

VOLUNTEER SHOWCASE

October 2012, Arkansas

People's Garden Maintained by Volunteers, Produce Donated to Feds Feed Families

A new USDA "People's Garden" in Van Buren County, Arkansas has given fresh, nutritious food to food banks during the summer when food is needed most.

Staff at the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) field office and Van Buren County Conservation District in Clinton, AR became volunteers as they worked on their own time and joined other Earth Team volunteers in preparing the "People's Garden" bed and planting seedlings in early May. Plants were donated to the project by Peters Farm in Clinton.

"Our goal is to make a collective effort to provide fresh, nutritious vegetables to hungry individuals and families who are struggling to buy food. If we can give back to our community and make a positive impact in at least one hungry neighbor's life, our efforts will be well worth the time dedicated to the garden," said Jeremy Huff, NRCS district conservationist.

"Earth Team volunteers include NRCS and district employees who work the garden on their own time, retirees, parents, teenagers, district directors, and a volunteer from the U.S. Military's Wounded Warrior program," said Candace Smith, district manager of the Van Buren County Conservation District.

The project was started through a partnership with the Van Buren County Health Department and the Van Buren County TEA Coalition. The TEA Coalition received a grant through the Arkansas Coalition for Obesity Prevention/ Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance to establish garden beds for community use. Van Buren County donated the land for the garden and provided a space to the Clinton Field Office staff.

Huff commended Sara Bates, TEA Coalition program coordinator; Candace Smith, Van Buren County Conservation District manager and the Earth Team volunteers for their support and contributions.



(L - R) Earth Team Volunteers Ed Wood and Sgt. Stephen Lowery plant tomatoes seedlings in the USDA People's Garden.

About 10 volunteers are making significant contributions in planting, growing and maintaining the garden on a daily basis. The NRCS field office staff in Clinton will record the total amount of food donated and report it to the USDA Feds Feed Families food drive.

The People's Garden Initiative was launched by U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack Feb. 12, 2009, to challenge USDA employees to create gardens at USDA facilities. It has become a collaborative effort of more than 700 local and national organizations all working together throughout the nation.



The Earth Team is the volunteer component of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), a USDA agency. For more about NRCS and the Earth Team, visit www.usda.nrcs.gov.

If you are interested in volunteering, call (888) 526-3227 or visit your local NRCS office to learn about volunteer opportunities.