

# THE PILOT GARDEN: CAIRO'S FOOD DONATION GARDEN

## Our Story

Food insecurity is a widespread issue throughout Illinois, and Cairo is a prime example of a food insecure community. Lack of food in a community, especially healthy food, decreases the likelihood that residents will live healthy lives.

Because community food pantries often have limited access to fresh fruits and vegetables to provide to families, we formed a partnership with Southern 7 Health Department and Daystar Community Programs to install The Pilot Garden: Cairo's Food Donation Garden. With funding support from a Growing Together Illinois fund, an empty gravel lot has been transformed into a thriving garden with 10 full sized raised beds, a trellis arch for vining vegetables, a pollinator garden, and a sensory garden. Growing Together Illinois is funded by University of Illinois Extension's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education. Eight additional sponsors donated time, supplies, and funding to support the project.



FFA members from Egyptian and Meridian High Schools built and installed the raised beds. Community volunteers planted the garden in early June. Volunteer groups with Daystar constructed the permanent fence and built two picnic tables. Numerous other community volunteers gave of their time to care for the garden. In this first year, 681.2 pounds of produce were grown and donated.

The food pantry reported clients look forward to picking up fresh produce, and that it does not last long on the shelves. With the soup kitchen next door, an overabundance of one vegetable becomes a featured ingredient – from fried green tomatoes to stuffed bell peppers.

**238 hours of volunteer time  
were recorded - valued at \$6,792**



**Illinois Extension**  
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

## Our Partners

The success of this garden project would not be possible without the dedication of our partners.

### Southern 7 Health Department

S7HD offered an empty lot next to their Cairo location for use as a food donation garden. Their partnership made this garden possible!



### Daystar Community Programs

Extension has worked with Daystar for years prior to the garden project. When we offered the prospect of fresh produce from a garden, Daystar was enthusiastic! All produce grown at the garden is delivered to Daystar, where it is weighed and packaged by volunteers for delivery.



## Our Sponsors

The support of our sponsors has been crucial in the establishment of the garden.

### Illinois American Water



Illinois American Water donated \$1,000 to cover the cost of water needed for the 2021 garden season.

### Shawnee Professional Services

Shawnee Professional Services surveyed the garden site prior to construction, free of charge. They also loaned trucks and supplies for garden and fence installation.



### Farrow Lumber



Farrow Lumber donated half the cost of the lumber needed to build the raised beds and donated mulch.

### ACI-X

An ACI-X contractor installed a hydrant at the garden site free of charge, allowing for future connection of drip irrigation.



### Illinois Master Gardeners



Illinois Master Gardeners provided support and volunteer time to help create and sustain the garden.

### Autism Society of Southern Illinois

The Autism Society of Southern Illinois donated \$350 to support the creation of a sensory garden within The Pilot Garden.



### Farm Credit Illinois



A \$500 Community Improvement Grant from Farm Credit Illinois supported the installation of a permanent fence.

### Shawnee Community College

The agriculture department donated tomato, pepper, cucumber, squash, and herb plants.





## Our Volunteers

We are grateful to our dedicated volunteers who gave of their time to plant and tend the garden!

### Our Volunteers

Deb Davis  
Iwanda DeBerry  
Josie Eason  
Marie Emery  
Bishop Derek Eurales  
Joan Floyd  
Jami Green  
Florence Heady  
Gabrielle Kueker  
Alsandra Lewis  
Emily Lind  
Morgan Nickles  
Kevin Rohling  
Max Russell  
Marian Smith  
Anne Terry

