocery store. Creating easy and inexpensive access to healthy foods is key to project sucess. Over time five gardens in the community provided more than 450 pounds of produce to families. Participants ate more fresh produce, were more physically active and became more self-sufficient.

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