

Surveying the State of Master Gardeners' Project Gardens in Illinois

And Detailing Food Donation Project Gardens

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The following report was created based on of the information collected from a survey constructed and distributed by the Illinois State Master Gardener program from May 22 until July 14, 2017. Follow up emails, and phone calls were conducted to confirm and clarify the collected data.

Goals of the survey included:

1. Locate where Master Gardeners' project gardens are in Illinois.
2. Determine the category of each project garden.
3. Gather information and details about these project gardens.
4. Identify how many food donation gardens Master Gardeners currently maintain.
5. Discover how these donation gardens serve their local community or food pantry.
6. Establish the status of partnerships between SNAP-Ed and current MG food donation gardens.
7. Articulate how Master Gardeners and SNAP-Ed can work together to impact hunger.

Process:

The Illinois State Master Gardener program created and distributed a survey using the online software, Qualtrics. The surveys were dispersed by email to Extension staff who have Master Gardener responsibilities including program coordinators, horticulture educators, and county directors, 90 recipients in total. The survey was open to these individuals from May 22 until July 14, almost two months. After repeated attempts to contact recipients (who had not completed the survey) through calling, emailing, and instant messaging, we accepted 45 responses as a final sum. We felt confident with 45 responses because at least one person per Extension unit completed a survey. Follow up emails were sent to each unit to assure the quality of the data and to eliminate the possibility of double counting. The emails included each person

who submitted a survey and the horticulture educator when applicable. We received confirmation from 35 representatives with additional information. When confirmation was not received the original survey data was used.

Goal #1: Locate where Master Gardeners project gardens are in Illinois.

Through the survey, we learned about Master Gardeners' project gardens all over the state of Illinois. We asked each survey recipient to specify which unit they represent and which counties they work with to reflect the location of the project gardens. The survey reported 488 Master Gardener project gardens in total. These gardens are located throughout Illinois; however, Units 25, 26, 27 did not report any project gardens. Unit 26 has less than 20 active Master Gardeners and Units 25 and 27 do not have active Master Gardener programs.

Goal #2: Determine the category of each project garden.

With the survey, we attempted to classify the types of existing gardens to have a better understanding of the current garden projects. In addition, we hoped to discover new gardens that may connect with emerging issues. While we knew there were many different kinds of gardens, we sought to create broad categories to allow proper classification. (Question 5 Graphic, page 6) It is important to note that we asked survey responders to pick categories that best represent the gardens. As a result, there is always the possibility of overlap in areas. For example, in theory, someone could choose a school garden because the garden is at a local elementary school and works with students; yet the produce goes to a local food pantry. The responder would most likely classify the garden as a school garden, while it could also be considered a food donation garden. The primary focus was to understand better how gardens are impacting citizens in their local community, with categories that encompass the gardens in the best way.

Garden Categories:

This section features a graphic containing the different classifications. The following section includes a description and example of each garden type to help clarify. While overlap in categories is unavoidable, we tried to get a better grasp on what capacity the Master Gardeners' project gardens are serving their communities.

Demonstration:

As of the survey date, one of the most frequently selected categories was demonstration garden with a reported 94 demonstration gardens. Traditionally these gardens are for education including visitor self-discovery. Demonstration gardens usually contain many plants and may be labeled with both the plant's common name and scientific name. Master Gardeners typically plan, design and maintain demonstration gardens. The Idea Garden in Urbana, Illinois is a beautiful example of a demonstration garden.

School:

The 81 school gardens reported in the survey are either located or affiliated with a school. Some of the gardens, like the school garden at Proviso Area-Exceptional Child (PAEC) School in Maywood, Illinois, SNAP-Ed staff work with the students to educate on healthy eating, gardening practices, and introducing garden produce some students have never tasted before. PAEC has recently introduced students to kale and fresh mint according to discussions with Extension staff, Emilia Arellano and Dominique Harris.

G.I.F.T./Food Donation:

A commonly selected type of garden is the G.I.F.T./Food Donation gardens. G.I.F.T. or Growing Illinois Food Together is a UI Extension program designed to help people impact local hunger by growing and donating produce. G.I.F.T. gardens may be with 4-H or Master Gardeners. There are many G.I.F.T. gardens across the state and Master Gardeners in McDonough County Extension have recently started their own G.I.F.T. garden. Some food donation gardens have been actively serving their communities for many years such as the *Harvard Growing Together Garden* in Harvard, Illinois. Currently, there are 79 food donation gardens associated with Master Gardeners in Illinois.

