

# Growing & Nourishing Healthy Communities

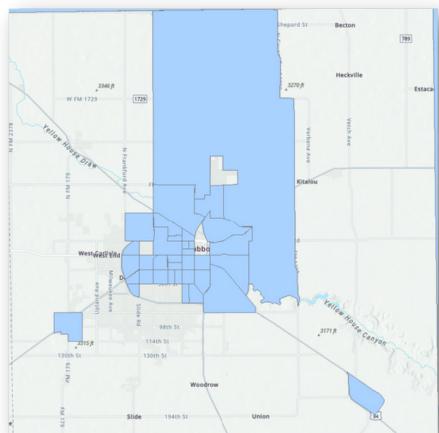
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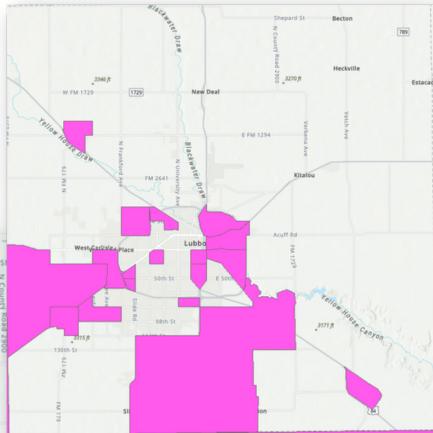
## RELEVANCE

A food desert is a geographic area where affordable and healthy food is difficult to obtain, particularly for those without access to an automobile. Food deserts also exist in rural areas and low-income communities. Some research links them to diet-related health problems in affected populations. Food deserts are sometimes associated with supermarket shortages and food security. Like many counties in Texas, Lubbock County has a high number of food deserts. Residents of low-income households living in food deserts have limited ability to access and purchase healthy foods. On the other hand, foods that are nutrient poor but high in calories are often plentiful.



### Low-income (LI) Census Tracts

The criteria for identifying a census tract as low-income are from the U.S. Department of Treasury's New Markets Tax Credit (NMTC) program. This program defines low-income as: poverty rate is 20% or greater; or median family income is less than or equal to 80% of the State-wide median family income.



### Low-access (LA) Census Tracts

Low access to food stores is characterized by the number (at least 500) and share (at least 33%) or people at different distances from the nearest supermarket, supercenter, or large grocery store, as well as the number of housing units in the area without access to a vehicle and that are more than .5 mile from one of these stores.



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Researchers suggest that an individual's food choices are often influenced by what is immediately available to them. Therefore, improving access to vegetables and fruits can be beneficial in improving the diet and the health of the community.

## RESPONSE

The Growing and Nourishing Healthy Communities (GNHC) course, which is funded in part by the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), helps increase the availability of fresh produce through teaching participants how to grow fruits and vegetables in community and backyard gardens. By incorporating cooking demonstrations using the produce grown, participants learn how to prepare the produce they harvest.

## VALUE STATEMENT

### Growing & Nourishing Healthy Communities

These nutritious programs teach low-income audiences to prepare nutritious meals, stretch their food resources, improve their food safety practices, and participate in regular physical activity. This not only improves the quality of life and reduces the risk of chronic disease for participants, but also lowers public health care costs.

**21.1%**

OF LUBBOCK  
COUNTY IS A FOOD  
DESERT

**35,132**

Number of SNAP  
eligible recipients in  
Lubbock County



## RESPONSE cont'd.

To participate in the program, individuals must (1) qualify for SNAP benefits or be a Lubbock Dream Center participant; (2) have an interest in learning how to grow vegetables; (3) agree to help build and maintain the community gardens; and (4) complete a series of educational classes to increase their gardening skills. The Lubbock Dream Center was chosen as the program site because it is within the identified geographically significant area.

### Partnerships & Collaborators

- The Lubbock Dream Center provided the use of their community garden and classroom facilities which contributed greatly to the success of this adult program.
- Master Wellness Volunteers provided cultural influence to recipes and cooking demonstrations, participant guidance and support.

Growing & Nourishing Healthy Communities was offered in a group setting which allows participants to support, bond, learn from, and encourage each other. A Spring/Summer and Fall/Winter program was held at the Lubbock Dream Center to teach participants about growing your own food year round in Lubbock County.

- Spring/Summer Program (April 28-July 21)- 12 Graduates
- Fall/Winter Program (October 27-December 15)- 7 Graduates



## Evaluation Strategy

GNHC was implemented twice- in the spring/summer and in the fall/winter. A pre-post evaluation was administered at the conclusion of each session. A total of 15 of 19 graduates returned the evaluation instrument for a response rate of 78.9%.

## RESULTS

In 2021, a combined total of 14 raised beds produced 31.3 pounds of vegetables with the support from Extension Agents Edwards and Reid and the Lubbock Dream Center. Extension Agents taught the nutrition and gardening class series, as well as conducted the cooking demonstrations with the Better Living for Texans program. Pre and post-surveys indicate participants had a statistically different positive change as a result of the GMHC program in the following areas. Please note, at the time this document was written, not all post survey results were received from the fall/winter program.

### Perceived Changes in Accessibility of Fruits and Vegetables

- Serve vegetables at meals
- Serve fruit for dessert
- Vegetables are available as a snack



### Summary

The value of the GNHC program in Lubbock County is empowering participants with the knowledge and support to grow their own vegetables, provide examples of how to consume the produce, and, therefore, have a healthy available option for food near their homes.

"I don't like green vegetables except jalapeno peppers, but I guess if I am going to grow squash, okra and cucumbers, I'll give them a try!"

### Perceived Changes in Targeted Gardening Concepts

- How to pick a site for a garden
- Know when to plant vegetables
- How and why to test soil
- How to space plants
- Water requirements and drip irrigation
- How to identify insects to determine if chemical control is needed
- Pesticide safety
- How to use mulch
- How to make and use compost

## Future Programming

Future gardening and nutrition education programs will continue at the Lubbock Dream Center. Expansion areas include: starting your garden from seed, container gardening, and gardening for pollinators.



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