

LGFCU Excellence in Innovation Award Project Evaluation

Project ID	IGC-8
Title of Program	Gardens of Hope
Program Category	Intergovernmental Collaboration
Submission Date	6/1/2017 4:07:40 PM
County	Yancey
Employee	Jason Robinson
Employee title	Assistant to the County Manager/Clerk to the Board
Email	jason.robinson@yanceycountync.gov
County Department	Sheriff's/County Manager/Cooperative Extension
Phone	828-682-3971
Address	110 Town Square, Room 11 Burnsville, NC 28714
County Manager	Nathan Bennett
Supervisor	Nathan Bennett
Implementation Date	3/28/2016
FLSA Designation	Both (if applicable to a team)
Project Team Members	Shane Hilliard, Chief Deputy; WB Randolph, Jailer; Adam McCurry, Agriculture Technician; Tres Magner, Cooperative Extension Director; Jason Robinson, Assistant to the County Manager/Clerk to the Board; Nathan Bennett, County Manager

Description of Productivity Improvement

The productivity for this project lies not only in the improvement of county government services but in the overall societal advancement of our county. Chief Deputy Shane Hilliard came up with the idea of taking a tract of vacant property owned by the county and using it to have inmates raise a garden of green beans, squash, and cucumbers. By implementing this project we hoped to take non-violent misdemeanor inmates serving short sentences in the county detention center and give them a skill that they can learn and utilize to divert them from the path of repeated visits to the county jail. This project also involved our county cooperative extension center and TRACTOR, a local non-profit food hub that Yancey County supports. By utilizing the expertise of the agriculture technician in that office he was able to teach the inmates "best practices" when it came to growing large quantities of beans, squash, and cucumbers. By selling the produce to the local food hub it helped them meet their quota for green beans, cucumbers, and squash as well as providing funds to them. The project also brought funds back to the county general fund from the sale of the produce. The project turned out to be a big success in its first year. One of the inmates when he was released from jail actually became a grower for TRACTOR. From the outset, the agriculture technician talked with the inmates about planning the development of the garden. He talked to them about the different markets that were

available and what crops grow best in our area. The inmates planned the garden and then did all of the work to bring the crops to harvest. In total, from 3/4 of an acre of land the inmates planted 1,000 feet row of beans, 1,000 cucumber plants, and 1,000 yellow squash plants. This produced a yield of 144 bushels of bean, 48 boxes of cucumbers, and 58 boxes of yellow squash. This was sold to TRACTOR for \$5,115.02. This was done with more than 1,400 hours and 23 inmates.

Description of why this project was initiated

Yancey County is a small, rural county in Western North Carolina. Like many rural counties in years past we were a farming community, mainly growing tobacco. In the past few years more and more farmland has been sold and the amount of land in use for agriculture has declined. When TRACTOR came along, the goal was to make farming profitable for a folks that wanted to farm. In its first few years, TRACTOR struggled to get farmers to grow for them to be able to have enough product to sell. TRACTOR was also set up to be an economic development driver for the agriculture industry in our county. This was seen as a way for young people to be able to stay in Yancey County if they chose and to be able to save family farms. Also for a number of years, like many counties in North Carolina, Yancey County has had a prescription drug problem. A lot of the same offenders keep coming back into our jail which costs our county about \$1 million dollars every year. Unfortunately, some of these offenders will always re-offend but some of them actually want to have a way of breaking the cycle of crime by having a skill to be a productive member of society. When the Sheriff's Office developed this idea, everyone realized that it would be a good idea to get inmates out and working but the benefits have far exceeded anyone's expectations. The inmates in the jail now want to be on the "work crew" and it is considered an honor to be able to work in the garden. The inmates are learning skills that they can take with them for the rest of their lives. While these two problems seem to be completely separate and different from each other, only when Chief Deputy Hilliard came up with the idea did everyone see that this could be something that could solve both problems at one time. TRACTOR is given product that they need to sell and the inmates are given a lifelong skill that they will hopefully develop into something that can be used to break the cycle of criminality. This project has truly turned out to be a win-win for everyone involved.

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

This project provided many quantifiable benefits to Yancey County over the past year. The actual savings for this past year breaks down as follows: Revenue: \$5115.02; Expenses: \$2473.59 for a total profit for the year of \$2,641.43 that actually came back to the Yancey County Government budget. Since this was the first year of the project many things like bean stakes had to be purchased and will be reused in years to come. The potential savings that this will mean to the county is every more impressive. We pay approximately \$69 per inmate per day when they are in our jail. If this project keeps just one of those inmates from coming back to jail it will save the County \$25,185 per year. This is not counting the economic benefits of having that former inmate to pay sales and property tax which could add an additional \$500 per year per inmate. In addition we used existing jail staff to oversee the inmates as well as the existing staff at the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Office.

Other descriptive information

Unfortunately, there will always be inmates in our county jail but this project gives them a real opportunity to be a positive force in the community. The project is what local government, working together, should be about...helping people. This project has brought together multiple departments in county government as well as the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, and North Carolina A and T State University to make the lives better for Yancey County citizens. The idea for an inmate garden is not a new idea but the innovative part of this project is how it is benefiting so many different groups of people, benefiting county government, a local non-profit, as well as the inmates. The uniqueness of this project shows how governments, working together, can improve the lives of the citizens that they serve. The County Commissioners, Sheriff, and the administration of Yancey County Government are proud of this project and hope that other counties can use this project as a model to work together for the betterment of their entire county.