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OGDEN NRCS OFFICE PARTICIPATES IN PEOPLE'S GARDEN INITIATIVE

There is something to be said about growing your own vegetables and an added bonus is having enough to share with your community. Tom Vilsack, Secretary of Agriculture, encouraged USDA employees to institute a "People's Garden" in every State and the Ogden NRCS Area and Field Offices jumped at the opportunity to do so. First Lady, Michelle Obama, brought the People's Garden concept into the spotlight via her White House Kitchen Garden. She believes gardens are an important teaching tool for children. Not only do People's Gardens afford children the opportunity to learn about healthy eating, they are able to participate in giving the "fruits of their labor" to local charities and experience the value of community service.



NRCS staffer Jennifer West reports that the Coalville NRCS Field Office is currently experimenting with Straw Bale Gardens. It's not what they'd refer to as a People Garden, as of yet, because it's still in the infancy stages. They have grown about 3 pounds of peppers but the peas and beans haven't fared as well. The ultimate goal is to work out the kinks and limited availability of land at the Coalville field office in the hopes of having a bona fide People's Garden next season. The Ogden NRCS Service Center used the lot behind their building (see accompanying photo) to create the first Ogden NRCS People's Garden. Through a joint effort with the Farm Service Agency we are

growing tomatoes, beats, Swiss chard, cantaloupe, cucumbers, beans, spinach, radishes, squash, carrots, leaks, a variety of peppers, and lettuce. Earth team volunteers, NRCS and FSA employees pitched in to mulch and till the ground, plant, weed, and harvest the bounty.

"The People's Garden gave us an opportunity to apply a few of the practices that we encourage our landowners to implement in their own conservation plans," said Field Office Engineer, Cody Tusing, who set up a micro-irrigation system along the rows with a timer to monitor water usage. The Area Resource Conservationist, Danny McBride, applied polyacrylamide (referred to as PAM) which acts as a binding agent for soil, between the rows and reduces soil erosion. Watching these practices being utilized helped a lot of the employees, who don't get in the field very often, see first-hand how water and soil conservation techniques are used.

There are three components that must be considered when starting a People's Garden:

1. It must **Benefit the Community** (food donations, wildlife friendly, a rain garden to absorb storm water run-off, a leisure space for the public to use).

2. Is **Collaborative** (an effort between volunteers, employees, and/or other organizations in the community).
3. **Incorporates Sustainable Practices** (utilizing rain barrels, composting/mulching, planting native species and/or encouraging beneficial insects that feed on destructive pests).

Currently the Ogden NRCS People's Garden has donated approximately 85 pounds of vegetables to the Ogden Catholic Community Services and has approximately 45 volunteer and employee hours invested in the project. If you are interested in starting your own People's Garden or are interested in visiting these gardens, contact the Ogden (801-629-0575) or Coalville (435-336-5853) NRCS offices.

Periodic news reports from NRCS Utah



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