

Annual Report Sample Stories

Master Gardeners help improve nutritious options for neighbors in need

Master Gardeners in DuPage, Kane, and Kendall counties helped battle food insecurity by donating more than 7 tons of fresh produce to local food access sites in 2020. This empowered food pantries to provide more fresh options at a time when client demand was high.

To achieve this, Master Gardener volunteers planted extra garden rows at home or safely managed community garden plots to harvest nutritious, fresh produce for 14 community food sites across the tri-county area.

To help make these fresh vegetables more attractive to clients, the SNAP-Education team provided matching preparation tips and low-budget recipes. These tools showed how to cook vegetables not everyone may be familiar with, such as beets or kale, or to learn how to prepare common ones, like green beans, in healthier ways.

Example provided by Rosie Ralston, Unit 5 Extension Communicator

Midwestern Hemp Database: Science informing policy

In 2018, USDA legalized production of hemp in the United States for the first time in nearly 70 years. As a result, there was a tremendous need for information on variety performance and best management practices for industrial hemp in Illinois. In response to these needs, Phillip Alberti worked to develop an industrial hemp educational program over the course of late 2019 and early 2020. Basics of Industrial Hemp Production and the Grower Spotlight series were just two of the 30 programs resulting from that effort, reaching over 3,000 attendees. Program evaluations and needs assessments indicated a strong desire for further research and education in this new production area.

To address this issue, Alberti developed the Midwestern Hemp Database. The MHD is a collaboration between Midwestern land grant institutions, private laboratories, and a vast network of grower-cooperators. In short, participation in this program provided hemp growers with an exciting opportunity to receive discounted laboratory analysis in exchange for data collection and data sharing. In its first year of operation, over 130 growers participated across the four participating states (Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Indiana). The results of the cannabinoid testing and information on production systems (variety, planting date, target population, fertilizer rates, etc.) were made available in a publicly accessible interface. Participating researchers and farmers can use the database to identify suitable hemp varieties and production strategies.

“This ended up being a perfect project to take on during an unpredictable 2020,” says Alberti. “We have been able to take advantage of grower networks across the region to gain valuable insight on a new crop, while influencing policy. Refining and expanding this program will improve a greatly underdeveloped knowledge base for hemp in our region and continue to allow science to impact policy. The resources and partnerships we develop will enable hemp producers to make informed decisions building on the combined experiences of researchers and other growers.”

Example provided by Unit 1 Impact Report