

Food from Our Farms

A Multicultural Collaboration

Across the U.S., ethnic minorities, low-income families, seniors, and people with disabilities do not robustly participate in local farmers markets as customers or growers/vendors. Products at local farmers markets have a lot to offer these groups in their nutritional quality, reasonable price, support of local businesses, and convenient neighborhood locations. Rock County UW-Extension, UW-Rock County, and community partners participated in *Food from Our Farms*, with the goal of increasing participation in local farmers markets and gardens by these underserved populations. Over one-half of the *Food from Our Farms* budget funded UW-Rock County student stipends for service learning projects. Ten non-traditional, traditional, and minority UW-Rock County students participated in a variety of projects across 2006-2007.

Two students worked side-by-side with Rock County inmates in their rehabilitative community gardens. Their collaborative gardening was a powerful and respectful learning experience for the mostly male inmates and these female students, and the garden produce grown was remarkable in its variety and abundance. The inmates took great pride in the use of their garden produce within the prison. The manager of the Janesville Farmer's market was assisted by another student who served as assistant manager on market Saturdays, helping to set up the market, troubleshoot problems, and close the market. Two students made contacts within the spanish-speaking community to spread the word about the Janesville and Beloit farmers markets. As a result there were radio spots in Spanish, a Spanish farmers market website, word-of-mouth publicity, and print publicity in the form of posters and local Spanish publications.

A student and her daughter were integrally involved in installing, planting, and maintaining a raised-bed vegetable garden with students and staff at the Wisconsin Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired (WCBVI). WCBVI students successfully sold herbs from this garden at the Janesville farmers market. UW-Rock County education majors visited local grade schools with a talk/slideshow, fresh produce snacks, and take-home flyers. With hundreds of kids, they shared information about the nutritious food available to their families at the local farmers markets. The grant provided at-risk kids from the Boys and Girls Club with their own tools, seeds, and garden plots for summer 2007. Deftly led by a UW-Rock student, the garden teamwork proved to be very productive, with the kids learning about gardening, fresh vegetables, and life, along the way.

Principal Project Coordinators

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