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UW-MADISON EXTENSION

Growing Together WI

2017-2020 Impact Report



Prepared By: Shannon Sparks, Diana Benitez Perez, Sarah Smith & Emily Latham

University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension

FoodWise Program

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Growing Together WI Overview

Growing Together WI projects work towards improving the health, food security, and food safety of SNAP eligible participants in Wisconsin. These projects encourage collaboration between FoodWise education staff and Master Gardener Volunteers (MGVs) to promote healthy food access, education, and availability through garden spaces. This collaborative effort can take place in a variety of ways such as development and maintenance of community garden spaces for limited income audiences, garden produce donations to food pantries or other SNAP-Ed eligible meal sites, and teaching limited income audiences how to use donated produce in their homes and grow their own food. These projects are intended to be part of a multi-level intervention that combines policy, systems, and environmental changes with direct education to increase access to fresh produce and knowledge of how to grow and safely incorporate the produce into a healthy diet for limited income populations.

The University of Wisconsin (UW)-Madison Division of Extension FoodWise Program launched Growing Together WI in 2017. FoodWise established this project as part of a multi-state effort initiated by Iowa State Extension. Growing Together projects now exist in eight states: Iowa, Illinois, Wisconsin, Michigan, Indiana, Nebraska, Wyoming and Montana. These states collaborate on how to structure, evaluate, and communicate about their project efforts. All projects incorporate three core strategies into their effort: 1. Grow fresh produce in community garden spaces; 2. Connect the grown produce to organizations where SNAP eligible communities access food; and 3. Educate SNAP eligible populations about growing and consuming fresh produce.

Figure 1: Growing Together Model



Growing Together WI projects are facilitated by FoodWise coordinators and educators in partnership with Master Gardener Volunteers and community partners at the garden and donation sites. Projects are initiated after a community assessment determines where to best locate a garden and donate the produce based on the needs of SNAP eligible populations and the settings where they would access food. The intended outcomes of Growing Together WI are: 1. Increasing access to fresh produce in SNAP eligible communities; 2. Educating SNAP eligible populations about how to both grow and safely

use fresh produce as part of a healthy diet; 3. Developing community partnerships in support of increasing access to fresh produce for SNAP eligible populations; 4. Building community support for establishing and supporting donation garden efforts; and 5. Engaging Master Gardener Volunteers in supporting local food production efforts.

Project Grant Cycle and Implementation

Growing Together WI uses a mini-grant model to distribute statewide funding to local FoodWise projects. FoodWise coordinators work with their county Master Gardener Volunteers and community partners to assess the need for a Growing Together project in their community and develop a project plan for how they will use the three core strategies of Grow, Connect, and Educate to increase access to fresh produce in SNAP eligible audiences. Projects may apply for funding to cover the costs of establishing a garden, growing and harvesting produce, donating produce, and providing direct education (from 2017-19, grants were capped at \$5,000; in 2020, they were capped at \$2,500). Local projects initiate the planning process in December and January in order to submit a proposal in February. A state-level team of the FoodWise PSE Specialist, FoodWise Program Manager, Master Gardener Volunteer Program Manager, and FoodWise Financial Specialist review proposals to determine project feasibility, compliance with SNAP-Ed guidelines, financial compliance, and potential sustainability. Projects are notified of their award in March and are allowed to start implementing upon award.

Projects vary when they start growing due to variations in climate within the state of Wisconsin, with some projects being able to start growing in April while others wait until June to put plants in the ground due to later frosts. Project partners spend the spring planning and purchasing materials, preparing garden beds, and getting ready for planting. During the late spring and summer months, projects plant the gardens, begin harvesting and donating, and provide education to SNAP eligible participants. The fall season continues these activities while also beginning the wrap up phase of the project, including conducting an evaluation of project efforts. Projects evaluate their impact based on the total weight of produce harvested and donated, changes in knowledge of participants, community partnerships established, and additional resources developed and leveraged based on grant funding.

