

2016 Grow Well Missouri Gardening Program Evaluation Summary
MFH Project: Collaborating with Missouri Food Pantries for Better Health
University of Missouri – Interdisciplinary Center for Food Security
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The following report summarizes the results of the 2016 Gardening Program Evaluation conducted during September, October, and November of 2016. A total of 83 people completed the survey from the communities of Mexico, Columbia, Booneville, California, Wheatland, and Buffalo. In most sections of the report, the results from 2016 are compared to the average results from 2013-2015.

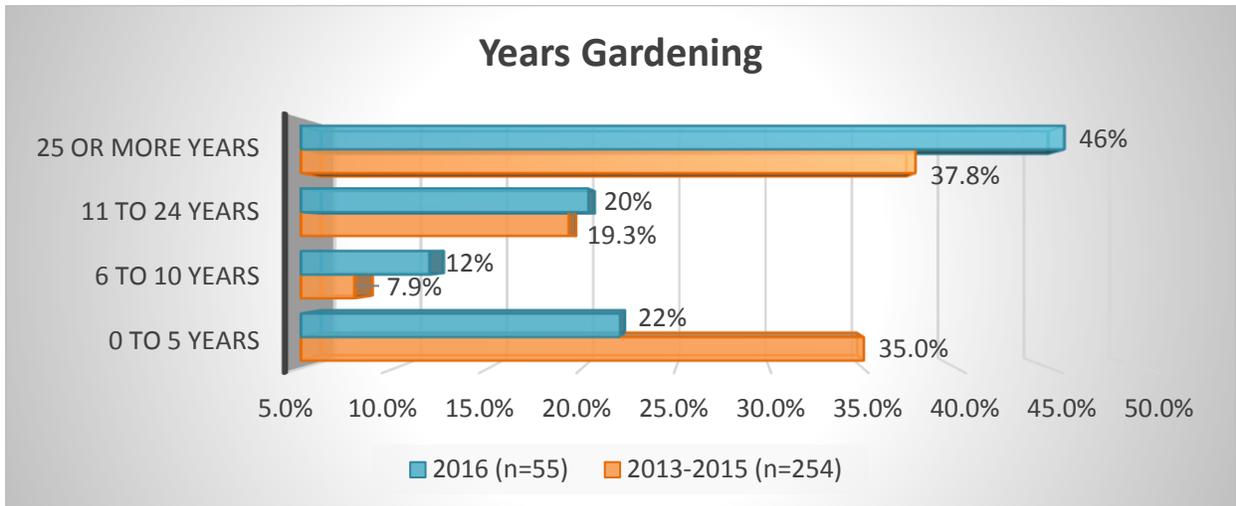
Highlights

Our 2016 evaluation results are largely consistent with the results from previous years. Highlights from the evaluation include the following:

