

POWER^{UP} YOUR PANTRY

Go Local! Series *Partnering with Farmers and Gardeners*



With a little bit of prior planning, food pantries and local farmers and gardeners can partner to increase the amount of fresh food available to food pantry clients.

Given that fresh produce is generally hard to come by for pantries and their clients, these donations provide families with a much needed source of nutritious food. They may also help reduce food waste. Below are a few simple steps to help you get started.

Make a connection. If you are starting from scratch, check out your area's farmers market to find local farmers. Ask to speak to the market manager or whoever serves as the primary contact for the market. If possible, consider attending a market meeting to introduce yourself to the group and let them know that your pantry is able to accept donations of fresh produce. For reaching out to gardeners, see if your community has an Extension Master Gardener group (mg.missouri.edu/) that might be interested in partnering. Community gardens, community garden organizations, and garden clubs are other places to look for gardeners.

One selling point: Donations may be tax deductible or in some cases be eligible for a tax credit. People are encouraged to speak with a tax professional. Information about the Missouri Food Pantry Tax Credit (FPT) is available at bit.ly/foodpantrytaxcredit.

Get the word out. To reach a broader audience, consider advertising in the local paper or on the local radio station. Look for opportunities for free media, too. Many local papers are looking for stories to run and would be happy to feature an article about your pantry and its interest in seeking donations of fresh produce. This is also a great opportunity to share your pantry's work with the community and find new volunteers and donors.



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This series is intended for food pantries and other hunger relief groups looking for ways to enhance their current operations and better meet the needs of people who use their services.

The information provided is based on survey and other research conducted by the Interdisciplinary Center for Food Security at the University of Missouri.

Looking for Farmers?

Search farmers markets by county on Missouri Farmers' Market Directory: bit.ly/mofarmermarketdirectory.

Once donations start coming in, find ways to share updates about your progress. Post pictures and stories on Facebook or other social media platforms. This will help build interest and hopefully lead to more community involvement.

Work out the logistics. Once you've made some connections, you'll need to work out the logistics with the growers. Given that produce is perishable, consider accepting deliveries just before or on distribution days. Ideally, you'll find a time that is convenient for the growers and your pantry. Unless the produce will be distributed to clients immediately, refrigerate it when you receive it.

Handle with care. Whether the produce you receive is excess from a home garden or sound but unmarketable produce (because of odd shapes or sizes) from a farm, handle it as if it will be served to your own family and friends. Avoid throwing items if they are being transferred from one bin to another and always refrigerate the produce unless it will be distributed immediately. Please feel free to post and share our [Harvesting and Handling Produce Safely guide](#) (found at foodsecurity.missouri.edu/power-up/) with your growers to ensure that good food safety practices are being followed. These are good tips for pantries to follow as well.

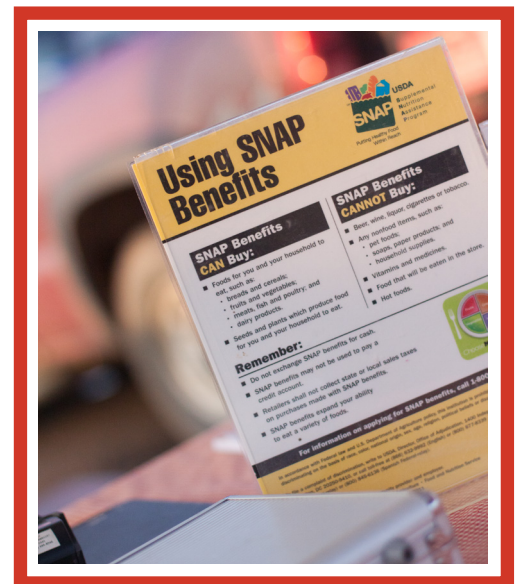
Make it a group effort. Area gardeners may choose to join forces to harvest and deliver produce to your agency at a scheduled time. Likewise, for growers who sell at farmers' markets or produce auctions, produce for donation may be brought to market and set aside at a central location. Produce that doesn't sell can be also be collected at the end of the day. Obviously, delivery or pick-up will need to be arranged.

Another related idea to consider, a donation station, is basically a farmers' market event that allows customers and vendors to make donations of produce or cash at the market. If cash is donated, it is used to buy produce at the market for the food pantry.

Look into gleaning. Gleaning is a coordinated effort between a volunteer group and a local farmer to salvage good quality but unmarketable produce from a farm. Basically, the farmer allows the volunteer group to harvest produce. The produce is then taken to the food pantry for distribution. Gleaning can happen anytime during the growing season but is most common at the end of the season or after the main harvest of a particular crop. For examples, see After the Harvest (KC region, aftertheharvestkc.org/).

Go a step further. Make SNAP available at the farmers market. Farmers' markets can be approved as retail sites for SNAP, similar to grocery stores. The process involves completing a USDA application and following the steps to get set-up. Generally, the market will obtain an electronic card reader and develop a token system to centralize the SNAP transactions in order to relieve individual farmers from the burden of obtaining their own card readers. Once established, SNAP recipients can spend their benefits on food at the market, with the exception of prepared foods and cosmetics. USDA resources for getting started can be found at bit.ly/snapandfarmersmarkets.

Some communities go a step further and create incentive programs for SNAP customers. These programs increase the buying power of SNAP benefits by matching the SNAP dollars spent by a customer with a predetermined amount of money raised through fundraisers, sponsorships, or grants. For information about SNAP incentive programs in Kansas and Missouri, go to the Double Up Food Bucks Heartland website at doubleupheartland.org/.





SPOTLIGHT: SPRINGFIELD, MO



Dee Bremer and Pat DeWitt are volunteer leaders of Grow Well Missouri in Springfield, a project of the University of Missouri, affiliated with Master Gardeners of Greene County.

Dee Bremer and Pat DeWitt have simple words of wisdom for those seeking produce donations from farmers: Make friends. Be consistent. Show appreciation. This advice has served them well as they have worked with farmers at the Greater Springfield Farmers Market since 2016.

Initially, it was the farmers who reached out to them to see if they could help with restoring a demonstration garden that was vandalized. One thing led to another and soon it was discovered that the growers often had more produce than they could sell or use themselves.

Making friends. After initial conversations with growers and the farmers market manager, Dee and Pat began to get to know many of the market vendors, letting them know that they'd be more than happy to take their excess produce to the local pantry at Crosslines, part of the Council of Churches of the Ozarks. This led to invitations from farmers to visit their farms and learn more about their operations.

Being consistent. Dee and Pat made a practice of showing up twice a week initially, with permission, to pick up produce. As a result, farmers could count on their produce making it to people who need it. In fact, knowing their produce was

not going to waste was a big motivator for farmers to give and even increase their giving over time.

Showing appreciation. Sometimes, simple things can make a difference. Dee and Pat often shared snacks with growers. During the heat of summer, Dee made each of them cooling neck wraps. Beyond that, Dee and Pat promoted the farmers market, along with the fact that the market accepts SNAP and doubles the value of SNAP benefits, to food pantry clients they work with as part of Grow Well Missouri. This drove customers to the market and increased participation in the market's SNAP programs – a win-win for vendors and customers.

Dee and Pat's commitment has paid dividends. They took in approximately 10,000 pounds of produce in 2016. In 2017, they are on track to increase that by more than 50%.

They also see huge potential in involving the general public. New in 2017, they hosted a food drive at the farmers market. The idea involved inviting farmers market customers to donate produce or cash to help feed area families.

In the coming year, they hope to involve more volunteers and hunger relief groups and take in more donations. Top on their wish list: a truck or van to help with hauling larger loads.



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For more information:
foodsecurity.missouri.edu