Growing Together WI Funded Projects

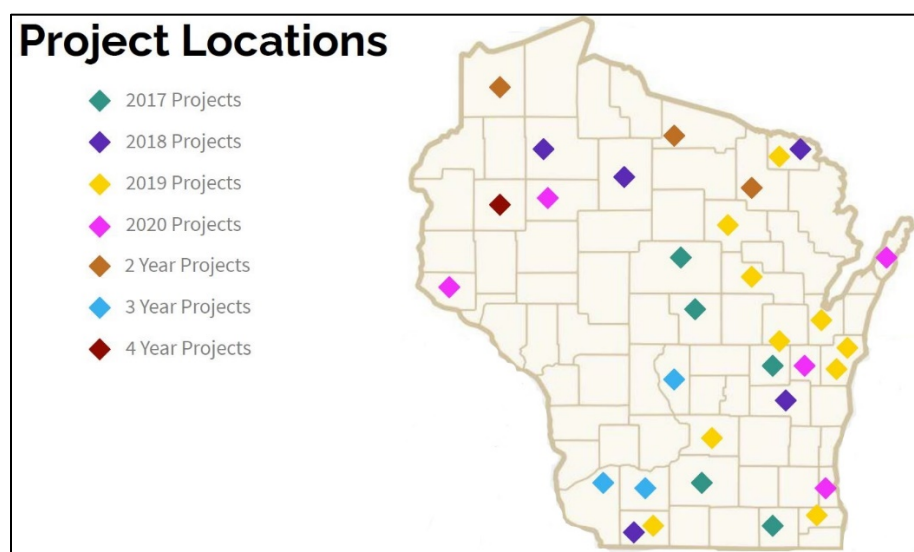
From 2017 to 2020 there were a total of 44 mini-grants awarded for Growing Together projects across 26 Wisconsin counties. The number of projects funded per year varied over time as did the total funds awarded (see Table 1). Most projects were only funded for one year with the exception of projects in Adams, Barron, Douglas, Grant, Iowa, and Vilas counties which received grants in multiple years.

Table 1: Growing Together WI Projects by Year

	2017	2018	2019	2020
Funded Projects	9	10	15	10
Total # of Garden Sites	9	12	29	13
Total Dollars Awarded	\$18,903	\$22,570	\$32,177	\$15,423

A complete list of funded Growing Together WI projects can be found in Appendix A. Projects have varied in terms of the settings in which they took place and the number of garden and donation sites. The majority of projects included one garden site and one donation site, but others utilized multiple sites for growing and/or donations. Some multi-year projects added new garden or donation sites after their first year. Common garden sites have included community gardens, food pantries and schools. The most common donation settings were food pantries, senior meal sites, SNAP-Ed eligible schools or summer meals programs, and limited income housing sites. Several projects have engaged American Indian and Hmong communities in the state, working to increase the availability of culturally-appropriate garden produce.

Figure 2: Map of Growing Together WI Projects



The types and variety of produce grown have also varied from site to site and year to year. Some gardens with more limited space have limited their plantings to a few varieties while others have grown and harvested more than 45 different fresh fruits, vegetables and herbs. Some common plantings included a variety of different types of tomatoes, peppers, squash, greens beans and berries, cucumbers, onions, carrots, potatoes, broccoli, and cauliflower. Some gardens even planted fruit trees (such as apple and cherry). The projects associated with American Indian and Hmong communities integrated culturally appropriate plants, such as the Native Wellness Garden in Milwaukee which includes a “three sisters” garden (corn, beans and squash) and a medicine wheel garden where they grow traditional herbs.

Growing Together projects that were funded for 2020 faced challenges with implementation due to COVID-19. UW-Madison Division of Extension halted all programming in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This pause in programming led to delays in implementation for the Growing Together WI project. In June 2020, programs were allowed to apply for exemptions to operate. Of the 16 projects that submitted applications in 2020, only eight moved forward due to the delays. Because of the delays, projects were modified and either focused on planting if they had already established garden

spaces or on building garden spaces for either late season planting or future planting. Projects struggled to get volunteers or engage Master Gardener Volunteers due to safety concerns, causing further delays and challenges with both planting and harvesting.

Growing Together WI Outcomes and Impacts

Through its Grow-Connect-Educate approach, Growing Together projects strive to increase access to and utilization of fresh garden produce while also increasing capacity in communities to support sustained fresh produce availability. The collective outcomes of Wisconsin's Growing Together projects are discussed below.

Increased Food Access

One of the main goals for each funded project was to increase food access for SNAP eligible communities. In general, this was accomplished by both increasing the availability of fresh produce and reducing barriers to access. A number of factors can limit access to fresh produce for limited income audiences. Distance to grocery stores, transportation availability, the cost of fresh produce, and limited availability of fresh produce at food assistance sites can all negatively impact access. Growing Together WI projects addressed these barriers by increasing access to fresh produce at sites where limited income audiences may access food, while also increasing the capacity of individuals and communities to grow their own produce.