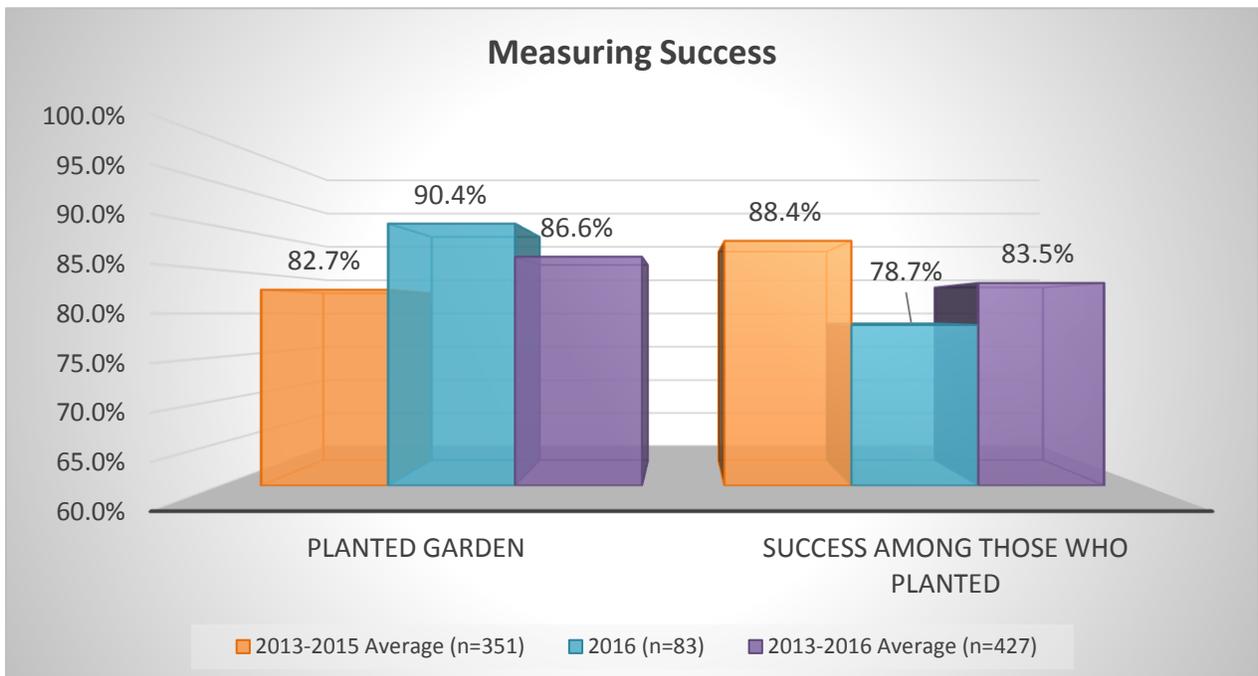
- The majority of people reached through Grow Well Missouri are experienced gardeners.
- For new gardeners and people getting back into gardening, Grow Well Missouri can serve as a catalyst. Additional, anecdotal evidence suggests that the personal connection provided by staffing the Grow Well Missouri display provides new gardeners with the confidence to give gardening a try.
- Over the life of the program, most people (87%) who pick up materials plant a garden. Most of those people (84%) report that their garden was a success.
- Garden productivity varies from year to year based on many factors. During the 2016 season, 61% rated their garden as somewhat to very productive. This ranks 2nd highest in the four years of the program.
- Gardeners are inclined to share. Approximately 90% of participants share produce with friends, family, and neighbors. Some make donations at senior centers, churches, and food pantries.
- At least 38% of gardeners in 2016 report doing more in their gardens compared to 2015.
- Just over half (52%) of gardeners reported that their skill improved by a little or a lot between 2015 and 2016.
- As observed through a number of testimonials, gardens are an important part of people's lives. Some garden to relax and be outside. For others, it is all about the fresh, healthy food and feeling more self-sufficient.

Evaluation Summary

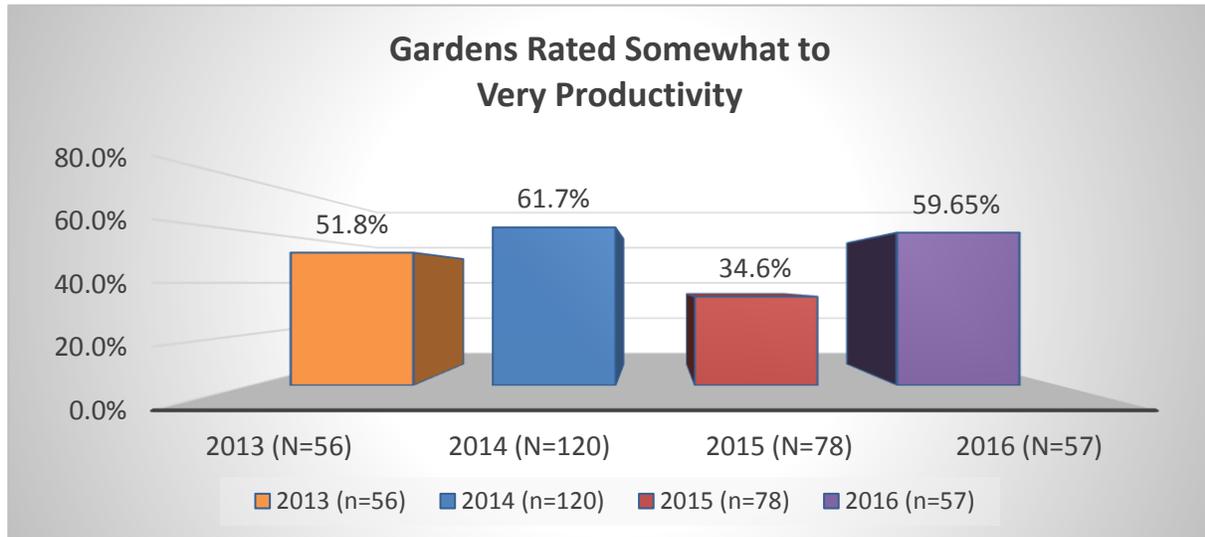
Years Gardening: First, it is important to note that many of the people who use food pantries have a great deal of gardening experience. People commonly respond, “I can’t remember *not* gardening.” when asked how many years they have been gardening. In the mostly rural counties of Missouri, the gardening tradition is still very strong. For many, they are accustomed to the ebb and flow of the gardening season and the trials and rewards of growing one’s own food. The chart below shows how years of gardening experience is distributed across program participants.



