



**Agriculture Secretary Vilsack
Update: People's Garden
November 2009**

Hi, I'm Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. I'm standing in the People's Garden on the grounds of USDA's Whitten Building in Washington DC to update you about the progress of our People's Garden initiative.

This past summer, I encouraged all USDA employees to look for opportunities to participate in the People's Garden movement. Hundreds of you responded to this challenge. I'd like to thank all of you who got involved. Today, as a result of your hard work and passion, there are 124 USDA People's Gardens around the United States and 1 in Seoul, South Korea. And USDA employees are planting new People's Gardens all the time.

I also want to update you on our progress in expanding this People's Garden to include the entire grounds of the Whitten Building. Our plans include a wide variety of practices that can also be adopted at home. This is USDA's opportunity to educate the nation on sustainable methods such as how to use water wisely, to choose the right plant for the right site and climate, and to create habitat for wildlife.

We've also been working hard to prepare the nation's demonstration plot for the cooler months ahead. We are planting cover crops, like barley and winter rye to provide soil cover during the winter. Cover crops are one of the most cost-effective and environmentally sustainable ways to improve soil health. They control soil erosion, protect water quality, and provide food and cover for wildlife.

Gardens are a terrific way for us to connect with local communities and showcase what we do at USDA. In just the past few months in this garden we harvested 300 pounds of vegetables and donated them to a local food bank. Chefs have demonstrated how to prepare this produce in healthy, nutritious and delicious ways and gave folks recipes to try at home. We also held weekly workshops on helpful gardening techniques like how to make and use compost and how to choose and use fertilizers. And just the other day, my wife helped celebrate the establishment of a new People's Garden at a local elementary school in Washington DC.

The possibilities for outreach are limitless, and I want to encourage you to get involved to create a People's Garden in your community. Many of you have done this already. Partners of the People's Garden initiative now include 31 national organizations representing over a thousand local groups. Let me end by sharing an exciting story. Recently, we heard from two sisters, Jane Ray and Jill Burkindine, of Carthage, Texas. Their father, who had served as the Mayor of Carthage, had passed away and they had been looking for an appropriate way to honor his memory.

Jane was ironing shirts in her den when she saw First Lady Michelle Obama on television addressing USDA employees about the People's Garden initiative. She said it was this moment that encouraged her and her sister to offer up two acres of land that had belonged to their father to create a People's Garden. They will dedicate the garden next spring and all of the fresh food grown will be donated to a local charity to help those in need. This story shows me the power that gardens have to make a difference in local communities. The People's Garden Initiative enables everyone in USDA to make a positive difference in communities throughout our country and around the world. I want to hear about your efforts so we can highlight the value of sustainable agriculture and healthy lifestyles to people everywhere.