

# Community Garden Helps Low-Income North Carolinians Eat Their Veggies

Kim Hicks

## At A Glance

A community garden now produces more than 500 pounds of produce each week for low-income families and homebound older adults in Roanoke Rapids, NC. Park Baptist and Calvary Baptist churches partnered with NC Cooperative Extension and Health Matters, a CDC-funded program, to increase education and access to healthy eating and physical activity. Through this collaboration, 1 acre of church property was converted into a garden to provide fresh fruits and vegetables to residents, including clients of a nearby food pantry, Angel's Closet.



## Public Health Challenge

Eating more fruits and vegetables as a part of a healthy eating pattern can reduce the risk of chronic disease. However, in eastern North Carolina, where Halifax County is located, only 11% of the population eats fruits and vegetables 5 times or more per day (BRFSS 2015). Additionally, more than 1 in 4 residents in Halifax County faces food insecurity (County Health Rankings, 2017). Food insecure families often rely on food pantries, but most pantries lack regular sources of

fresh produce for their clients. These issues motivated two Halifax County churches to create a community garden on their property. During the planning and early implementation phases, the churches quickly recognized several challenges related to planning and maintaining the crops, managing pests and pollinators, and connecting harvested produce with families experiencing food insecurity.

## Find Out More

Through Cooperative Agreement 1613 (Programs to Reduce Obesity in High Obesity Areas to Boost Prevention) funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Health Matters is increasing education and access around healthy eating and physical activity in four North Carolina counties: Edgecombe, Halifax, Lee and Northampton. Learn more about Health Matters important work! Visit <http://www.healthmattersnc.org>

*The garden is a great success, and we are planning for next year! It's a great way for people to work, [and] it's been great for the community. A lot of people talk about it now, and come by.*  
- Garden Volunteer

## Contact

### Kim Hicks

North Carolina State  
University  
512 Brickhaven Dr  
240T  
Campus Box 7606  
Raleigh, NC 27695

## Approach

The Roanoke Rapids churches, Health Matters, and NC Cooperative Extension partnered so that the garden could be a sustainable community-driven effort to increase low-income families' access to fresh produce. Church volunteers tended the garden. NC Cooperative Extension provided expertise on water use, analyzed soil samples, and helped manage pollinators and pests. Health Matters provided gardening tools and materials for an outdoor water line to replace the previous system of watering the 1-acre garden with buckets carried from inside the church. To deliver the garden's harvests to food pantry clients, Health Matters and the churches designed and provided reusable grocery bags.

## Results

Each week of the 2017 harvest season, the garden provided an average of 54 families with fresh produce. A total of 324 families received produce. After the installation of the garden's separate outdoor water line with no sewer requirements, irrigation costs in the hottest season dropped to just \$20 per month. The garden is thriving with the work volunteers have done to manage the soil and pests, and currently distributes over 15 bags of produce per day, 3 days a week to Angel's Closet. The garden provides additional produce to 30 homebound older adults each weekend. The success of the garden garnered the attention of other faith communities that are interested in starting their own gardens.

## What's Next

The garden continues to use community and partner resources to support its mission. To encourage sustainable growth, volunteers are invited to use a row in the garden for personal use when they agree to tend a row for Angel's Closet. The churches work closely with NC Cooperative Extension to use water efficiently to keep costs low. Angel's Closet, Health Matters, and local coalition members are planning a community garden training in 2018 to encourage development of new community gardens in Halifax County.