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WANTED: Gardeners to Help Reduce Food Insecurity Across Iowa

Cultivate Iowa promotes healthier communities through food gardening, produce donation

ELKHART, Iowa – (February 27, 2014) – The [Iowa Food Systems Council's](#) (IFSC) Food Access and Health Work Group today announced the need for more gardeners to reduce food insecurity in Iowa. With more than 400,000 Iowans who do not have regular access to healthful food, donating fresh vegetables and fruit to food pantries will help to ensure low-resource Iowans will have greater opportunities to put fresh produce on their plates.

“The [Cultivate Iowa](#) campaign aims to promote food security and improve the health of Iowans by increasing access to garden produce through integrated coordination, social marketing and outreach strategies,” says Elizabeth Danforth Richey, one of the project coordinators. Through extensive research, Cultivate Iowa identified how food gardening could positively impact individuals, families, organizations and communities. By talking with food pantry staff and volunteers, low-resource Iowans and current food gardeners, Cultivate Iowa was designed as a program to help all Iowa communities.

“By increasing the number of food gardeners in our communities, we can begin to increase food security and boost health throughout our communities and the entire state of Iowa,” says project coordinator Angie Tagtow. “Food pantries appreciate having fresh produce in stock. Families love seeing it at pantries and it’s usually the first thing off the shelves, so it never goes to waste. The key to remember is that all fresh produce is happily received and every little bit helps.” Visit www.cultivateiowa.org to learn more about food gardening and easy ways to start a garden.

Gardeners may also join the program by pledging to donate fresh produce at www.CultivateIowa.org. Gardeners can enter their ZIP code to find organizations in their communities that accept fresh produce. At the end of the growing season, gardeners can report back how much they donated through a post-harvest survey.

On March 11, the IFSC will launch the 2014 Cultivate Iowa campaign at the Iowa Arboretum in Madrid. “Spring into Action with Cultivate Iowa” will feature keynote speaker, Gary Oppenheimer, founder and executive director of AmpleHarvest.org. Panel presentations, demonstrations and exhibits will follow the keynote. Seed Savers Exchange has donated thousands of vegetable seeds to this campaign. Additional support has been provided by the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture.

For more information about Cultivate Iowa or the Spring into Action event, please visit www.cultivateiowa.org.

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About Cultivate Iowa

Cultivate Iowa is an initiative of the Iowa Food Systems Council's Food Access & Health Work Group (FAHWG) to promote the benefits of food gardening and produce donation to create a sustainable future and healthier communities in Iowa.

Through outreach and community engagement, Cultivate Iowa aims to inspire Iowans to grow some of their own produce and live healthier lifestyles. In addition, Cultivate Iowa is focused on empowering gardeners and community members to donate fresh produce to their local food pantries or other community organizations. For further information, visit www.cultivateiowa.org.

About the Iowa Food Systems Council

The Iowa Food Systems Council is an emerging member-based nonprofit organization whose charge is to monitor Iowa's food and health landscape, to encourage and coordinate connections between food system leaders and decision makers. The Council also identifies policies, programs and research that cultivate a resilient and sustainable food system – a food system that builds healthier Iowans, communities, economies and the environment. For further information, visit www.IowaFoodSystemsCouncil.org.