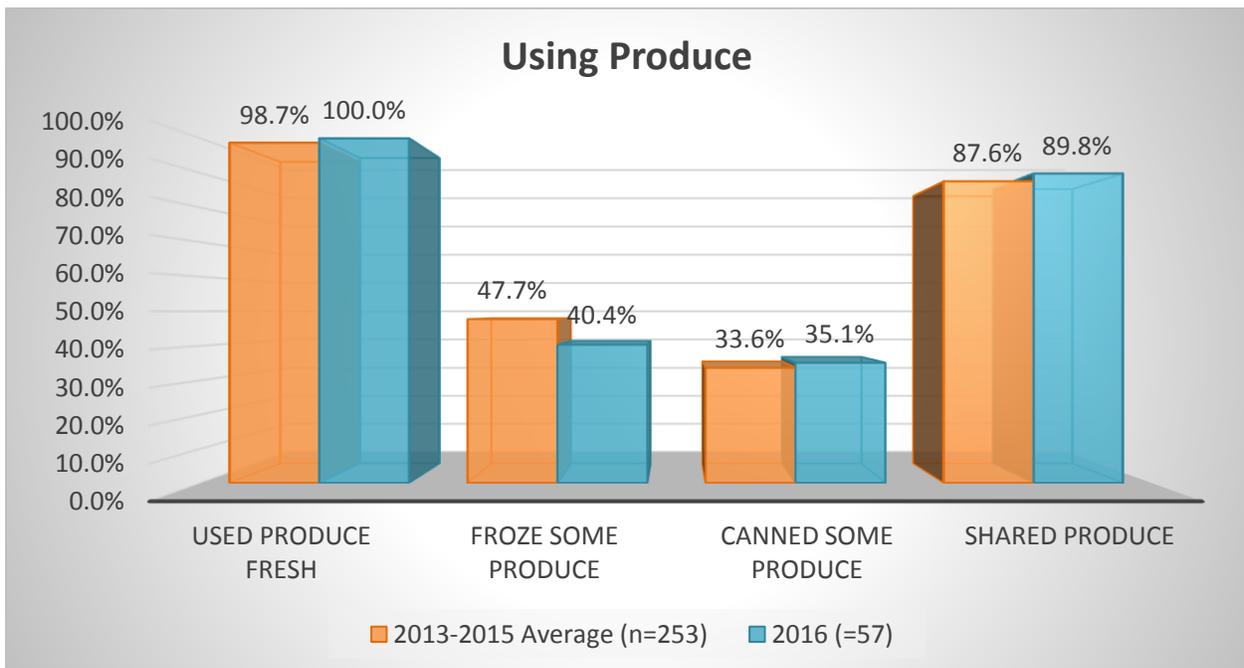
Measuring Success: At a basic level, we are encouraged that the majority of people who pick up materials from Grow Well Missouri make good use of them by planting a garden. Further, a majority of those who plant a garden report that their garden was a success. As shown in the graph below, this pattern has remained consistent since the inception of Grow Well Missouri in 2013.



