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Photo Credit: Glenn Wester

[Awesome Food](#) is delighted to announce its third microgrant of \$1,000 has been awarded to [SNAP Gardens](#) and [Dinner Garden](#) to fund a collaboration to raise awareness that food stamps can be used gardening. The project is among the nearly 800 projects from around the world who have applied for grants from Awesome Food, a chapter of the [Awesome Foundation](#) which made its first micro-grant award in October.

“We chose SNAP Gardens and Dinner Garden as this month’s recipients because of their original, sensible and sustainable approach to ending hunger,” said Angela Moore, an Awesome Food trustee and a vice president of digital for the [Food Network](#) who is a native of San Antonio, where Dinner Garden is based. “We look forward to witnessing the impact of the award as it fosters communication about the project and plays a part in helping Americans grow their own food.”



SNAP Gardens was started in 2011 by New Yorker [Daniel Bowman Simon](#) in an attempt to bring to light decades-old legislation: in 1973, an amendment was made to the [1964 Food Stamp Act](#) to allow the purchase of seeds and food-producing plants. While it's been possible to use food stamps to purchase seeds and plants ever since, it hasn't happened much, because, as Simon says, "It's been buried in the fine print." Simon's mission has been to raise awareness of this legislation to beneficiaries and administrators of the food stamp program, now known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program ([SNAP](#)).

Amanda Hesser, an Awesome Food trustee and co-founder of [FOOD52](#), added, "SNAP Gardens and Dinner Garden show us that we don't always need to create new programs but to maximize the initiatives — like food stamps — that we already have. They have a clear mission to get the word out that food stamps can be used to buy seeds and plants, and we believe it's an important one."

In its short time so far, SNAP Gardens has already distributed posters to farmers markets in 24 states and Washington DC. Their posters are designed to reach a wide audience through translation in multiple languages, including Spanish, Hmong, Cherokee, and Mandarin. Their hope is to help make gardening a viable option for people who may have limited resources and immediate hunger needs.



The accolades SNAP Gardens have received thus far include winning the "Editor's Choice" award at NYC Maker Faire in September and presenting a [webinar titled "Food Stamps Grow Gardens"](#) to the [USDA's People's Garden](#) in October, which attracted nearly 1,000 listeners, including many Master Gardeners. Simon noted that although the word is getting out to many, he believes that only a small fraction of the nearly 46 million Americans on food stamps now know that they can choose to buy seeds and plants, it's the beginning of having more and more gardens in every state, and a great opportunity to help people feed themselves.

[Dinner Garden](#) — a non-profit based in San Antonio, Texas — sends free starter packs of vegetable seeds to low-income families nationwide, and has distributed tens of thousands of packets across all 50 states. “We want to make sure that everyone who gets free seeds from Dinner Garden also knows that if they receive food stamps, they can buy some of their own seeds and plants. And if they don’t get food stamps, as dedicated gardeners, they can, and will, help spread the word!” Simon explained.

The grant will be used to print information cards and to establish a toll-free information hotline for a full year — all to increase awareness of food stamp use for seeds and plants. The information cards will be sent to 15,000 Dinner Garden recipients with their seeds, and the hotline will provide access to information in multiple languages, as well as providing a place for people to share stories and ask questions.

“It’s exemplary activism,” said [Raj Patel](#), author of *The Value of Nothing* and *Stuffed and Starved*. “I had no idea such provisions existed in the law, and am so glad both that Daniel found them, and that he’s developing the micro-flash of insight into a much more sustained and important project. If it pans out, it’ll make possible a new wave of urban agriculture supported by entitlements that already exist (and in budget strapped times, that’s legislatively vital) — and that’ll make a huge difference in the under-served communities that already depend on food stamps. And that’s what I love about this project — it builds on what’s already there in terms of hunger legislation, and turns it in a new a possibly transformative direction for the very communities most underserved by the urban gardening movement.”

Simon added that while there are over 1.8 million SNAP recipients in New York City alone, he sees a strong audience for the program in rural areas where SNAP recipients are more likely to have access to arable land, and may already have gardening experience.

Gary Oppenheimer of [AmpleHarvest.org](#), an organization that urges gardeners to donate excess produce to food pantries, echoed this sentiment, adding that planting seeds and growing food can really help take some of the growing burden off of food pantries.

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