Gardens for Adults or Youth with Disabilities (Enabling Gardens):

Gardens for Adults or Youth with Disabilities are gardens usually located at facilities across Illinois. We have 57 of these gardens. Through discussions with Extension staff, Gail DeVilbiss, Master Gardeners recently created two new raised beds for the Community-Link program participants in Breese, Illinois.

Environmental Stewardship:

There are 54 recorded Environmental Stewardship gardens in our state. These gardens include Monarch Waystations, prairie restoration projects, pollinator pockets, and other like-minded gardens. For example, as listed on their website, local Master Gardeners assist the DuPage County Care Center's (formally DuPage County Convalescent Center) garden. The facilities' garden is a designated Monarch Waystation in Wheaton, Illinois. The Care Center's garden is an excellent example of how gardens can have overlapping categories.

Other:

Many people felt they had gardens that classified as the “other” type of gardens, with 49 in total. Most of these other gardens are either therapeutic gardens or seasonal food donation gardens but lack a permanent garden status. One example is in DuPage County. They classified their veteran's garden in the other category. Veteran's garden may be an appropriate new category.

Historical:

The 33 historical gardens are gardens located at historic sites across Illinois. An example of a historical garden is the garden located at the Dana-Thomas House in Springfield, Illinois. Sangamon County Master Gardeners have maintained the pristine garden for many years, even winning notable awards for all their hard work.

Assisted Living Facility:

We currently have 29 gardens at assisted living facilities, similar to the garden at the Champaign County Nursing Home. Many of the assisted living facility gardens are used as therapeutic gardens and provide residents a way to be outside more.

Hospital:

The recorded nine hospital gardens are at local hospitals. Traditionally, hospital gardens provide therapeutic gardening to visitors and patients. The DuPage Master Gardeners work with the Ronald McDonald House at the Central DuPage Hospital, to provide patients and families sensory and butterfly gardens.

Adult Correctional Facility:

Interestingly, we have two adult correctional facility gardens, comparable to the garden at the Decatur Women's Correctional Facility in Decatur, Illinois. These gardens within correctional facilities teach the inmate's life, and work skills and the garden serves as a vehicle for rehabilitation.

Juvenile Correctional Facility:

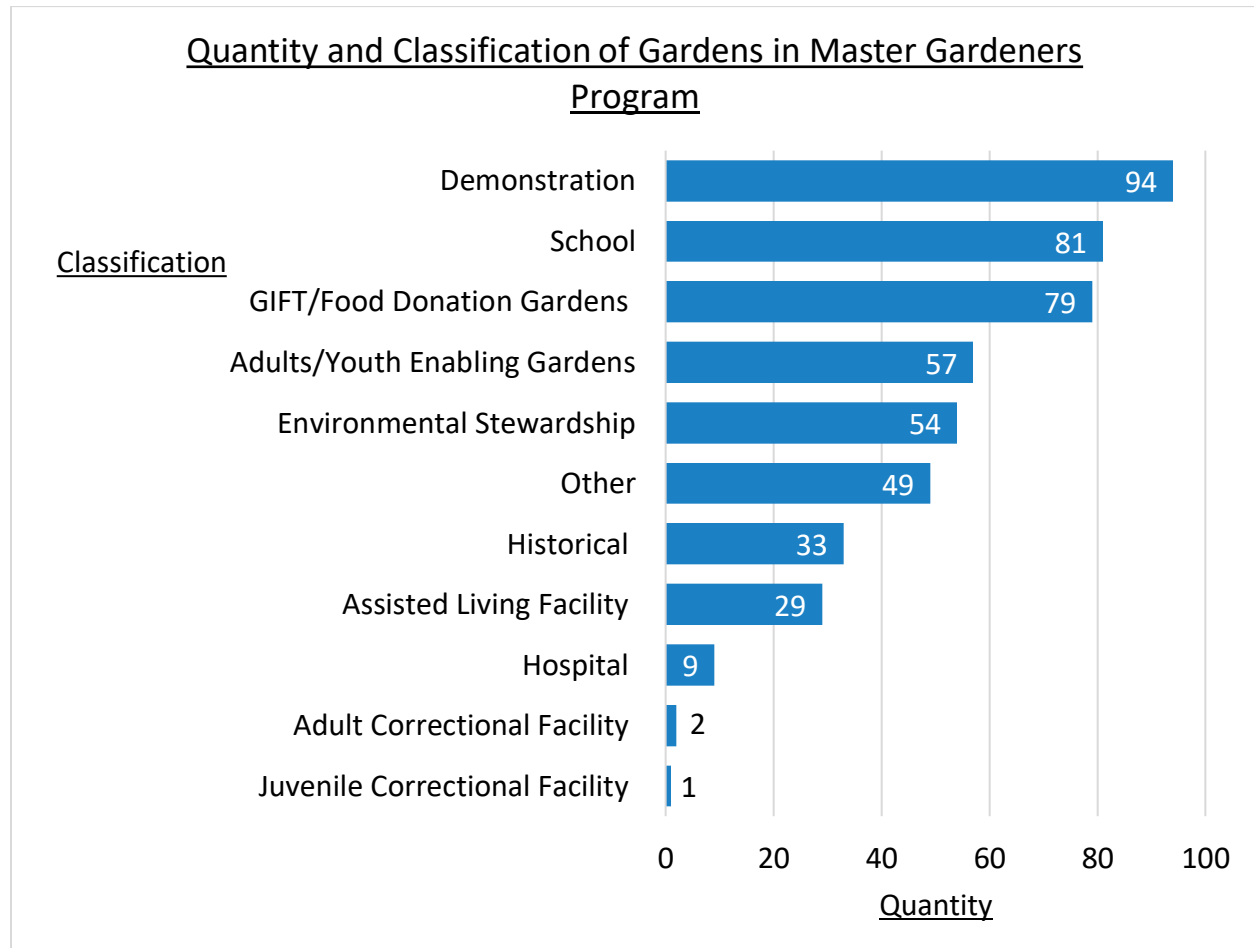
In Illinois, we currently have one juvenile correctional facility garden at the Champaign County Juvenile Detention Center. The garden in the detention center teaches young individuals a new set of skills related to horticulture they may not have ever experienced without a garden program. Many of the youth look forward to returning home to garden with their families with new gardening knowledge gained while detained.