During the planning process of each project, the project manager determined what sites would have the greatest access to SNAP eligible communities in order to reach the most individuals. Partnerships were then created in order to start a donation stream from garden bed to donation site. In some cases, Growing Together WI grant funding was used to establish garden beds in locations where fresh produce availability was limited. In other communities where fresh produce garden beds close to donation sites were already in existence, the mini-grants provided extra support for materials needed to increase production and care for the garden. By building strong partnerships with sites that had already built trust with the target audience - as the Milwaukee Native Wellness garden did with the Congregation of the Great Spirit, a Native Catholic Church with established ties to the local American Indian population - projects ensured that they were reaching communities with the greatest need.

Table 2: Donated Produce and Reach

	2017	2018	2019	2020
Total pounds of produce donated	1,831	2,606	3,480	3,008
Reach of donated food (# of individuals)	7,522	3,468	6,865	3,263

Several different indicators were utilized to evaluate the goal of increasing food access. These include the amount of fresh produce donated, the types and numbers of sites receiving donations of produce, and the number of participants receiving produce. Table 2 shows the total weight of fresh produce donated across all funded projects each year and the average number of individuals served per

month by these donation sites. In the first year of the project (2017), there were 7,522 individuals served per month at donation sites where 1,831 pounds of fresh produce was donated. The total amount of donated produce increased significantly from year to year until 2020, when COVID-19 impacted the ability of some projects to successfully grow and donate produce.

Table 3: Sites Receiving Produce Donations

	2017	2018	2019	2020
Food Pantries	6	12	15	17
Meal Sites	10	14	13	10
Low-income Housing	1	2	2	1
Schools/Summer Meal Sites	1	1	15	0
Other	0	3	2	3
TOTAL	18	32	47	31

Table 3 details the different types of sites that received donated produce in each year of the project. The most common donation sites were food pantries, followed closely by meal sites. Other common donation sites were low-income housing sites and SNAP-Ed eligible schools and summer meal sites. For some donation sites that previously did not have access to fresh produce, these donations allowed them to offer their participants fresh fruits and vegetables. As one Food Pantry Director commented, “Pantry clients would walk in the door and say “wow” when they saw the fresh produce. Not only is the produce something they don’t typically see at the pantry, but it was the first thing they saw when walking in the door.” For other donation sites that already offered fresh produce, these donations allowed them to serve more participants and offer them a greater variety. A Senior Nutrition Program County Director in the northwest part of the state emphasized the importance of these donations, noting:

The Senior Nutrition Program greatly appreciates the donated produce that we received this season from the Barron Community Garden. Not only are we including local, fresh, nutritious produce into the meals to improve senior health, but it also is a cost-saving of government dollars, allowing us to serve as many seniors as possible. The goal of our program is to make sure no senior goes hungry.

While both the number of sites and the amount of donations were important for increasing food access, a diversity of food donation sites was also important to ensuring a variety of populations were reached. Schools, for example, serve a different clientele than a senior meal site. Different sites also utilized donations in different ways. Some schools and youth organizations used the produce donations for snacks; meal sites incorporated donations into meal offerings, while food pantries added the produce to their food boxes or client-choice offerings. As detailed in Appendix A, more than a third of projects donated to more than one site. In some cases, this was an intentional effort to serve a broader audience; in other cases, donation sites were added as garden bed production increased. For example, one Milwaukee-based project promoting healthy food access for the urban American Indian population was initially donating all of their produce to the urban Indian health clinic where the garden was located. Their harvest was so bountiful, however, that they formed a new partnership with a nearby Native

Catholic church. This gave them a second site through which they could channel donations to their target population for that project.

Increased Food Utilization

A second goal of Growing Together is to increase food utilization within the communities being served. Access to fresh produce is not the only barrier to healthy eating; knowing how to grow healthy food and being able to appropriately use available produce is equally important. Projects met this goal in many forms, with garden-based education and nutrition education being the most commonly utilized strategies. Some projects also incorporated other approaches aimed at reducing food waste and creating partnerships with other garden sites.

