

GROW Ohio for Food Security

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Last year, the Master Gardener Volunteer (MGV) program in Ohio embarked on a new project, one in which all of the counties who participated benefited immensely.

The program was called "GROW Ohio - Feed the Hungry" and was created to encourage county MGV programs to grow fresh produce to be donated to the local food pantry. MGVs could also recruit friends and neighbors to participate. Some of the MGVs even went to farmer's markets and picked up left over produce that would have gone to waste.

The response was overwhelmingly positive and we will be doing this again in 2017.

Many counties were already growing produce for their local food banks. For instance, MGVs of Clark County have given more than 6,000 pounds of produce a year for over eight years.

In order to increase the number of counties involved in this effort, we organized a bit of a competition between the counties with the winner of the category receiving a cash award to be put back into the project.

We divided the counties by the number of volunteers in each county so that small programs weren't competing against the large programs. We provided a first, second and third place cash award in each category.

Overall, Ohio MGVs raised more than 23 tons of fresh vegetables that were given to various agencies and pantries around Ohio.

In our area, four counties appeared in the top categories of produce pounds raised. I want to personally congratulate the Greene County MGVs for winning second place and Clark County MGVs for winning third place in the Large County Category.

Franklin County came in first in this category with 10,386 pounds raised while Green and Clark raised 7,365 and 6,989 respectively. Hamilton County came in right behind Clark County with 853 pounds.

The other county in this part of the state that was recognized was Fayette County in the Small County category. They raised 1,282 pounds of produce.

This effort is no small task for the volunteers. For instance, some of these gardens were in one location with a lot of volunteers gathering weekly to work and harvest. Some of them were in individual community and backyard gardens.

The logistics of harvesting and handling fresh produce are time-consuming. We want to ensure that the freshest and highest quality produce is donated.

Our goal for this year is to double the amount of counties who participated in this project. We had 14 counties in 2016 and need more to participate to help reduce the lack of food security in many of our communities.

In addition, you can get involved by contacting your local County Extension office to see if they are participating and find out how you can help.

Almost all gardeners have produce to spare during the season and instead of letting it go to the compost pile, consider donating to your community.



MGV harvesting potatoes in the Victory Garden



Truckload of fresh produce ready to go to the local food pantry