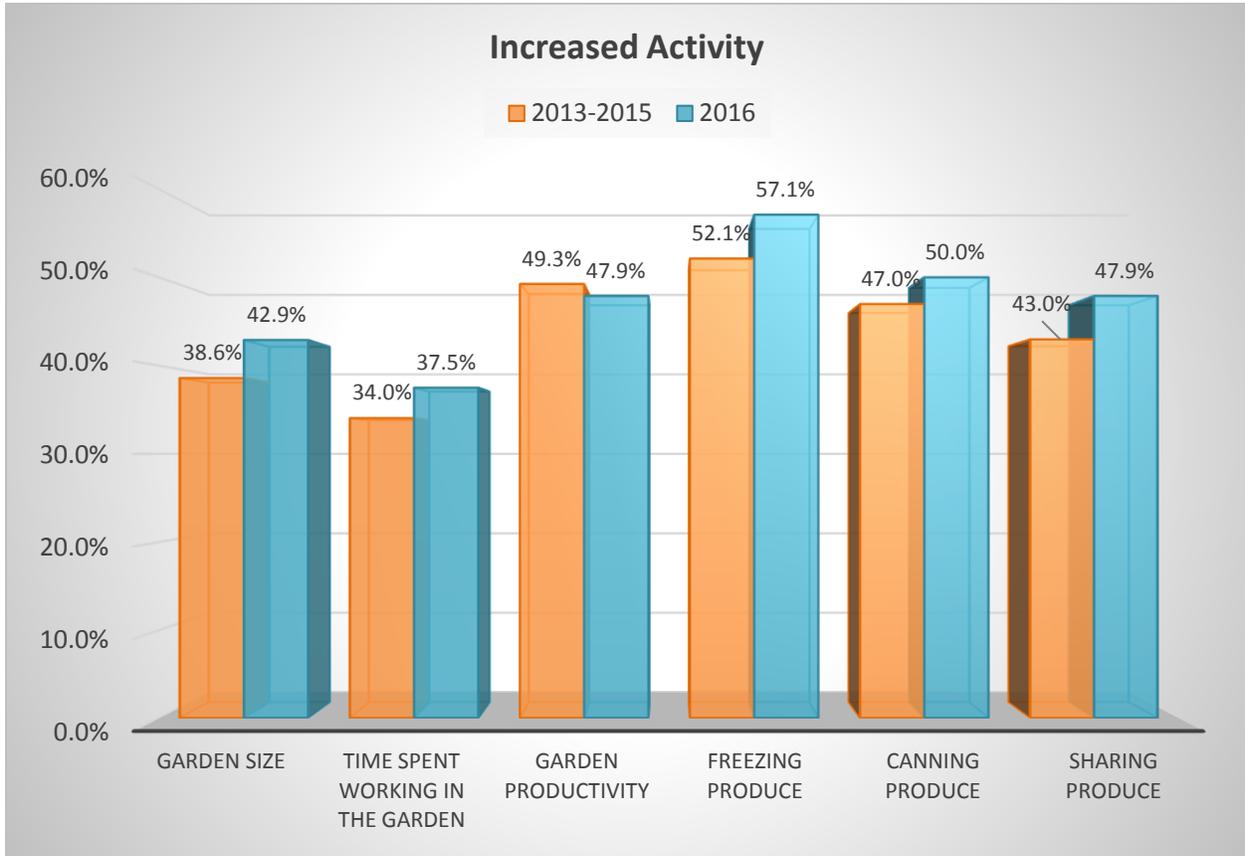
Garden Productivity: Self-assessments of garden productivity show that in most years, more than half of gardeners rate their garden as somewhat to very productive. One of the biggest factors affecting productivity is weather. In the case of 2015, where only 35% of gardens were rated as somewhat to very productive, most of our service area experienced drought in the early summer and too much rain in the fall.



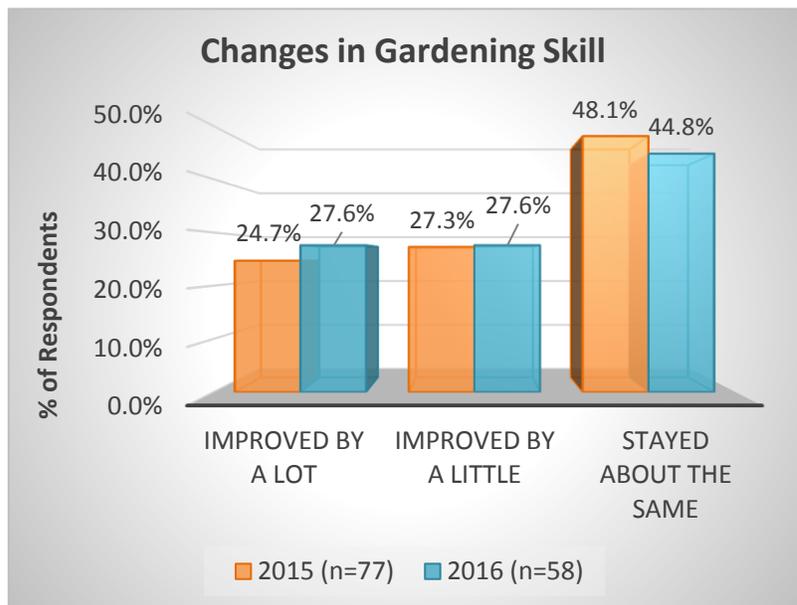
Using Produce: The ways that people use produce has remained relatively consistent over the life of the program. We continue to be impressed by the percentage of people (near 90%) who share produce from their gardens with others. This points to the benevolence of gardeners, their interest and desire to share the fruits of their labor, and the way that home gardens impact the whole community.



Changes in gardening activity: One goal of Grow Well Missouri is to help people to do more with their gardens. To gauge this, we ask people to consider a number of activities and tell us whether they are doing more, less, or the same amount of that activity. The chart below provides the results from these questions for 2013-2015 (average) and 2016. We are encouraged that at least 30% of gardeners indicate they are doing more from one year to the next in each category.



