

PLANT AN EXTRA ROW CAMPAIGN: 2014 FINAL SUMMARY REPORT

PURPOSE

The *Plant an Extra Row* (PAER) campaign, sponsored by the Minneapolis Health Department (MHD), encourages community and backyard gardeners across the city of Minneapolis to grow extra produce and donate their harvest to local food shelves. Through this campaign, MHD facilitates connections between local gardeners and partner food shelves with the goal of forming lasting relationships that provide nutritious food to individuals and families in need and help them improve their overall health. Everyone needs and deserves to have access to healthy food – the *Plant an Extra Row* campaign is one way to engage the community around this issue.

IMPLEMENTATION COMPONENTS

The PAER campaign included the following components, implemented by MHD staff:

- **Recruitment of gardeners and food shelves**
 - Attended community events, such as Local Food Resource Hubs Network seed distribution events and community plant sales, to raise awareness about the campaign and recruit interested gardeners.
 - Sent emails to all 2013 PAER gardeners to re-enlist them in the 2014 campaign.
 - Distributed PAER campaign information through email, social media, and Gardening Matters newsletters to recruit new gardeners.
 - Recruited food shelves via email and at Minneapolis Healthy Food Shelf Network meetings.
- **Gardener-Food shelf matching process**
 - Paired gardeners with a food shelf based on their preferred criteria (proximity to home/work, hours of operation, community served, etc.).
 - Notified food shelves and gardeners of their match via email and phone.
 - Encouraged gardeners to reach out to their assigned food shelf to establish a connection and a convenient time for donating.
 - Delivered reusable tote bags to participating food shelves for distribution to gardeners as a thank you for making their first donation.
- **Data collection and evaluation**
 - Collected produce donation data from participating food shelves on a monthly basis.
 - Compiled produce donation data to create 2014 campaign summary report for food shelves and gardeners.
- **Gardener and Food shelf communications**
 - Sent regular emails to partner food shelves to remind them to submit produce tracking forms each month.
 - Sent monthly e-newsletters to gardeners to keep them updated on PAER activities and promote ongoing participation in the campaign.
- **Photo project**
 - Recruited gardeners to participate in the photo project via the monthly e-newsletter.
 - Received 2 photos per month from selected gardeners of their garden, harvests, and donations.
 - Distributed \$25 gift cards to Mother Earth Gardens for participation in the photo project.

EVALUATION

To evaluate the results of the Plant an Extra Row campaign, MHD developed a simple tracking form to capture the total amount and weight of produce donations made each month throughout the campaign, from June through November 2014. In previous years, MHD attempted to collect donation data from both the food shelves and the gardeners, however, this process proved duplicative and results were inconsistent. In 2014, MHD collected donation data from food shelf managers only. Food shelves submitted the tracking forms on a monthly basis either electronically or using a paper version which could be filled in by hand and faxed, scanned or emailed to MHD. Food shelves received monthly email reminders to submit their tracking forms. As an incentive for submitting information, food shelves received a \$10 credit to The Food Group, a local food bank, for each month of data submitted, making them eligible for total credit of up to \$60. Data was then compiled and analyzed using Microsoft Excel.

RESULTS

Key results from the 2014 Plant an Extra Row campaign are outlined in the table below.

Total number of food shelves requesting donations	23
Total number of food shelves receiving donations	10
Total number of gardeners matched to a food shelf	42
Total pounds of produce donated	381.3lbs

DISCUSSION & NEXT STEPS

The 2014 PAER campaign resulted in a small, but important, increase in the amount of healthy foods available to individuals and families in need. MHD found 2014 to be a challenging year for the campaign for a variety of reasons.

- Staff attended fewer recruitment events in 2014, compared to 2013, which resulted in fewer opportunities to recruit new gardeners.
- Many gardeners that participated in the 2013 campaign continued to donate fresh produce to food shelves in 2014, but did not officially enroll in the PAER campaign since they had already established a connection to a food shelf and no longer needed the MHD's assistance.
- Several organizations serving food shelves in the Twin Cities implement programs similar to the PAER campaign. With more than one group doing this work, gardeners are donating fresh produce to food shelves outside of the PAER campaign.

While these last two challenges resulted in lower participation in the 2014 PAER campaign, the outcome is actually very positive since gardeners and food shelves are still connecting and more fresh produce is being donated through various formal and informal processes. The overall result of these efforts is contributing to a broader shift toward healthier food shelf donations and helping those in need.

Due to the fact that many other community organizations have taken on the role of matching gardeners to food shelves, and have more capacity to devote to the project, MHD has decided not to sponsor the Plant an Extra Row campaign in 2015. MHD will continue to promote the concept of donating fresh produce and other healthy foods to Minneapolis food shelves and will encourage food shelves to reach out to their specific community of donors to host their own fresh produce drives and donation collections.