

The Container Gardens for Change in Hardeman County, Tennessee

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Introduction

A community assessment conducted in Hardeman County, Tennessee found that children have limited access to grocery stores and experience a high rate of food insecurity. With limited access to foods that promote a healthy lifestyle, a child's immediate and long-term health could be negatively impacted. Graduate students from the University of Tennessee-Knoxville worked with Extension to create a program that would address these prominent food access concerns. Thus, the Container Gardens for Change (CGC) was developed in response of the need to improve food access and focus on increasing fruit and vegetable (F/V) consumption in the school-aged population residing in Hardeman County, Tennessee. Specifically, students in the 4H clubs will learn about the benefits of eating fruits and vegetables and grow the seasonal produce in their own classrooms. Having this personalized experience with growing a garden was aimed to increase overall exposure, likability, and consumption of the produce. Due to the pandemic and the reduction in in-person learning the lessons were developed to accommodate virtual and in-person students.

Objectives

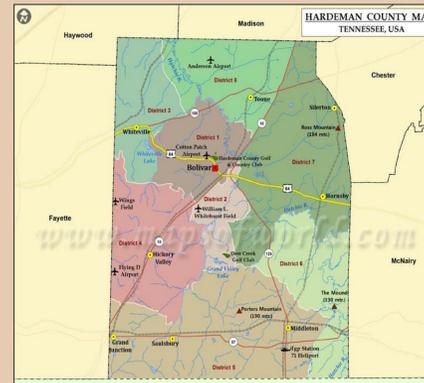
Process: By November 4, 2020, develop a checklist using existing resources to evaluate the fidelity of the CGC program.

Outcome: By January 31, 2022, there will be a significant increase in student-reported fruit and vegetable consumption post-intervention compared to baseline.

Impact: By the completion of the program, there will be a 25% increase in nutrition knowledge related to fresh fruits and vegetables post-intervention compared to baseline.



Community Assessment



Hardeman County has a much higher rate of food insecurity in comparison to the state of Tennessee. According to Feeding America, about 21% of children are food insecure in this county.² In addition, the USDA Interactive Tool Map, Hardeman Co. shows that there is a significant portion of the county that are in a food desert.³ When children do not have access to adequate nutrition, it can impact growth and development.⁴ As the pandemic hit this community, it further widened the gap of access to food.⁵⁻⁷ A lot of the students in this county rely heavily on the schools to provide free meals, but with the pandemic forcing schools to shut down, many children were unable to receive those meals and then were not exposed to fresh produce.⁵⁻⁷

Planning/Implementation

- Development of educational materials and website were created to be delivered by teachers at the participating schools. All materials would be able to be used for in-person and virtual students.
- Recruitment materials in the form of flyers was created to be distributed throughout the county to encourage higher participation of 4H clubs.
- A proposed budget allocation for gardening materials was created to determine how much funding would be needed to adequately implement the CGC program.
- Engage with community to support the CGC program and encourage donations to be used in the CGC program.
- Ensure utilization of the evaluation tools with teachers by providing them with clear instructions on to use each tool.

Evaluation

Fidelity

Once the educational materials were created, a fidelity checklist was developed to be used during the CGC implementation. It is to be used to evaluate the teachers' delivery of the CGC educational materials.

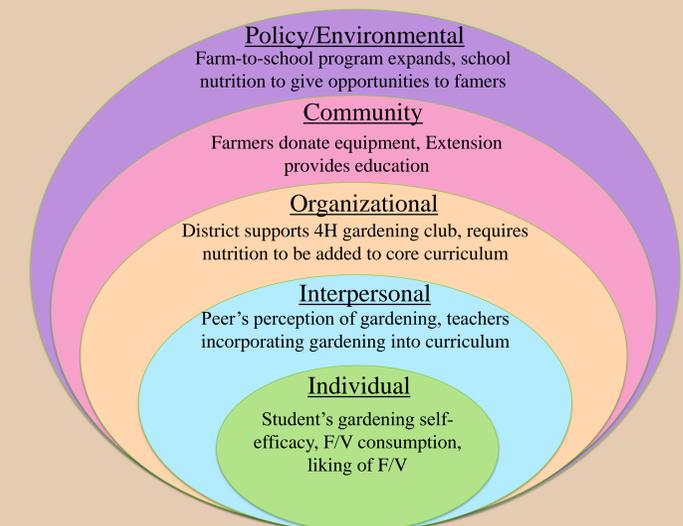
Fruit/Vegetable Consumption

To evaluate the CGC program in meeting the outcome objective, the fruit and vegetable consumption will be measured using a Veggie Meter, the USDA Plate Waste Study, and the CGC survey. Specifically, the survey will be used to analyze the change of likability and overall consumption of the F/V from the CGC pre- and post-survey.

Nutrition Knowledge

To measure the nutrition knowledge of the students for fruit and vegetables, the CGC pre- and post-survey will be used to analyze the overall change in knowledge from the beginning to the end of the program.

*Implementation of the program began in February/March 2021 at the participating schools and is still being delivered so data is still in the process of being collected.



This project was developed through Tennessee Extension with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention High Obesity Program