



Building Communities  
for Better Health

## Success Story

# “Growing” Healthy Food Access in Washington County

*With funding from Building Communities for Better Health (BCBH), a Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS) initiative (2018-2021), the Washington County Health Department worked with communities and organizations across the county to increase interest in, and access to healthy foods.*

### The Challenge

Healthy eating and physical activity are the cornerstones of good health. Yet, many communities throughout Missouri lack access to fresh, affordable, healthy foods. As a result, these community members either must drive long distances, pay high prices, or rely on what is available in their neighborhoods via food pantries that have little control over the foods they receive and/or convenience and/or grocery stores selling inexpensive, unhealthy foods.

### The Solution

Initiatives to enhance access to, and promotion of, healthy foods and policies that favor the promotion of locally grown fruits and vegetables are increasing nationwide. Community gardens, or collaborative projects on public spaces where participants share in the maintenance and products of the garden, have many benefits. In addition to increasing the availability of nutritious foods, gardening is a mild-to-moderate physical activity. Community gardens also provide opportunities to strengthen community ties—successful community gardens are built and sustained through contributions of time, talent, and resources from individuals and organizations in communities where they are located—and whether they beautify vacant lots, decrease environmental hazards, or reduce food miles, they are good for the environment.

***Community gardens provide access to fresh produce and so much more!***



Community Raised Bed – Farmer’s Market location

### The Outcome

BCBH funded supplies for numerous raised garden beds throughout Washington County. In addition, it provided an opportunity for community agencies to collaborate and strengthen relationships. The success of each community garden grew to more and more sites.

Growing healthy food access first began at the Washington County Health Department, located in the heart of public housing, because of a collaborative effort and funding. The BCBH funding and donations by the farmer’s market helped supply the materials needed for the raised beds and seeds. The City of Potosi employees constructed the beds at the health department, which were tended by a University of Missouri Extension staff member, a few juvenile offenders performing public service, and other members of the housing development. Farmers at the nearby farmer’s market shared their gardening experience and wisdom with residents.

This first bed was the spark to a growing trend. Prior to the end of the first season, the Potosi Senior Center expressed interest in raised garden beds. These beds were built to be handicap and

wheelchair accessible providing an all-inclusive gardening opportunity, and are especially helpful for those seniors who are no longer able to have their own gardens at home. These beds provide the seniors an opportunity to garden on a smaller scale and share their knowledge and skills with others, while benefiting personally from the harvest.

By the second year of the BCBH initiative, the Washington County Handicap Center, Little Learners Pre-School, and the Richwood Church all requested their own raised beds. The University of Missouri Extension office constructed the beds at the Washington County Handicap Center and Little Learners Pre-School, whereas church members built their own using materials purchased with BCBH funds, and the farmer's market provided seeds. Individuals from each of these locations tend to the garden and donate harvest to families in their communities.



**Community Partnership raised bed**

Finally, in the third year of the initiative, the sixth raised bed was constructed at the Washington County Community Partnership Office. Similar to the other five locations, the BCBH funded the supplies, and the University of Missouri Extension Office, along with clients and local residents maintained the garden. Walkers, runners, and bike riders who pass by are welcome to grab a snack or take a pepper home for a fresh salad. This bed has been so popular, there are plans to extend it to run the entire length of the building next year.

# 6

**Washington County locations now have raised garden beds helping to increase access to fruits and vegetables!**

## What's Next?

Washington County Health Department plans to continue building on this momentum to grow healthy food access. Through this work, community champions located within the farmer's market will help to bring in other potential partners and funding and communicate the successes of the community gardens. Partnerships between coalitions, alliances, businesses, government, and other supporters will continue to work together to support existing beds and to place additional beds in new locations. The next bed is planned for the Life Church in Potosi, which serves as the largest food pantry.

**To learn more about our work, visit:**  
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