### Daystar Staff

Sherry Miller  
Amy Conway

### Volunteer Groups

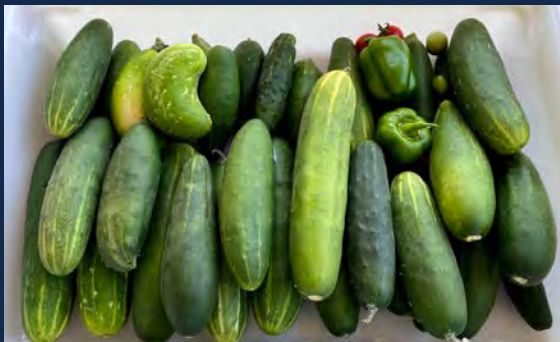
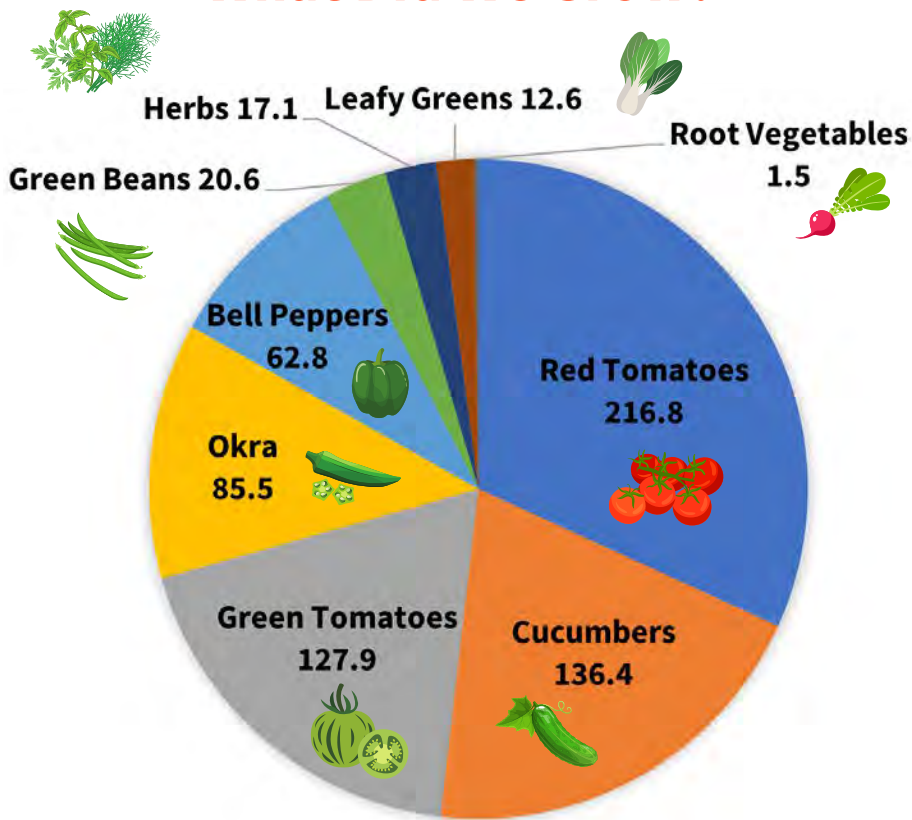
Egyptian FFA  
Meridian FFA  
St. Ann's volunteers, Nashville, IL  
Immaculate Conception volunteers,  
Columbia, IL

### Thank you to the following for donations of plants or garden materials:

Bishop Derek Eurales  
Patti Powell  
Marian Smith  
Brenda Tripp  
Jonathan Voelz



## What Did We Grow?



**681.2**  
**pounds of produce were**  
**grown and donated!**

# Cairo Elementary Garden Tours

In October, Extension offered tours of The Pilot Garden for each grade at Cairo Elementary. Students walked to the garden and had the opportunity to tour the garden, complete a scavenger hunt, vote for their class's favorite vegetable, and learn about healthy eating with SNAP-Ed.

In total, 149 students and 18 adults visited the garden.

## Sensory Garden Dedication

On Saturday, June 12, Extension hosted a dedication of the The Pilot Sensory Garden in honor of Trenton Lockett. With funding from the Autism Society of Southern Illinois, we installed a sensory garden within The Pilot Garden: Cairo's Food Donation Garden.

This garden includes 5 small raised beds dedicated to each of the 5 senses: see, touch, smell, hear, and taste. Plants representing each sense are planted within their respective bed for the community to enjoy.

About 30 participants came to the dedication, participating in the ribbon cutting, photo booth, and youth activities including making a seed bomb, painting a rock, and planting a seed.



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