The focus of direct education in the context of the Growing Together WI projects varied by site. In some cases, this education was provided by the FoodWise coordinators/educators or Master Gardener Volunteers involved in the project; in other cases, project partners took the lead on educational components. Garden-based education included teaching participants about the growing process from planting to harvesting and how to utilize each food item being grown in that garden. In Florence County, for example, where the garden bed was located on the grounds of a local elementary school, the 4th grade teachers incorporated literacy lessons that revolved around gardening. This encouraged students to be involved in all aspects of the garden itself from getting it ready for planting to watering and weeding. As one teacher explained, “Students helped to plant in the spring. They learned from the Master Gardener how to plant and all the different varieties of plants.” Although summer break prevented many kids from being fully involved throughout the entire gardening cycle, children who attended summer school were able to continue engaging in both the garden-based education and garden upkeep, and they got to consume the fresh produce as snacks. In another project in Grant County, a partnership with the local library resulted in story-time that took place in the garden site. The goal of this garden-based story-time was educating children about growing food and the importance of fresh produce in their diet.

Table 4: Garden-Based Direct Education

	2017	2018	2019	2020
% of Projects Engaged in Garden-Based Education	67%	60%	73%	8%
# of FoodWise staff	20	9	23	17

For the first three years of Growing Together WI, garden-based education was incorporated into the majority of projects (see Table 4). However, in 2020 this was the case for only one of the 13 funded projects. Due to COVID-19, schools throughout the state closed and Extension’s educational programming was paused. In lieu of direct education, many projects instead provided participants with Healthy Seasonal Produce sheets with information on how to prepare and eat the specific produce that had been made available through donations. Another project that was unable to plant their community garden in 2020 due to COVID-19 instead provided participants with educational materials and supplies so that they could learn to grow their own fresh produce in pots at home.

Some meal sites that incorporated the donated fruits and vegetables into meals they provided to their communities provided nutrition education related to the meals they served. One senior meal center, for example, used their fresh zucchini, squash and other produce to make warm soups and salad for their clients. At the same time, they educated the individuals they served about the ingredients their meal contained, why these items were important to incorporate into their diet, and how these ingredients reached their table.

Other projects integrated components designed to increase utilization of fresh produce grown at other garden sites and reduce waste. In some cases, this involved building partnerships with other garden bed sites outside of Growing Together project sites and facilitating the redistribution of fresh produce that would have otherwise gone to waste. Other projects used some of their mini-grant funding to purchase composters that would allow for a direct and self-sustaining way to fertilize their garden beds. Accompanying education with SNAP eligible audiences pointed out that food utilization did not stop at consumption and that spoiled or unused produce could still be utilized in some form to benefit the production of more food. Overall, around 5% of project sites engaged in these types of food rescue and redistribution efforts.

Increased Community Capacity

The third primary goal for Growing Together projects was to build capacity in the community to sustain increased access to fresh garden produce for SNAP eligible populations. Growing Together WI projects seek to accomplish this by building strong community partnerships and community support for community gardens and donation efforts. Critical to these efforts has been the involvement of Master Gardener Volunteers and other community champions, establishing and strengthening partnerships with local businesses and other community partners, and leveraging other funding or in-kind donations to increase the reach of the Growing Together mini-grants and sustain project efforts.

Development and support of each project has strongly depended on the Master Gardener Volunteers (MGVs). MGVs were integral to building community capacity due to the extensive number of hours and immense efforts contributed to each of their respective garden sites. MGVs were responsible for maintaining and overseeing upkeep of their community garden beds. In many cases, they also helped build important connections between the community and the project. From 2017 to 2019, the number of MGVs involved in the Growing Together projects doubled, as did the total number of hours they contributed to the project (see Table 5). Fewer MGVs were involved in the 2020 projects due to the impact of COVID-19 on the ability of some projects to successfully move forward. On average, MGVs contributed 20 hours of their time to their respective Growing Together projects, although actual hours contributed by individual MGVs varied significantly.

Table 5: Growing Together Master Gardener Volunteers (MGVs) & Partners

	2017	2018	2019	2020
# of MGVs	26	31	52	23
Total # of MGV Hours	475	702	1,029	480
# of Community Partners	53	46	89	40

Engaging MGVs who were dedicated to the project was a challenge in the planning process. However, many who joined Growing Together WI projects continued on after the first year, and those who have stayed for several years have been key to their project's success. Their ability to promote the importance of the project to the surrounding community and the populations involved with the donation sites was imperative to the success of the project. One MGV, knowing how crucial gaining community respect and trust was for the success of the project, joined a local soccer league in order to get to know the community better and understand their needs. The creation and maintenance of such community connections were important not only to the establishment and acceptance of the gardens in the community but also their long-term success.

