

**Ohio**

**Organizing Life-Changing Community Gardens in Underserved Local Communities**

**Producing Results**

The Steps Program in Cleveland, OH partnered with the Ohio State University Extension to create 31 new community gardens with 1,085 new gardeners. Hundreds of families have increased access to fresh fruits and vegetables, thousands of pounds of fresh produce have been donated to food pantries, and a new farmers' market was created.

**Public Health Problem**

Fresh fruit and vegetable consumption and physical inactivity rates are important public health issues in Cleveland. In 2005, approximately 70% of adults in Cleveland did not eat 5 fruits and vegetables a day, and over 50% did not meet the recommended levels of physical activity.

**Taking Action**

The Steps Program in Cleveland, OH partnered with the Community Gardening Program (CGP) at The Ohio State University Extension to provide outreach and training to residents interested in starting community gardens. Since 2005, the CGP has been working in Steps intervention neighborhoods to increase the reach and spread of community gardens in order to provide access to fresh produce and to increase physical activity. CGP offers "Starting a Community Garden" workshops in each Steps intervention neighborhood, meets with block and street clubs, and partners with social service agencies to provide tools and resources to start new community gardens in Cleveland. Gardens empower community residents to make further impacts on health challenges facing their communities. CGP's creation of new community gardens also leads to sustainable changes in the built environment.

**Implications and Impact**

The program partnership surpassed its goal of starting eight new gardens in 2006 by forming 13 new gardens, which engaged 624 new gardeners. Another 18 new gardens are being cultivated this year in additional neighborhoods. Thousands of pounds of fresh produce have been donated to food pantries, and one new farmers' market, Veggie Fresh Spot, was created in Cleveland's Central neighborhood. At the Veggie Fresh Spot, youth sell produce they grow at a local Steps community garden through an employment program in partnership with St. Vincent's Charity Hospital. This new program employs young men from the neighborhood and is sustained through sales at the market, as well as grants and donations from the Greater Cleveland community. An additional seven gardens have also received grants totaling over \$30,000 from local foundations and businesses to build infrastructure and create programming for their gardens. Furthermore, two Steps community gardens have also been rezoned by Cleveland City Council as Urban Gardens, protecting them from immediate development. The words of Monroe Cuff, community gardener, speak to the power of community gardens: "This garden changed my life."