

## ***How Does Your Garden Grow in Fort Pierre?*** **A Healthy Hometown<sup>SM</sup> Powered by Wellmark Success Story**

### **Summary**

It took Fort Pierre 200 years to build a community garden, but they got it done. With inspiration from Wellmark's Healthy Hometown community health improvement initiative, the city of Fort Pierre began talking about establishing their first community garden in February 2018 and the garden was open for growing by summer 2018.



### **Key Components**

The Healthy Hometown community garden workgroup, led by 20-year Master Gardener and Fort Pierre resident, Ron Schreiner, found themselves starting from scratch. This meant overcoming some significant barriers such as securing land, establishing policies and a budget, obtaining funding, finding community members to commit to renting the plots, and dealing with a ticking clock and Mother Nature. With assistance from the City of Fort Pierre, the group was successful in gaining authorization from the US Army Corps of Engineers to use a vacant lot centrally located near downtown for the garden.

Following the action plan developed by the workgroup, guided by South Dakota State University Extension's community garden start-up workbook, *Diggin' in the Dirt, Community Style*, volunteers began leveling the lot and planning the layout of the garden. The lot would eventually hold 24 garden beds, an edible fruit tree orchard, picnic tables, kids' sandbox, and compost bins. Sponsorships were sought from area businesses and individuals, and colorful sponsorship signs were hung on each bed to recognize their contribution to the garden. The City of Fort Pierre ran waterlines to each bed, with water costs covered by rental fees. Beds were constructed and moved into place by a group of community volunteers and then filled with topsoil.

## Challenge

Although the community of Fort Pierre was known for excellent commercial gardening in its early days, no community garden had ever existed in anyone's memory. Many residents living in townhomes, apartments, or homes with yards not suitable for gardening, had no options for planting a garden and harvesting their own fresh vegetables. With planting season only a few short months away, community members did not waste a minute. Planning for the garden set forth immediately.

## Results

In a very short time frame, a barren empty lot was transformed into a gathering space that provided an abundance of produce not only for the families of the individuals renting plots, but also for the local Senior Nutrition Program. The garden provided a social setting that led to many positive conversations about gardening, with novice gardeners gleaning tips from experienced growers. One bed was even tended to by children from the summer youth program. With a goal of having 50 percent of the beds rented by June 1, the workgroup was pleased to have 15 of the 24 beds rented and planted this season. Sponsorships were secured for 20 beds and additional funding was sought through several grant opportunities. Local businesses provided materials at discounted prices or provided services "in kind".

## Successes

The Fort Pierre community garden is a great example of how community members can come together to accomplish great things. By establishing the garden, it is estimated that more than 150 senior nutrition program recipients and more than 80 families, friends, and neighbors accessed the fresh produce harvested from the garden. While the garden workgroup feels successful in their efforts to increase access to and consumption of fresh vegetables in the community, they know the potential to reach even more people will grow when all of the beds are being used in the future.

## Next Steps/Other Info.

Because of the timing of funding requests, some of the garden amenities such as a chain link fence, picnic tables, sandbox, and compost bins will need to wait until next year to be added. Future funding needs will depend on the demand for more beds, amenities, ancillary materials, or repairs.

For communities interested in starting a garden, planning 9-12 months in advance is a good idea. Although this garden came together in a few short months, it required a significant number of volunteer hours over a very short period of time. Those volunteer hours could be spread out over several months, and funding secured well in advance, if planning is initiated early.

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