When MGVs who have stayed at their respective garden beds for multiple years were asked what their work means to them and why they continue, many shared the same sentiment. As one 2018 MGV stated "I enjoy gardening and am passionate about helping people eat local and healthier foods. This project allowed me to help give back to the local community and provide fresh produce for our local food pantry." Another noted, "The number of people who need food supportive services is growing. I would like to help people learn to grow healthy food inexpensively and in small places." Not only did many MGVs learn about the importance of providing fresh produce to food insecure individuals in their community through their involvement in Growing Together WI projects, they acknowledged the importance of teaching the communities sustainability and empowering them to gain the knowledge and skills they need to grow food of their own.

Community partnerships have also been critical to the success of Growing Together WI projects. As noted in Table 5, Growing Together projects built numerous partnerships within their local communities to support the development and maintenance of the garden beds and produce donation networks and ensure the projects fit within and met the needs of the local community. While the number and types of partnerships varied widely, there were on average five partnerships for each funded Growing Together project.

Projects that aimed to promote healthy food access for communities with historically different food cultures (such as American Indian and Hmong communities) created partnerships that built a bridge of trust. In Milwaukee, for example, a partnership with a local Native Catholic church provided more access to the local American Indian community. Most importantly, the partnership engaged Native elders in the planning process of the garden beds which ensured that there would be culturally-appropriate produce grown and community involvement in the garden. Other partnership sites working with diverse populations, such as a senior meals site in Manitowoc which serves a large number of Hmong elders, provided the local Growing Together WI project with crucial information that helped further understanding of the needs of this specific community and ways to customize the project to meet their needs.

In some communities, these partnerships have been important in securing the resources to establish and maintain the gardens. The FoodWise coordinator for Iowa, Grant, Green and Lafayette counties, for example, oversaw several multi-year projects that built strong but unexpected partnerships with local businesses. One such partnership with a local insurance company led to the donation of funds

to build a fence around a garden bed that was being affected by local animals. Local volunteers from the community who wanted to support the success of the garden provided the labor to put up the fence. This partnership and the donations of time and money were important to the ultimate success of the garden. Without the fence, the garden would have not had much produce to be donated to the partner donation sites. In addition, these partnerships with local businesses and volunteers increased local community buy-in and a sense of ownership in the project, thus ensuring the project's long-term viability, giving the surrounding community a sense of empowerment, and building awareness of the importance of local, fresh produce.

Table 6: Leveraged Funding & Donations

	2017	2018	2019	2020
Dollars Leveraged	\$9,800	\$5,660	\$17,326	\$10,147
% of Funding Awarded	51%	25%	54%	66%

As noted in the example above, such partnerships could be important for leveraging additional resources to support the development, maintenance, and ultimate success of the Growing Together projects. Since 2017, Growing Together WI projects have leveraged \$42,933 in the form of donated materials or funds (see Table 6). Depending on the year, this leveraged funding ranged from 25 to 66% of the total SNAP-Ed funding awarded to Growing Together WI projects that year.

These additional resources not only allowed projects to increase the impact of their mini-grant funding; in some cases, they led to increased community awareness and visibility that supported the project's goals. For example, a project in Barron County that also needed a fence to protect the garden beds from wildlife formed a relationship with a local insurance company who donated the funding needed to purchase the materials to build the protective barrier. This led a local newspaper to do a story on the garden and spread awareness of an upcoming "open house" the MGVs were hosting with educational activities for children and a tasting table. Such partnerships often led to increased visibility for projects, and both strong partners and community awareness and support are critical to the sustainability of these projects once SNAP-Ed funding is no longer available.

Community champions have also been central to project success in many communities. Champions are individuals who provide sustained and often charismatic leadership that successfully advocate for or enhance the appeal of a Growing Together project. As one FoodWise coordinator emphasized in the first year of Growing Together WI, "In order for gardens to be successful, you MUST HAVE a garden champion that is able to provide dedicated time to making the garden happen." In 2019, almost two-thirds of garden sites reported a champion that was engaged in their project. In schools with gardens, it was often teachers who served as champions. In community settings, champions could be individuals or groups of individuals. In Fond du Lac County, for example, a few veterans championed a dedicated community garden space for local veterans. In 2018, the Veterans THRIVE Garden was built over six days with the effort of 85 volunteers that included veterans from the community and donations from five local businesses. In its first year, approximately 300 pounds of fresh produce were harvested from the new community garden plot and donated to a veterans' meal site.

