

Integration of Local Food Programs in Salt Lake County to Benefit Prisoners, Juvenile Delinquents and Meals on Wheels Clients

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Abstract

Horticulture Extension faculty in Salt Lake County was presented a challenge in spring of 2014 to identify sources of local produce to benefit homebound Meals on Wheels clients through the newly developed Meals Plus Program (MPP). Although the delivery of produce to clients was not a problem since the Salt Lake County Meals on Wheels Program regularly distributed cooked meals to approximately 1,500 clients in 2014, the budget for the MPP did not include money to purchase produce from a local grocer or farmer. USU Extension horticulture faculty was tasked with sourcing local produce through community partnerships; three partnerships were developed in 2014 to supply approximately 130 seniors with weekly shares of fresh produce.

Keywords: local produce, food assistance program

Participating Partners

USU Extension utilized Master Gardener volunteers to plant, harvest and maintain the one-quarter acre Meals Plus Harvest Garden located at a popular Salt Lake County park. The Meals Plus Harvest Garden, situated adjacent to a popular weekend farmers' market, provided an opportunity to advertise the MPP to the public through signage and provided an opportunity for the public to volunteer with the program through Master Gardener led volunteer workdays.

The Salt Lake County Jail Horticulture Program was the second local food program to donate to the MPP in 2014. The Jail Horticulture Program is a partnership between the Salt Lake County Jail and USU Extension. Participating prisoners grow produce on a 1.5 acre garden and sell as a vendor at the downtown farmers' market. In 2014, the MPP received excess produce from the Jail Horticulture Program.

The Green Urban Lunchbox was the third participating partner in 2014. This not-for-profit program works with the SLCgreen's Fruit Share Program to maintain and harvest registered fruit trees around Salt Lake City. One goal of the SLCgreen's Fruit Share Program is to provide fresh fruit to local food-assistance programs; hence, a partnership with MPP was a natural fit.

Program Growth in 2015

One additional producer has committed to contribute produce in 2015. Bell Organic, a local community supported agriculture producer, has committed to work with Genesis Youth Center to provide residents with court-ordered community service hours the opportunity to work on an urban farm. In exchange work hours, Bell Organic will donate produce to the MPP in 2015.