

LGFCU Excellence in Innovation Award Project Evaluation

Project ID	PIP-9
Title of Program	Seed Exchange
Program Category	Public Information and Participation
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Implementation Date	9/29/2015
FLSA Designation	Non-exempt
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Description of Productivity Improvement

The Seed Exchange was created at the Denton Library of the Davidson County Public Library in September, 2016. The exchange involves two things: the seed bank itself, in which all donated seeds are placed, and the exchange, a group in the community who meet once a month to discuss various things concerning gardening. Discussions range from how to prepare a garden and how to naturally keep pests away, to harvesting the garden and preserving seeds for the following year. The seed bank itself is a 20-drawer dresser which held, this year, approximately 450 packets of vegetable, flower, fruit and herb seeds. Seeds were donated by community members as well as four non-GMO (genetically modified organism), heirloom seed companies within the United States. Advertising was put up in the local post office, on flyers, Facebook and the library website inviting those interested to come in and get information as well as free seeds for their gardens. Those interested, came in and entered on a laptop, their name, email address and how many seed packets they “checked out”. The idea is that each person would allow one plant of each variety in their garden to mature and turn to seed. Those seeds would then be brought back to the seed bank for next year’s gardens. And so the rotation begins again.

The Seed Exchange is a group of members in the community. Some are seasoned gardeners, others have never gardened before. Once a month the exchange meets and discusses a variety of topics, leaving time for questions that may come up concerning individual gardens. The exchange talks about gardening from beginning (plotting and tilling the garden) to end (harvesting, drying seeds, canning).

Guest speakers come in to share information with the group as well as the more seasoned gardeners sharing their knowledge. It offers the community an opportunity to learn and try something new, knowing that the group is just an email away should there be an emergency (a pest eating the plant leaves).

Once the seeds were gathered, packed and labeled and all marketing was complete, the first seed exchange was held in September. The Exchange continued every month through March, prepping those who were preparing to have a garden. In April, seeds were actually planted and the growing season officially began. Most checked out seeds from April through the beginning of June.

Description of why this project was initiated

The project was initiated for a few different reasons. First, there was a community concern for the amount of genetically modified foods produced in gardens as well as the pesticides used on the seeds and plants. Using non-GMO, heirloom seeds (seeds that are not genetically modified) would create a chemical-free plant/garden and seeds from the plant could be saved to grow again the following year. There was a concern about the loss of pollinators such as bees and butterflies, which are crucial in the development of a successful garden. Allowing flower and herb seeds into the exchange would help bring pollinators back to the area, therefore aiding in a hardier garden.

There was also a desire to not only bring awareness to the community about the ability to grow their own food and grow it in a safe, chemical free environment, but to have a sustainable and reliable local seed source for all everyone regardless of financial status. This project would allow for community involvement on many levels. Sharing seeds, tools and knowledge with those who needed or wanted the help would be a win-win situation with everyone learning from each other. This cost-effective program could not only create sustainability, but it could also create a tighter and more supportive community.

Quantifiable results (sustainability, cost savings, cost avoidance and/or a higher level of service).

Indication of what resources were used and what was done with any accrued time savings

The overall cost of the project was minimal. A dresser was purchased for the seeds (\$80) as well as 5 bags of soil (\$40-we did not till up a garden this year, instead we chose to do container gardening on the patio). We had donations from four seed companies, however we paid the cost of shipping (\$34). This brought the total cost of the materials to approximately \$154. All containers were donated. Seeds were donated by the community as well as the seed companies. All seeds were non-GMO/heirloom seeds. The initial set-up time was approximately 10 hours a week for 8 weeks (40 hours total). This time was used for researching plants and how to grow certain varieties as well as sorting, packing and labeling the seeds as they came in. Through the spring, the time spent on research and prep work dropped to approximately an hour a week. May began another period of work as we wanted began container gardening at the library in order to prove its effectiveness as a way to grow vegetables and herbs. Some plants were added into the landscape of the library inviting in pollinators as well as being used as a means of natural pest control. Time spent on planting was 2 hours a week for the first month. Once plants were big enough to re-pot, some were put on the library's patio, some were given to local residents who were interested, some were given to the family resource center for shut-ins and those in need. Many plants were also given to the Denton

community garden, a garden for the community by the community. Residents share in the upkeep of this garden and all items picked from the garden are then shared with members of the community. We began with 450 packs of seeds and by the beginning of June, the dresser had only 76 packs left. We have had people bring in seeds, many by dead-heading flowers such as marigolds. We have also had people bring in the remainder of seeds they didn't use in their gardens this year. As the season progresses, we expect gardens to mature and plants to go to seed. Then, community members will bring in their success stories and their seeds. The Seed Exchange continues to meet, drawing in a bigger group each month. They will continue to teach gardening as a full year event since North Carolina is able to grow year-round. More classes will be taught, about not only seed growing but grafting, cutting and rooting plants. We will continue to search out seed sources. We are waiting for more donations now, to be used in the fall garden planting.

The program so far, has been successful. We have been able to share knowledge with the community about how to become more sustainable. More and more people learn about the benefits of not only having their own food source, but having a chemical-free food source. Pollinators are much more prolific in comparison to last year. Outreach programs have been taught in afterschool daycares and preschools, educating the younger generation on not only growing but the importance of growing. Plants have been handed out to shut-ins who used to garden, but can no longer do it. Caring for a single plant can be a very positive experience for them as they can once again nurture and care for something that was once so important to them. Plants were also given to those in need, along with the information on how to take care of the plant so that it will not only bear fruit this season but can be used as a continuous food source by drying and storing some of the seeds.

Finally, the program continues to show success as people begin to bring back seeds to the seed bank. The excitement is contagious when one person after another comes in to share their stories, their harvest and their seeds with us. There are also sad stories of burned up or dried up plants. These too are success stories, as each learns a valuable lesson along the way about what NOT to do or what to do more of. The idea that we can be our own sustainable community appeals to many and so many take part in this program. As the harvest begins, we look forward to seeing our seed supply replenished and the next season beginning in the late summer.

Other descriptive information

Donation requests are sent out twice a year, once in the winter (for spring planting) and once in the summer (for fall planting). Different types of seeds will be sent each time. Some of the seed companies ask for a list of desired seeds, other pick and choose for the exchange based on the planting zone (we are zone 6).