Other Community Impacts

Growing Together WI projects had a few other important but unanticipated outcomes. In some communities, the Growing Together project helped strengthen and support community connections. The Hmong Elders Garden in Manitowoc County, for example, not only provided fresh culturally-appropriate produce to the Hmong elders, it also nurtured relationship building within the community. The garden became a space that allowed connections to prosper. Some individuals traveled over an hour to the Manitowoc garden site because they heard from other members of the Hmong community what was taking place. Women within the community appreciated the space for storytelling and human connection, something they believed was lacking within their community due to busy schedules and a lack of time. In addition, the garden allowed Hmong women to not only take power over their diet, but their voice as well. They used this space to share personal stories and challenges, which in turn created a sense of empowerment and liberation.

Other garden sites were also identified as collective spaces of healing and empowerment. At one of the project sites in Manitowoc County, multiple volunteers who were overcoming depression and anxiety noted that their work with the garden provided a healthy coping strategy and gave them a sense of purpose within their own communities. Other sites went out of their way to ensure their projects were accessible for older clientele and those with disabilities. One garden site which had some volunteers in wheelchairs designed their garden beds to be wheelchair accessible so more people were able to participate and contribute to their community. Another project came up with the idea of mobile salad carts, which a volunteer who also happened to be a master carpenter helped design and build. Typical salad ingredients, such as tomatoes and cucumbers, were grown in these carts by individuals for whom traditional garden sites might be inaccessible. In these ways, these projects not only worked to improve physical health through increased access to fresh produce, they also supported the mental health of garden volunteers, contributed to their sense of purpose, and helped strengthen community connections, support and involvement.

Adaptations for Wisconsin's Diverse Cultural Communities

While the majority of Growing Together WI projects served the broader communities in which they were situated, several projects were specifically designed to meet the unique cultural needs of diverse communities in the state. Between 2018 and 2020, five different projects partnered with American Indian communities or community partners to establish donation gardens (see Appendix A for specific sites). In addition, a 2019 project in Manitowoc county partnered with a Hmong senior meals site to create a garden for Hmong elders. In each case, adaptations were required to ensure the project's success. Especially important were partnerships with the local community to encourage community involvement and ensure that local community needs and preferences were being met.

A central focus of all of these projects was the inclusion of fruits, vegetables, and herbs that have been an essential part of the traditional diet of the respective community being served as well as cultural practices that are important to these communities. At the Native Wellness Garden in Milwaukee, the majority of the community members involved in the garden were Native elders who not only tended the garden beds but encouraged community building by incorporating spiritual practices

rooted in traditional Native practices. As the FoodWise coordinator working with the project noted, “There are a lot of traditional Native elements that went into the garden area - a three sisters traditional planting space, traditional Native herbs for traditional Native practices. This space was also an oasis in the city for people to come out and connect with nature.” The surrounding community appreciated being able to not only incorporate traditional fruits and vegetables in their recipes, but they also felt empowered to be listened to and supported to continue traditional practices around food production. During 2020 alone, the project was able to grow and donate about 668 pounds of fresh produce to local food pantries associated with Gerald Ignace Indian Health Center and the Congregation of the Great Spirit. When the Native elders involved with the garden were asked how many had been eating more fresh produce, 79% indicated they were - another important indicator of success. Sites like the Native Wellness garden in Milwaukee demonstrated the importance of empowering the Native American community with the knowledge they already carry with them.

Engagement with community elders was also a central feature of the Hmong Elders Garden Project in Manitowoc County. The project was able to learn about the community's needs through a partnership with the senior meal site that provides meals to Hmong elders in the area. With the help of Hmong-English translators, the project was able to discover that the lack of enthusiasm for the food being served at the site due to the lack of culturally-appropriate ingredients included in their meals. Once established, the garden was supported by several Hmong women who were overjoyed to be able to plant the produce they enjoy using in their traditional recipes such as bitter melon, cilantro, and lemongrass tea. In addition, many women used the space to connect and discuss important topics that have affected their community, such as domestic abuse. As one of the women expressed in relation to the importance of the community building the garden provided, “I am happy that I am able to come here and just be able to speak my language and share stories with women I have not been able to connect with in years, it brings me joy.”

Lessons Learned

Over the past four years, Growing Together WI projects across that state have made significant strides toward improving access to fresh produce for SNAP eligible participants in their communities. Dozens of garden spaces have been developed, improved or repurposed, and over 10,000 pounds of fresh produce has been grown and donated to more than 50 different sites with a collective reach of over 20,000 individuals. Individuals in these communities have learned about growing their own fresh produce and how to use fresh produce as part of a healthy diet. Strong partnerships have been built within the project communities that have helped the gardens thrive and increased the collective investment of the community in the gardens and their goal of improving food security and health. As one Master Gardener Volunteer noted, “This is worth all the energy, with all the great people that have come together to make this happen, this garden is a symbol of our school helping out those that need it right in our own neighborhood.”