Changes in gardening skill: Another goal of Grow Well Missouri is to increase the gardening skill of gardeners. As noted above, many gardeners who participate are already skilled. However, it is clear from talking to new and old gardeners alike that many people pick up at least a couple of new tips each year. The chart below indicates that just over half of gardeners indicate their skill improved by some amount between 2015 and 2016. The same holds true for gardeners between 2014 and 2015. (Note: We started asking the question in 2015.)



Testimonials: This year we went into the field during evaluation season with a few simple questions and a recorder. Our hope was to capture a few of the many stories we hear when working with gardeners. We made five recordings. Below are a few highlights that capture different impacts of the program.

- **Work and home grown produce:** *“I like to work out in the garden and grow my stuff. And then pick it and bring it in and have good ol’ garden stuff. It beats all this bought stuff.”* – Edna
- **Relaxation and nature:** *“It’s relaxing. I grew up on a farm, and it’s getting back to nature for me. My biggest thing though is that it’s very relaxing and calming.”* – John
- **Eating healthy and making better choices:** *“I think we make better choices, fresher choices... Fresher choices from the garden, but it also changes what we eat and the meals that we choose. We try to choose things to go with what we have in the garden. So, if we already have peppers, tomatoes, and cucumbers, we may only need to buy lettuce and onions to go with it. If we already have fresh choices at home, we’re going to choose more fresh choices from the grocery store too.”* – Christine
- **Exercise, home cooked meals, freshness, and sharing:** *“Gardening gives us a little more responsibility during the day. I’m disabled, and as I get older, it gets to where I just want to sit around. The garden gets me out and helps me get my exercise. We get to choose the vegetables we want and like, my wife has different preferences in her vegetables choices than I do. We also get to make more home cooked food than if we were to go to the store and buy premade. The vegetables last longer than the ones we can buy at the store. We get to share with our neighbors, and they share with us. I just enjoy working in the garden, always have.”* – Jerald
- **Gardening for the first time, saving money, eating well, being outside:** *“Being a new gardener and this being my first year, I went into it a bit naive. I’ve learned so much about gardening. I’ve made a lot of mistakes, but I’ve had a lot of good pointers and education to help do better next year. As a husband and father, all the vegetables that I’ve been getting have save me so much money, rather than having to go to the store and buy these things. It’s a benefit having all this food. My wife’s a vegetarian, so she finds 101 different ways to use all these vegetables. I know where they come from... they come right out of my backyard. I’m not worried about packaged goods or canned goods, I’ve got canned vegetables that have sat in the cupboard all summer long because I have them coming right out of the garden in my back yard. I’m an outdoors person, and it’s given me a reason to be outside. It’s given me something to learn more about, I get to watch my family eat it, and save money at the same time. It’s a win-win.”* Ben

In addition, we received some candid responses when we asked how people’s gardens would be affected if seeds and transplants weren’t available at the food pantry.

- *“Well, I typically go over the Versailles and buy seeds from the Amish... the seeds from the pantry were just a portion, but I was able to plant them in with my other stuff. I appreciated the gift of seeds and everything. It helps out.”* – Edna
- *“It would affect it a lot. Seeds are kind of expensive in a lot of places and when you’re on a limited budget, it’s hard to get all the seeds you need. I know you can buy some seeds with food stamps, but I also need the food too. Being able to pick up the seeds here (at the pantry) is really a blessing.”* – John
- *“It would make a big impact this year. We probably wouldn’t have started a garden... that’s where the whole idea came from this year. To get started with the patio tomatoes and some of the seeds is how we got started, and were able to get more seeds and seedlings from friends and neighbors.”* – Christine

- *“This year, if I wouldn’t have got seeds from you, I wouldn’t have raised a garden at all. I had no intentions of growing a garden this year, but you got my attention at the table and gave out cool and warm weather seeds, that’s what got me going. I took a bag of seeds home and thought about it for three days, then I grabbed a shovel and started working on the garden. That’s the way it started. If it wasn’t for the seeds, I wouldn’t have planted at all.” – Jerald*
- *“To be honest, if seeds weren’t available at the pantry, I probably wouldn’t have a garden. I have a garden because I came down to the pantry. I have a big family, four kids at home, and sometimes you just need that extra food and they provide it here. I saw your stand and what you had to offer, and I started looking at it and if it wasn’t for being here, seeing it, being intrigued, none of this would have happened. Your stand made me look and pay attention and is why I have a garden.” – Ben*