Category Consideration:

Upon further research, we noticed a trend of gardens for families and individuals in social crisis. Master Gardeners reported gardens at organizations like the Crisis Nursery in Urbana, IL for the children affected to enjoy. These gardens are distributed throughout the state such as the Will County Family Court garden. With the knowledge of this new type of garden, we created a new garden category for future surveys and distinctions - Families in Crisis gardens.

The most commonly designated categories are demonstration, school, and food donation/G.I.F.T. gardens. These other garden categories are working with their community members and educating them in many ways not captured in this survey. All of the different categories of gardens create impact in unique ways that we hope to discover as we learn more about these project gardens. Future surveys could help to quantify the impact.

Question 5 from the survey: Specify the number of each type of active gardens in your Master Gardener program. If a garden fits more than one category, pick the prevailing type. Do not duplicate gardens and count each garden only once. Example Lawrence County: School 1 Environmental Stewardship: 2



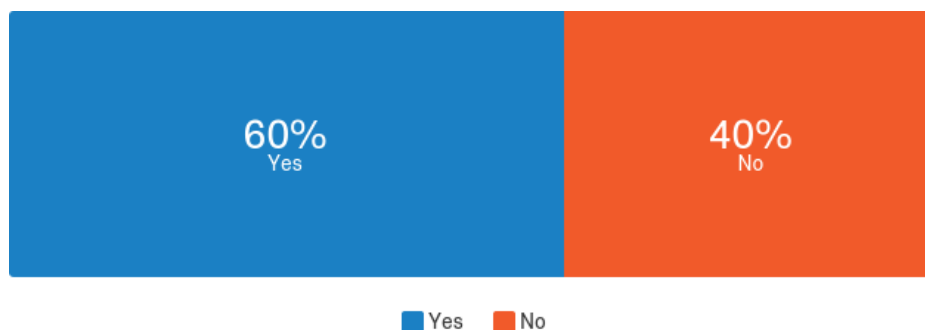
Goal #4: Identify how many food donation gardens Master Gardeners currently maintain.

There are 79 food donation gardens that Master Gardeners currently maintain. While this number of garden plots is promising for helping to alleviate food insecurity issues in Illinois, many of the gardens are still very new in production years. We do have some addresses for these food donation gardens because the survey explicitly asked for each gardens location.

We embarked on this project hoping that the food donation project gardens could potentially partner with Illinois SNAP-Ed to provide fresh produce to local food pantries. This new collaboration between Master Gardeners and SNAP-Ed would provide healthy, fresh

produce to food pantries and help save the pantry money. The food pantry could help more people with these extra resources. A major part of this project is learning about where produce grown in project gardens is donated. An exciting revelation from the survey is that many of the food donation gardens are currently providing fresh produce to their local food pantry. This pre-established relationship allows individuals and families healthier choices, along with providing SNAP-Ed an audience for new education. While the original goal was to focus the survey on Master Gardener's food donation project gardens and establish if SNAP-Ed was working with these gardens, the survey reports found other hopeful information. For example, many of the Master Gardener programs have a food donation garden and are donating produce to a food pantry; they just were unsure if SNAP-Ed was in the county. These gardens are promising for the growth of the new partnership between Master Gardeners and SNAP-Ed.

