

Feature Story

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Ste 1321, Jackson, MS 39269 • Phone: (601) 965-5205 • Web: www.ms.nrcs.usda.gov

People's Garden Feeds Hundreds of Families in Need

By Justin Fritscher

NRCS Mississippi

justin.fritscher@ms.usda.gov

Canton, Miss. – A People's Garden in central Mississippi has fed hundreds of impoverished families with fresh fruits and veggies, and more food is on the way, the garden's organizers say.

"I am looking forward to our fall garden after our summer garden was so successful," said Harold Waldrop, who heads the garden for the Madison Countians Allied Against Porverty (MadCAAP). "It's helping others. That's what it's all about."

So far, 500 tomato plants in the Helping Hands Garden have produced more than a 1,000 pounds of tomatoes. About 515 pounds of tomatoes were harvested in June. Also in June, 227 pounds of zucchini, 227 pounds of cucumber, 62 pounds of okra, 322 pounds of squash, 26 pounds of eggplant, 243 pounds of potatoes, 17 pounds of bell peppers and 46 pounds of peas were harvested.

"We have had a very good year," Waldrop said.

The garden was established this year in Canton on a vacant lot. The garden has 8 raised beds, and other tilled areas that are growing a variety of vegetables.

MadCAAP received a grant through the Mississippi Food Network through Blue Cross Blue Shield Mississippi to fund part of the garden. MadCAAP has used the money wisely to ensure the garden is a sustainable effort that will persist for future years.

"In February, our site was simply a weed-filled vacant lot, but in a matter of months, it has been transformed into a flourishing garden that is making a tangible difference in the lives of our clients," said Judy Miller, project coordinator for the garden. "Now that is truly amazing."

Volunteers tend to the garden 10-12 hours a week, picking, planting, tilling and other tasks to keep the garden in tip-top shape. About 40 volunteers, from church groups and area businesses, have worked at the garden since it was planted in March.

The vegetables are distributed several times a week at MadCAAP office, which also provides clothes and other necessities to low income families.

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One of the volunteers was Stephanie Gunn, who has visited MadCAAP for assistance.

“I’ve enjoyed it. It was a different experience. I’ve never worked in the garden before. I really like working here, and if I had a house I would plan stuff,” Gunn said.

Carolyn Rainey, a loyal volunteer to the cause, said the MadCAAP garden provides a healthy component to the diets of many. The garden fed 700 people in June.

“It’s a blessing. This garden has grown some delicious food,” Rainey said. “You can just eat a tomato off the vine. It doesn’t need salt or pepper.”

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Photos by Justin Fritscher, NRCS-Mississippi Public Affairs.