

& Food & Nutrition

December 1977 Volume 7 Number 6



Building a WIC Program

Health officials in Fairfax County, Virginia, are enthusiastic about their new WIC program. They've designed the program to be an integral part of the health service system. **Page 2**

School Lunch and Health

The National School Lunch Program offers a valuable opportunity to reinforce the importance of nutrition to health. Here's how some school food service people are working to make the program an exciting educational experience. **Page 6**

Georgia has a School Lunch Heart Week

Tennessee managers take their message to the public



Minnesota's Food Stamp Center

County staffs know what to do when they've got food stamp questions they can't answer. They call the food stamp policy center run by the State Department of Public Welfare. **Page 10**



Families Garden Cooperatively

Sixty low-income families grew their own vegetables this summer in a cooperative gardening project run by the Saratoga, New York, Economic Opportunity Council. **Page 12**



Solving Lunch Problems

Two articles tell how State and local people are solving some of their school food service problems. The efforts described are spin-offs of the Management and Technical Assistance Project conducted by FNS. **Page 13**

Workshops bring people together

New collection system saves time, avoids hassles



Families Garden Cooperatively

It is early winter, and the soil around Saratoga and Mechanicville, New York, has already hardened.

Undistinguishable from the rest of this rural area, two small gardens that flourished during the summer have turned a dull brown. The bent and brittle stalks are a subtle reminder of the activity that engulfed these plots just a few months before.

What took place was an experiment in gardening, successful cooperative gardening by low-income families who used all the resources they could muster to make their project work.

Three years ago, the Saratoga County Economic Opportunity Council opened the two community gardens for low-income people who wanted to grow their own vegetables but lacked the necessary equipment and land to do it.

Sixty families participated

This year, more than 60 families benefited from the cooperative arrangement. About half the families were food stamp recipients who used their stamps to buy seeds and plants.

Food stamp program regulations allow participants to purchase seeds and plants to grow food for home consumption. Participants make their purchases at authorized stores, using the same procedures they use to purchase regular food items. For a relatively small outlay of food stamps, and a lot of hard work, a family can grow fresh vegetables to enjoy all summer. Many of the Saratoga and Mechanicville gardeners had enough produce to freeze or can for winter meals.

Land and tools are shared

During the growing season, co-op participants may work in the garden whenever they wish. There is no charge for using the land.

The council managed to get both garden sites at no cost, thanks to two area residents willing to let the group "borrow" their land. One was an acquaintance of a council member, a farmer who had a piece of vacant land outside of Saratoga Springs. The other was the owner of a small lot across from the public housing project.

Most of the tools, fertilizers and insecticides came from local merchants, who sold them to the council at cost. All equipment and supplies are stored in the council offices, and gardeners check out what they need when they come to work their plots. There's just about everything a serious gardener would want—shovels, hoes, spades, rakes, roto tillers, and insect sprays.

Families get individual plots

Each year, the gardens are divided into individual plots according to family size and, of course, ambition and willingness to work. No garden plot can be smaller than 15 by 20 feet or larger than 50 by 100 feet.

Last year, Harry Hall and his wife qualified for one of the largest plots because of their family size—they have four children. Mr. Hall admitted there was a lot of hard work involved.

"But well worth it when you realized that you were eating what you had grown," he added. "That is a nice feeling."

Teenager Ricky Garland would agree. An ambitious worker who has earned a few blisters for his labor, Ricky has worked his family's plot for the last two summers. This year he helped the family grow cabbage, cucumbers, beans, squash, peppers and eggplants.

Ricky's favorites, though, were tomatoes. "It was a real kick watching those little plants grow up into big tomatoes," he said.

Barbara Garland, Ricky's mother, bought all of the plants and seeds with food stamps. For \$20 in stamps, she and her family were able to grow a good portion of their summer vegetables. Their only extra purchases were lettuce, carrots, and celery. This year, like last, Ms. Garland preserved squash and beans.

Ms. Garland learned of the garden 2 years ago at a meeting of housing project residents. A guest speaker at that meeting was garden project coordinator Dianne Shippee, who explained how the co-op arrangement works and how food stamp recipients can buy seeds and plants. The coordinator later went into more detail on both points at the garden organization meetings held prior to the growing season.

Interest grows with work

According to Ms. Shippee, the meetings generated a great deal of interest, and the interest increased as people actually began working on their land.

"People were not afraid to ask questions or get their hands dirty," Ms. Shippee explained. "After a while they were all working like pros."

Equally enthusiastic was Chet Davis, the Saratoga Extension Service Horticultural Technician who has provided technical assistance and practice expertise whenever the gardeners have needed it. "I've

Solving Lunch Problems

been with the gardening project from the beginning," he said, "and I've been amazed and very impressed with our gardeners' enthusiasm for the task at hand.

"In a matter of months, they turned from green horns to ardent green thumbs," he laughed.

Results outweigh difficulties

One thing the gardeners learned was that farming has its problems as well as rewards.

"Our people had to haul water with a bucket from a creek several hundred yards away," Dianne Shippee explained, "and in the hot weather that's hard work."

There were also the usual problems of weather, insects and dis-

ease. But especially difficult was an incident involving vandalism.

"It was hard enough with the dry weather and everything else," said the project coordinator. "But when the vandals got in and stole the produce, that was heartbreaking."

Despite all the problems, the coordinator said, the harvest was a full one, and the families from both towns were pleased.

Will there be another garden next year?

"You bet," Ms. Shippee said. "And a lot more of our people will be using food stamps to buy plants and seeds. Those purchases keep putting food on their tables all year long." □

By Herb Strum

More than 150 school systems took part in the Management and Technical Assistance Project sponsored by the Food and Nutrition Service.

Known as MTA, the project brought together Federal, State, and local child nutrition program administrators, who worked as teams to identify school food service problems and recommend solutions for them.

These two articles are about some spin-offs from MTA. The first tells how Arkansas is encouraging schools to use the teamwork approach in improving their school lunch and breakfast programs. The second tells how Boston public schools developed a solution to one of the problems they identified during an MTA review.

Workshops bring people together

Having workshops for school food service workers is not a new idea. National, State and local agencies often sponsor workshops that provide valuable training and opportunities to exchange ideas on shared problems.

But what about having workshops that involve not only school food service people, but teachers, students, and community members as well? That may be a new idea. And if it is, Arkansas can be proud to have come up with it.

This year, for the third year in a row, the Arkansas Department of Education is sponsoring a series of workshops to help schools and communities improve their school food service programs. Held at various schools throughout the State, the workshops focus on iden-



The garden's plentiful yield included these hearty cabbages.



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THIRD CLASS BLK. RT.
PERMIT NUMBER .005-5

Published six times a year by the Food and Nutrition Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.

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Yearly subscription: \$4.00 domestic, \$5.00 foreign. Single copies 70 cents each. Subscription orders should be sent to the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.

The Secretary of Agriculture has determined that the publication of this periodical is necessary in the transaction of the public business required by law of this Department. The use of funds for printing this publication has been approved by the Director of the Office of Management and Budget through September 30, 1978.

Prints of photos may be obtained from Photo Library, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.

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