

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack People's Garden Message July 2009

Secretary Tom Vilsack;

What was the idea behind the people's garden? Well, we wanted to take an opportunity to showcase what we do at USDA, and to encourage folks to consider local production and local consumption. We felt that this was an opportunity to provide an example to the rest of the country.

There are a lot of people who walk this mall from all over the country, and we thought if we had a statement garden that we would begin to get peoples attention about this, but we wanted to also encourage other USDA offices to follow suit. And we felt that if we could create these people's gardens then it would allow us to better connect people with where their food comes from. Allow young people in particular to understand how hard it is to produce food and how much fun it is to produce food. And we believed that as these local production opportunities were created young people in particular would not only learn the lessons of hard work, but more importantly would be encouraged to be more nutritious eaters. So there are lots of reasons for the people's garden, and we're encouraged by the response.

It started off as a relatively small project and now it's expanding rather dramatically and we think we're going to get a lot of attention over the course of the next couple of years as this spreads. Our hope is that with the people's garden that we not only have USDA facilities expand garden opportunities but the people and communities take a look at churches or schools or even vacant lots. And converting them into something that may be trash ridden today but could be a beautiful garden tomorrow, so there are multiple ways in which it could impact a community.

When you ask the question what kind of gardens can people plant, it depends obviously on the location and the type of soil, the climate, obviously there are different plants that will grow better in different climates. In my home area of Iowa we have no problem growing sweet corn, we can grow beans, we can grow potatoes, we can grow squash, we can grow peas. A wide variety of those kinds of vegetables, in addition a lot of folks could grow herb gardens. So it really just kind of depends on where you live but if you do it right it will be rewarding.

I'd like to encourage every person who works for USDA, all one hundred and three thousand of us to look for opportunities in our home communities and home areas, at USDA offices or churches, or at schools, or in community garden facilities to participate in the people's garden movement.

I think it's important, your friends and neighbors will be looking to you for leadership, for direction, and if they see you excited about planting a people's garden in a community garden then they will get involved as well. This is a terrific opportunity for this country to reconnect its self with its food supply, it's a terrific opportunity for us to send a strong message about nutritious eating. Certainly President Obama and First Lady

Michelle Obama have been very insistent on this at the White House garden and so this is an extension of what they're trying to provide in their leadership.

You can make a difference in this country, you can make a difference in healthcare, you can make a difference in community beautification, you can help expand the message of our everyday everyway USDA by getting involved and participating. It doesn't have to be acres and acres of garden it can be a flowerbox- just some indication, some awareness, some appreciation for the power of land to be able to produce and the connection that USDA has to it.

So get involved, join us and then tell us your stories. Send us your pictures, your video, allow us to use information to advocate on our website about the people's garden so that people can see that this is a movement that is moving across the country, and for that matter across the world. We have ninety offices worldwide, there is no reason why we can't have a people's garden on every continent of the world. So I encourage you to participate and be involved. The website that you can go to is www.usda.gov/peoplesgarden. Go to it.