Great things happen when motivated, creative folks come together! In 2014, Cultivate Iowa, an evidence-based social marketing initiative, developed the Guide for Growing Healthier Iowans, Organizations and Communities through Food Gardening and Produce Donation. This ten-page guide presents tangible action steps and key messages that encourage low-resource Iowans to get involved in food gardening and gardeners to donate their excess produce to local food pantries.

Cultivate Iowa is one of the Iowa Food Access and Health Work Group's (FAHWG) key programs. FAHWG is a work group of the Iowa Food Systems Council. Angie Tagtow, MS, RD, LD, then FAHWG convener and co-founder of the Council, organized the work group, which includes more than 600 individuals and organizations. FAHWG seeks to cultivate a diverse and just food system that increases access to nutritious food and improves the health of all Iowans through policy, system and environmental changes.

Angie and her partners in FAHWG, the Iowa Department of Public Health, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, and the Iowa Food Bank Association sought to expand Cultivate Iowa's tools and resources to include a campaign implementation guide and educational resources on food gardening and produce donation. The guide was to provide information and strategies for local WIC and Maternal and Child Health (MCH) offices, local public health agencies (LPHAs) and food pantries. With a Blueprint mini-grant from the Association of State Public Health Nutritionists (ASPHN), they did just that!

The Guide gives practical directions on how WIC, MCH, LPHAs and food pantries can integrate into their services Cultivate Iowa's messages and materials. The Guide also outlines strategies, using the Spectrum of Prevention,* to help these organizations promote policy, system and environmental changes that will result in more household, community, school and workplace gardens and increased produce donations. The overall goal is greater food security, healthy food access and health for low-resource Iowans.

Angie Tagtow, MS, RD, LD
Promoting Healthy Eating through Food Gardening and Produce Donations

The Growing Healthier Iowans Guide

*The Spectrum of Prevention is a framework that describes the various targets of prevention, from the primary prevention of disease to the tertiary prevention of complications and disabilities. It is used to guide prevention efforts.
Successes and Challenges

The Cultivate Iowa team created a colorful, easy-to-read guide that they distributed to more than 700 individuals and organizations involved in the Iowa Food Systems Council. The team distributed the Guide widely and made it available to download at www.CultivateIowa.org. They received excellent media coverage and positive feedback all around. Local WIC and MCH offices, LPHAs and food pantries were excited to have the new resource, and they asked for more copies! The team continues to promote the Guide in a monthly e-zine and at conferences and events. They look forward to the start of the 2015 growing season and more opportunities to share the Guide.

Angie says that the most exciting component of the Guide is the application of the Spectrum of Prevention model. Using the model, the Guide presents six strategies that organizations and communities can implement to promote food gardening and increase produce donations. Angie sees the inclusion of these strategies as a key shift from a focus on individual interventions to a policy, system and environmental (PSE) change approach to public health promotion. She is very excited about this new approach, where public health nutritionists can adapt the Spectrum of Prevention model to additional PSE strategies to increase knowledge and change behaviors and attitudes on a larger scale.

Through this project, FAHWG strengthened its relationships with the Iowa Department of Public Health, the Iowa Food Bank Association and Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. ISU Extension joined in the project as it was underway. Extension staff provided valuable input into the Guide. ISU Extension also reaches a different constituency. The Extension staff will use the Guide in their new Farm to Food Donation Project, a program that promotes Iowa’s Farm to Food Donation Tax Credit.

One of the challenges was that both Angie and her co-convener, Betsy Danforth-Richey, took new jobs in July 2014. The FAHWG Leadership Team stepped up and took on greater responsibilities. The team is stronger now, and it is continuing to develop more Cultivate Iowa tools.

Lessons Learned and Advice for ASPHN Members

In looking back, Angie would have liked the Guide to have been completed in time for the Iowa Hunger Summit in October and the Hope for the Hungry Conference in November. Angie also mentioned that team partners met twice in person and communicated electronically to develop the Guide. She said, “Meeting more frequently may have generated a more robust document that could have included more outcome data from the featured organizations.”
Angie encourages public health nutritionists around the country to take the Guide and adapt it for organizations and communities in their states! She also reminds us, “Collaboration takes time, and the more people at the table, the longer it takes.” She advises that outcome and impact evaluations also take time and resources. She said, “There are no databases that monitor gardening by socioeconomic status or state. In addition, food pantries and food banks do not have consistent methods for tracking donated garden produce.”

* According to the Prevention Institute, the Spectrum of Prevention identifies multiple levels of intervention and is a framework for a more comprehensive understanding of prevention. The levels are complementary and when used together produce greater results than would be possible by implementing any single activity. An underlying premise of the Spectrum is that prevention is much greater than teaching healthy behaviors.

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**Public health nutritionists can adapt the Spectrum of Prevention model to additional PSE strategies to increase knowledge and change behaviors and attitudes on a larger scale.**

Cultivate Iowa created posters, post cards and other materials that accompany the Guide to help promote food gardening and produce donation throughout Iowa.

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**The Important Role of the Public Health Nutritionist**

Increasing access to healthy foods through policy, system and environmental change strategies was a unique role that Angie and her fellow public health nutritionists played in the Cultivate Iowa project. The public health nutritionists involved in the project helped their partners think about their goals and their work in a new way. Connecting food gardening to food security was a new concept for the Food Bank Association and for Extension. Now they embrace this new approach — and they have sparked other organizations to embrace it as well!

**ASPHN in Action**

ASPHN is a non-profit membership organization that provides state and national leadership on food and nutrition policy, programs and services aimed at improving the health of our population. Our vision is to create new environmental norms where healthy eating and active living are the easy and natural choices for all Americans.

At ASPHN, we build our members’ skills as public health nutritionists by providing key resources and professional development. Funding from our Association’s Blueprint Collaborative mini-grant program helped Angie, an ASPHN member, launch the food gardening and produce donation guide in Iowa.

To learn more about ASPHN, please visit us on the web at [www.asphn.org](http://www.asphn.org).