Through these projects, Growing Together WI has learned several lessons important to the success and sustainability of these types of projects at the local level:

Strong community-level partnerships are essential. Community-level partnerships were crucial to the success of Growing Together projects. The relationships between community partners and Master Gardener Volunteers catalyzed community and environmental change and demonstrated the power of gardens to support healthy food access and availability in community spaces. Partnerships brought in additional human, material and financial resources that were essential to the development and ongoing maintenance of the gardens. Partnerships with key stakeholders helped build trust with the target community and helped ensure that projects were a good fit. Finally, such community partnerships helped build local buy-in and community ownership of the gardens, which is important to project sustainability.

Strong partnerships were also key when responding to unexpected situations. For example, when the COVID-19 pandemic impeded FoodWise's ability to move forward with implementation in the spring of 2020, gardens in places like Barron County and Douglas County were able to move forward with planting before FoodWise staff were able to provide support. Projects with established, strong partnerships are more sustainable and can more easily weather the challenges of unanticipated barriers.

Projects must be responsive to community preferences and needs. Successful projects are those that listen to the community and design gardens and project approaches that align with the community's stated needs and preferences. This includes garden location and design, the produce grown in the gardens, and donation sites. The American Indian and Hmong garden projects demonstrate how the inclusion of culturally-appropriate foods and associated cultural practices can make the gardens welcoming spaces. Other projects increased engagement by working to make their garden spaces and projects accessible to those with mobility constraints.

Garden location is important. The location of the garden beds has also proven to be crucial to the project's success. Successful gardens were located in areas that were accessible, visible, closely connected to limited income audiences, and connected to sites that facilitated partnerships. Gardens located on the grounds of SNAP eligible schools, for example, were easily accessible to the target population for both planting and garden maintenance as well as garden-based education. Garden beds in Dodgeville and Darlington were placed at local churches, and the resulting partnerships created an effective pathway to community involvement and support. Gardens that were placed in an accessible location allowed for active community involvement and increased sustainability.

Projects need to be flexible and adaptable. Many projects faced multiple barriers and challenges when getting started and being flexible was highlighted as key to building new relationships with community partners and MGVs. For example, one 2018 project was not able to gain enough support to sustain the garden at its initial site; however, one of the project leads was able to use their connections in the community to find an alternative site that allowed the garden to succeed.

Projects active in 2020 learned to be flexible and adaptive out of necessity. Given that the average age of Master Gardener Volunteers is older, many decided it was not safe to be involved in the gardens, at least during the initial months of the pandemic. As a result, many garden beds were planted late; to compensate, some shifted to planting vegetables that grow quicker such as cucumbers and kale. Some other projects were not able to plant at all but engaged in other activities such as building and preparing garden beds for the next growing season. One project that was unable to plant their garden plots instead assembled “Plunk-a-Pot” kits for their food pantry clients so they could grow their own fresh produce at home in pots. As one FoodWise coordinator commented, “At times you need to take lemons and make lemonade; sometimes plans don’t go through but you can find ways to make stuff work”.

Growing Together WI projects have now been in place for four years. Moving forward, we are looking to change our process to a graduated funding model where projects can apply for full funding in the first two years of operation and then apply for smaller amounts of funding in years 3-5 to move towards a sustainable model. We are in the process of evaluating this structure to ensure that projects have the resources needed to be successful while also looking towards how they can become self-sustaining over time.