Question 6: Does your Master Gardener program have any food donation gardens?



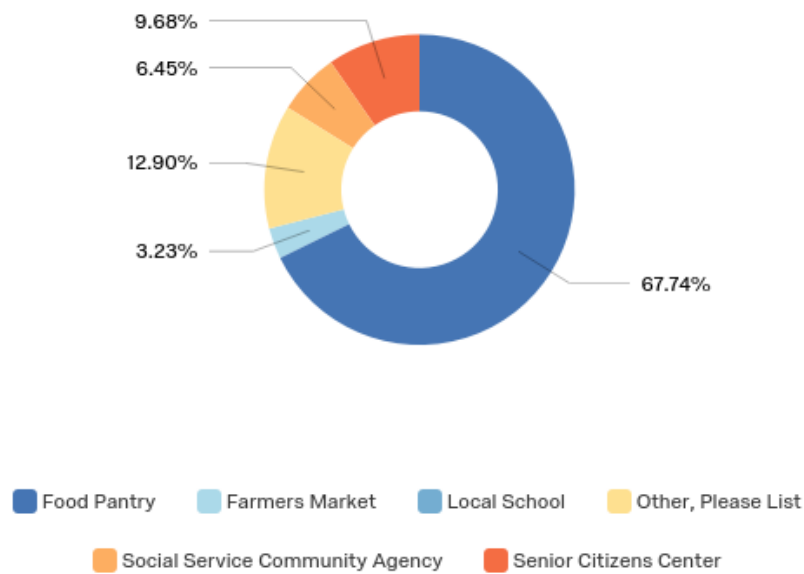
# Field	Choice Count	Percent
Yes	25	59.52%
No	17	40.48%
Total:	42	

Goal #5: Discover how these donation gardens serve their local community or food pantry.

By question seven, we lost ten individuals who did not complete the survey; however, we had 32 people who did continue answering the survey. Of the 32 responses over 60% of the gardens donate their produce to a local food pantry. Many of the gardens are producing bountiful harvests during the garden season with a total of 59,780. Many of participants did not divulge or did not know, how much their gardens are harvesting. Other participants skipped the question

altogether. Many of the gardens are still in their first few years of production; as a result, their food pounds are much lower. Many of the big garden producers were over six-years-old.

Question 8: Who are the recipients of the donated food?



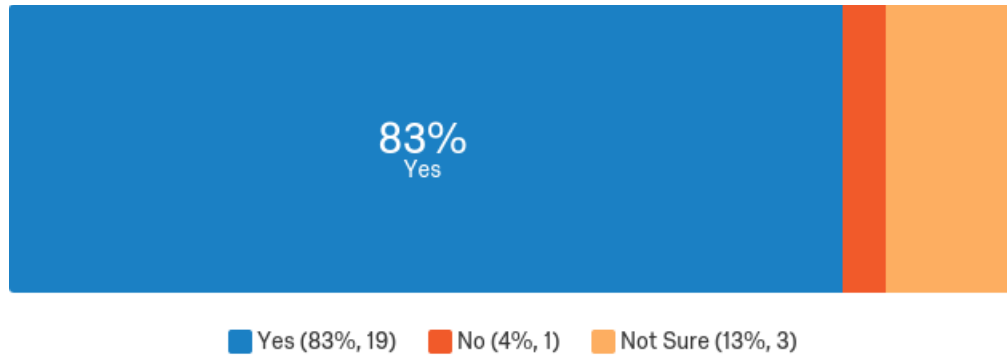
Location	Count	Percent
Farmers Market	1	3.23%
Food Pantry	21	67.74%
Local School	0	0.00%
Senior Citizens Center	3	9.68%
Social Service Community Agency	2	6.45%
Other, Please List	4	12.90%
Total	31	

Goal #6: Establish the status of partnerships between SNAP-Ed and current MG food donation gardens.

Over 90% of all donated produce from the garden is dropped off to their recipients by a gardener. So, the interaction between gardener and food pantry exists. Along with this presence in the community, we discovered that many communities offer a variety of gardens. While Master Gardeners are teaching others about how to grow produce, they also have the possibility to work with SNAP-Ed in the future to help food pantries.