Appendix A: Funded Projects 2017-2020

County	Project Name	Garden Site(s)	Donation Site(s)	Years Funded
Adams	Adams Friendship Garden	Adams Friendship Elementary	Adams Food Pantry Grand Marsh Elementary School High School Food Pantry	2017 2019 2020
Barron	Barron Community Garden	Barron Community Garden	Barron County ADRC Senior Nutrition Program Barron Food Pantry Cupboard and Closet Food Pantry	2017 2018 2019 2020
Brown	A Garden in Every School	Green Bay Public Schools	Food Pantries	2019
Calumet	Calumet County Garden	Ledge View Nature Center	Calumet WIC Christian Thrift Store Salvation Army St. Vincent de Paul	2020
Columbia	Lincoln Park Learning Gardens	Lincoln Park	Portage Food Pantry	2019
Dane	Mellowhood Foundation Youth Garden Nutrition Initiative	Mellowhood Community Garden	Good Shephard Lutheran Church Food Pantry	2017
Door	Sturgeon Bay ADRC Garden	Sturgeon Bay ADRC	JAK's Place/Turning Point Sturgeon Bay ADRC	2020
Douglas	Superior Community Garden	Superior Community Garden	Cooper Elementary School Northern Lights Elementary School Northwest Community Services Food Pantry	2019 2020
Florence	Florence St. Vincent de Paul Food Pantry Garden	Crossroads Community Garden	St. Vincent de Paul Food Pantry	2018
Florence	Florence School Garden	Florence Elementary School	St. Vincent de Paul Food Pantry	2019
Fond du Lac	Veterans THRIVE Garden	Fond du Lac Community Garden	Salute the Troops, Inc.	2018
Forest	New Hope Homeless Shelter/Wasmogishek Food Pantry Garden +	Crandon Community Garden New Hope Homeless Shelter/ Wasmogishek Food Pantry Garden	NEWCAP Food Pantry Wasmogishek Food Pantry	2017 2018

Grant *	Grant County Growing Together	Grace Lutheran Lancaster Community Garden Lancaster Food Pantry Ridgeway Elementary School SWCAP Boscobel Food Pantry UCC Church Dodgeville	Cassville Food Pantry Feeding Friends Lancaster Food Pantry Northern Grant County Food Pantry SWCAP Boscobel Food Pantry SWCAP Iowa County Food Pantry	2018 2019 2020
Iowa *	Iowa County Growing Together	Iowa County Food Pantry Plymouth Congregational Church Ridgeway Elementary School	Cassville Food Pantry Feeding Friends Lancaster Food Pantry SWCAP Boscobel Food Pantry SWCAP Iowa County Food Pantry	2018 2019 2020
Lafayette	Shullsburg FFA Garden	Shullsburg FFA Garden	Shullsburg Food Pantry SWCAP Lafayette County Food Pantry	2018
Lafayette	Lafayette County Growing Together Garden	Lafayette County Food Pantry	Lafayette County Food Pantry	2019
Langlade	Antigo Food Pantry Garden	Antigo Food Pantry	Antigo Food Pantry	2019
Manitowoc	Hmong Elders Garden	Hmong Senior Meal Site	Hmong Senior Meal Site	2019
Manitowoc	Painting Pathways Clubhouse Salad Garden	Painting Pathways Clubhouse	Painting Pathways Clubhouse	2019
Marathon	Community Connections Are Made in a Garden	Lincoln Elementary School	Neighbor's Place Pantry Riverview Towers	2017
Milwaukee	Native Wellness Garden +	Gerald Ignace Indian Health Center	Gerald Ignace Indian Health Center Congregation of the Great Spirit Food Pantry	2020
Outagamie/ Winnebago	Pillars Ascend Initiative Garden	Pillars Community Shelter and Food Pantry	Pillars Community Shelter and Food Pantry	2019
Portage	GardenWise Portage County	McKinley Grade School	Interfaith Food Pantry and School Backpack Program	2017
Pierce	Pierce County Food Pantry Garden	Pierce County Food Pantry Garden	Pierce County Food Pantry Garden	2020
Price	Phillips Growing Together Learning Garden	Phillips Learning Garden	St. Vincent de Paul Food Pantry	2018
Racine	Racine County Food Bank Teaching Garden	Racine County Food Bank	Racine Garden Food Bank	2019

Rusk	Rusk County Community Garden	Connection Thrift Store and Food Pantry	LadySmith Connections Food Pantry	2020
Sawyer	Lac Courte Orielles Elder Center Growing Together Garden ⁺	LCO Elder Center	Boys and Girls Club LCO Elder Center	2018
Shawano	Past, Present, and Future Gardening with Stockbridge-Munsee Community ⁺	Ella Besaw Center Mohican Family Center	FRESH Project Sites Stockbridge Food Distribution The Elderly Center	2019
Vilas	Lac du Flambeau Youth Center/Wellness Garden ⁺	Lac Du Flambeau Youth Center	Lac Du Flambeau Elder Meal Site Lac Du Flambeau Youth Center	2017 2018
Walworth	Community Garden for Healthy Community	Phoenix Middle School	Harold Johnson Delavan Food Pantry	2017
Winnebago	Growing Goodness	Oshkosh Area Community Pantry	Oshkosh Area Community Pantry	2017

* Iowa & Grant Counties' projects were initially funded separately but were jointly funded in 2020.

⁺ Sites involving partnerships with Wisconsin Tribal Nations or American Indian communities/organizations.