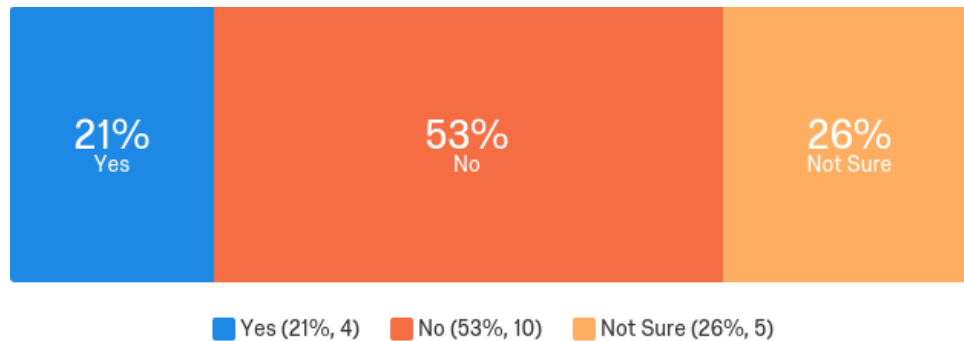
Now to the SNAP-Ed portion of the survey. We asked survey folks if SNAP-Ed was in their county, and for the most part, the program is. Of gardens, 82% have SNAP-Ed in their county. But, 13% of respondents are unsure if SNAP-Ed is available. One responder knew SNAP-Ed is not available in their county. Interestingly, of the 19 individuals who continued with the survey, 22% of responders' gardens have worked with SNAP-Ed. (If a responder answered no or not sure to Question 10, the survey ends.) This cooperation means that some gardens have already begun the partnership between education and food production. Please keep in mind, 26% of gardens did not know if they worked with SNAP-Ed, this suggests that people are unsure of the reach of SNAP-Ed. SNAP-Ed could begin working with ten gardens who do not currently partner with SNAP-Ed because the survey responder reported that SNAP-Ed was in their county.

Question 10: Do the majority of your food donation gardens have SNAP-Ed in their counties?



# Field	Choice Count	Percent
Yes	19	82.61%
No	1	4.35%
Not Sure	3	13.04%
Total:	23	

Question 11: Did the garden/gardens work with SNAP-Ed?



# Field	Choice Count	Percent
Yes	4	21.05%
No	10	52.63%
Not Sure	5	26.32%
Total	19	

Goal #7: Articulate how Master Gardeners and SNAP-Ed can work together to impact hunger.

With newly allocated resources, SNAP-Ed and Master Gardeners now have the opportunity and means to positively impact hunger across Illinois. Master Gardeners will continue their established food donation gardens, while hopefully inspiring other Master Gardeners to begin food donation gardens. These gardens could partner with their local SNAP-Ed to get the produce to the food pantries. Master Gardeners can educate on how to grow and care for a garden to those interested in starting a garden.

While four gardens already work with SNAP-Ed, there is an abundance of gardens which could begin a partnership. From our survey alone we learned of at least ten gardens which could start participating in the new partnership with few changes to their current operation. The established relationship requires Master Gardeners to grow produce and educate on gardening practices on their side of the project, while SNAP-Ed works with the local food pantry.

SNAP-Ed workers can help in a variety of ways. Educators can rework food pantries shelves, so food is in the eye-line of the consumer. With rearranged shelves, recipients are more likely to select fresh produce versus canned. SNAP-Ed can also host cooking classes, teach lessons on how to cut and cook with produce some people may have never used before, like kohlrabi. In counties where SNAP-Ed has already worked with the pantry, the workers distributed recipe cards that implemented the fresh produce into meals. One SNAP-Ed worker mentioned that she uses the fresh produce Master Gardeners grow in the food donation garden in her lessons while teaching how to use current season vegetables.

For example, in Harvard, IL the Master Gardeners provided enough produce that the food pantry was able to purchase refrigeration for other pantry food, according to Dale Kehr, SNAP-Ed Educator. SNAP-Ed would then help educate food recipients on how to cook with the fresh produce and educate on other related topics like the proper way to cut certain vegetables.

Conclusion:

Now armed with the knowledge of the types of project gardens, the State Master Gardener Program feels confident in the success of a collaboration with SNAP-Ed to bridge the gap between food production in Master Gardener gardens and SNAP-Ed programs. We would have preferred a one hundred percent participation of the survey audience. However, we now

have a nice snap-shot of Master Gardeners' project gardens, and we have gained valuable insight into the possibilities of expanding programs. Now, through the completed surveys, Illinois State Master Gardener Program has a better understanding of the types of project gardens, how food donation gardens work with local food pantries, and eventually partner with SNAP-Ed where possible. Master Gardeners now know about project gardens in the state and moving forward we will use this data and information on future projects.

Map of Extension units/counties with garden numbers:

