



# FOOD INSECURITY CASE STUDIES







## HEALTH CARE FOUNDATION BRINGS LEADERSHIP, FINANCIAL STRENGTH TO FIGHT AGAINST FOOD INSECURITY

The harmful effects of food insecurity lurk at the core of many health and societal problems. That's why the Health Care Foundation of Greater Kansas City (HCF) has made it a priority to fund efforts aimed at improving access to quality foods, boosting nutritional education and solidifying the link between food security and improved health.

This commitment, coupled with the remarkably creative efforts of diverse individuals across the community, has helped establish Kansas City as a pioneer in developing effective solutions to the interrelated challenges of chronic hunger and unhealthy dietary habits.



HCF was among the earliest investors regionally to address food insecurity. Supporting a wide range of programs that cross cultural, geographic and socio-economic lines reflects an understanding of the widespread nature of food insecurity and the varied approaches needed to address it.

"Given the fundamental connection between health and diet, we think it is essential to support those programs that can enhance food security and the many preventive benefits it produces," said Brenda Calvin, HCF program officer. "We're fortunate to be partnering with so many dynamic individuals and organizations, all of whom understand that healthy eating is, on many levels, imperative."

Researchers say the connection between food insecurity, poor health and downstream societal ills has become increasingly self-evident. Inadequate nutrition can negatively affect brain and cognitive development, school readiness and academic performance. Physical, mental and social development likewise can be impeded, along with quality-of-life and perceived happiness.

More directly, a growing body of evidence indicates food insecurity raises the risk for obesity and a host of other chronic conditions, from anemia and asthma to diabetes and oral health problems. Indirect impacts include increased health costs, student absenteeism and lost productive time at work.

Support for area efforts aimed at mitigating food insecurity falls within HCF's Healthy Communities focus area, which also focuses on active living and tobacco use prevention. Since 2005, the foundation has awarded nearly \$35 million in one way or another to address healthy communities.

Along with funding, the foundation has worked to provide grantees with the leadership training, administrative support and strategic assistance they need to sustain their missions. Perhaps most importantly, the foundation serves as a bridge that links key stakeholders to ensure collaboration and the exchange of vital lessons across the community.

The solutions grantees have developed in response to the problem of food insecurity are as broad and varied as the region they serve. From incentivizing the purchase of fresh fruits and vegetables for families reliant on food assistance to finding ways to making vacant lots bloom, Kansas City is emerging as national leader in the fight against one of America's most intractable problems.

The following brief case studies highlight just four of the many healthy eating programs HCF has had the opportunity to support.



# el centro

## RADIO PROGRAM REACHES OUT TO AT-RISK LATINO POPULATION

Isolated by language, culture and poverty, many Latino immigrants in Kansas City face chronic health risks often made worse by their limited knowledge of nutrition and inadequate access to healthy foods.

El Centro Inc., a 40-year-old area non-profit, is reducing that isolation with an innovative program that draws from the oral tradition to educate vulnerable populations in the pursuit of healthier eating and disease prevention.

Known as Comprando Rico y Sano, or Eating Healthy and Flavorful Foods, the initiative creates educational radio novellas that air regularly on three area Spanish-speaking stations. The 5-minute segments are broadcast weekly through mid-to-late summer and present dramatic, real-life narratives as a way of engaging at-risk listeners about the importance of healthy eating.

The program is now in its ninth year and is an offshoot of El Centro's Promotoras de Salud, or Promoters of Health program. Promotoras is modeled on community health initiatives adopted in developing countries that enlist citizens to help friends and neighbors access health and nutrition resources.

"The novellas are a great way to connect with people we couldn't otherwise reach," said Cielo Fernandez, chief program officer at El Centro. "By using music and realistic characters, we're able to highlight common problems and present effective solutions."



Promotoras is modeled on community health initiatives adopted in developing countries that enlist citizens to help friends and neighbors access health and nutrition resources.



A recent novella story line focused on a new immigrant woman with diabetes who lacked the knowledge to control her illness. Successive episodes underscored the importance of healthy eating in managing the disease and identified ways diet could be improved on a limited budget. Information on portion size, food groups and how to prepare healthy recipes also was incorporated.

One of the key objectives of the program is to promote farmer's markets as a means of obtaining economical fresh fruits and vegetables. Historically, Fernandez said, new Latino immigrants have avoided farmer's markets, in part because of the stigma associated with the belief that only the poorest people shopped there.

Thanks to the radio narratives and market changes designed to better accommodate Latino shoppers, however, a rapidly growing number of immigrants are embracing the venues and the produce they offer.

The radio program has also produced significant results in other areas. Before the broadcasts began highlighting the availability of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) for eligible low-income and mixed status families four years ago, enrollment in the federal-state food aid program was extremely low among Latinos throughout the Kansas City area.

But now Latinos are enrolling in the program at a rate of about 2,500 people annually, due to a combination of the novellas and the hard work of the promotoras across the community.

Fernandez said the Health Care Foundation of Greater Kansas City has supported the Promotoras program from its inception and has also played a role in helping assess the program's ongoing impact.

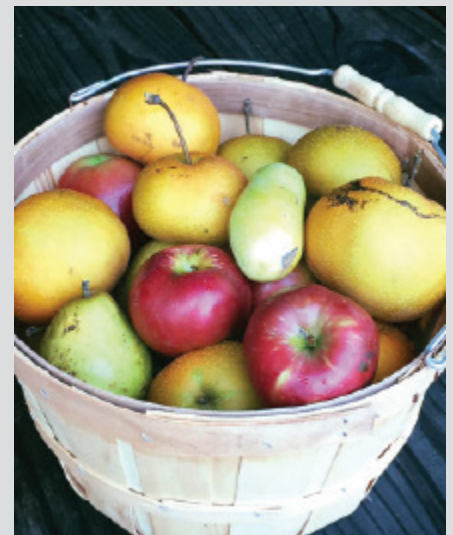
"The foundation's support has been enormously helpful," Fernandez said. "They understand that this is one of the few programs in the metropolitan area that is focused on primarily on prevention, particularly within the Latino Community. They can see the value this produces for our most vulnerable residents."





# giving grove

THRIVING URBAN ORCHARDS HELP IMPROVE DIETS,  
REJUVENATE COMMUNITIES





A visionary idea that took root in the Kansas City area six years ago continues to flourish as it improves healthy eating for low-income families and nurtures a renewed sense of community across struggling urban neighborhoods.

The Giving Grove, a program of the Kansas City Community Gardens, is a one-of-a-kind initiative that helps at-risk communities develop, harvest and share the bounty of fruit orchards planted at schools, churches and on vacant land.

Since 2013, the Giving Grove has helped plant over 2,000 trees at 135 sites throughout the metropolitan area. The annual harvest — which includes apples, pears, peaches, cherries, dates, figs and berries — is projected to exceed 250 tons in 2017.

Rob Reiman, the Giving Grove's executive director, said the Kansas City program differs fundamentally from other urban orchard initiatives nationwide, which typically depend on trained horticulturalists or volunteers to maintain a small number of centrally located groves.

The Giving Grove, in contrast, empowers citizens to take responsibility for planting, maintaining and harvesting the orchards. Most importantly, he said, the groves are established in the heart of the communities they serve.

"Our model is aimed at eliminating the complexity and cost of the supply chain by putting the fruit trees exactly where the need is," he said. "That, along with local stewardship, is what makes this so special."

Criteria for enlisting the help of the Giving Grove in creating a community orchard are straightforward: In addition to available land, at least two families in the neighborhood must commit to the project long-term; water needs to be readily accessible; and the harvest must be shared throughout the neighborhood. Along with nutritional value and flavor, tree varieties are selected based on disease resistance, climate adaptability and low maintenance requirements.

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While the program has been a success in providing greater access to fresh fruits for low-income families, the benefits extend well beyond diet and nutrition. Greater interaction and a renewed sense of community among residents of hard-pressed neighborhoods, a new sense of purpose for those involved in the cultivation, and a lessening of urban blight in areas where the orchards are planted inevitably flow from the program, Reiman said.

"I'm biased, but I think we're on to something really big with this," he said. "It is going remarkably well and exceeding everyone's expectations. Our board feels like we have a moral obligation to spread the word to other cities about the impact a program like this can have."

Several cities, including St. Louis and Birmingham, Alabama, already have reached out to learn more about how to make similar initiatives work in their communities. Omaha likewise is exploring the concept.

One constant throughout the Giving Grove's evolution has been the support of the Health Care Foundation of Greater Kansas City, Reiman said. The foundation was among the first to provide funding for the idea, which was the brainchild of three area men, Kevin Birzer, Greg Finkle and Ray Makalous. The trio was committed to providing more sustainable, nutrient-rich food to the area's growing number of hungry citizens.

"The Health Care Foundation took a risk on us, because it was a different kind of idea, and they've been with us every step of the way: Supportive, inquisitive and encouraging," he said. "I can say unequivocally that we would not have been able to do this without them as a partner."





# double up food bucks

## INNOVATIVE PROGRAM SPURS PRODUCE PURCHASING, HEALTHIER DIETS



Government aid remains essential in the fight against hunger for the area's most vulnerable populations. Yet there's no guarantee those in need can or will use their benefits to support healthy eating habits.

Fortunately, a Kansas City area program is making it easier for individuals and families battling food insecurity to afford a diet rich in fresh, nutritious foods. The Double Up Food Bucks incentive program doubles the value of SNAP dollars (previously called food assistance/stamps) for participants when they purchase fresh fruits and vegetables.

More than 1.1 million residents in Kansas and Missouri depend on federal food assistance through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) program. About two-thirds of SNAP recipients nationwide are children, elderly or disabled. The average monthly benefit to all households is \$254.

"The goal of Double Up Food Bucks is to help SNAP customers who have limited dollars to spend on food buy fresh fruits and vegetables, which they might not otherwise be able to afford," said Marlene Nagel, community development director with the Mid-America Regional Council (MARC). Nagel noted the program also is creating new opportunities for area fruit and vegetable producers by spurring demand for fresh produce.

Double Up Food Bucks in Kansas and Missouri is administered by the Double Up Heartland Collaborative, a partnership between MARC, Cultivate KC, the University of Kansas Medical Center, Douglas County and the Fair Food Network.



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A similar incentive program called Beans and Greens led by Cultivate KC and Menorah Legacy Foundation was launched seven years ago at several area farmer's markets. A grocery store pilot program in 2015 further demonstrated that an incentive program encouraging the purchase of vegetables and fruits could work in store settings.

Thanks to the success of the earlier programs, MARC in June 2016 won a \$3 million U.S. Department of Agriculture grant to extend the reach of the Double Up initiative. A prerequisite for winning the grant was the ability to secure equivalent matching funds from non-federal resources.

Notably, a significant portion of those matching dollars were provided by the Health Care Foundation of Greater Kansas City in conjunction with other non-traditional funders. Last year, the Double Up Food Bucks program was available at stores and markets across the Kansas City metro area, as well as in eastern Kansas and the St. Louis area. A total of about 100,000 transactions resulted in about \$128,000 in Double Up spending on produce in 2016.

In 2017, the Double Up Heartland Collaborative is expanding the program's footprint to include more locations in the Kansas City area, eastern Kansas, the St. Louis metropolitan area and in small towns across outstate Missouri. This year, Double Up Food Bucks will be available at:

- 28 farmers market locations and 53 grocery stores in the Kansas City metro
- 21 farmers market locations and 60 grocery stores in the St. Louis metro and in outstate Missouri
- 17 farmers market locations and 2 grocery stores in eastern Kansas

"If the program continues to be successful at increasing the purchase and consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables on a broad scale, policy officials and others hope it could drive food policy at the federal level and perhaps lead the USDA to incorporate similar initiatives into the SNAP program," said Donna Martin, a public health planner and also the program manager for Double Up Food Bucks initiative.

A survey conducted last year by the University of Kansas Medical Center found SNAP customers were reducing junk food consumption and eating more fruits and vegetables thanks to the program.

Both Martin and Nagel said HCF's support has been essential to Double Up's success, both during the early years and in helping meet the matching fund requirements for the federal grant.

"Being able to say early on that HCF was a strong partner and supporter of this effort was enormously helpful to us in securing additional funding," Nagel said. "And they've continued to offer advice and expertise as the program has rolled out."





# after the harvest

## GROUP HARVESTS CORNUCOPIA OF FRUITS AND VEGETABLES FOR AREA AT-RISK POPULATIONS

Fresh fruit and vegetables — and the health benefits that go with them — unfortunately remain out of reach for many with insufficient means. But thanks to a powerhouse Kansas City area program, a growing abundance of fresh produce is making its way to local families who need it most.

After the Harvest, a non-profit launched in 2014, captures vast quantities of fruit and vegetables that would otherwise go to waste. The food is distributed to at-risk families and individuals by area food banks and pantries. In 2016, the organization collected 3.6 million pounds of produce made up of more than 65 varieties of fruits and vegetables.

"We deliver everything from apples to zucchini and all varieties in between," said Lisa Ousley, the program's executive director. "It flies off the shelves in food pantries and provides an enormously important dietary component for those who depend on food banks and pantries."

After the Harvest is the largest single donor of fresh produce to Harvesters — The Community Food Network, the Kansas City-based regional food bank that serves a 26-county area in northwest Missouri and northeast Kansas. Harvesters, in turn, distributes the produce to 320 smaller regional agencies that collectively feed more than 35,000 people every week.







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The Produce Procurement program — which accounts for the vast majority of After the Harvest’s produce — works with large, commercial producers, as well as Farmer’s Choice, a Florida-based farmers agent that sources truckloads of non-retail grade produce for distribution to food banks and pantries nationwide. After the Harvest is one of Farmers’ Choice’s largest nonprofit distributors.

Christina Martin, president of After the Harvest’s board and a pro bono consultant to the group, said the Health Care Foundation of Greater Kansas City has played an integral role in the initiative’s ongoing success.

The program had its origins in a similar, faith-based initiative started by the Society of St. Andrew in 2008, and relies on two primary avenues to procure fruits and vegetables: A Gleaning Network works with area farmers to salvage crops in the field, while a second program links up with commercial producers throughout the eastern and southern U.S.

In nearly all cases, the produce is made available because its shape, size or color doesn’t meet the grading standards necessary for retail sale. Aesthetics, however, have no effect on taste or nutritional value, Ousley said.

“It is not Grade A Fancy, but it is still high quality and delicious, and much of it would go to waste if we were not in a position to take it,” she said.

Although After the Harvest’s gleaning program is small, Ousley said it provides an important connection with the community by creating an opportunity to engage with both volunteers and area farmers.

“Our farmers are some of the most generous people on the planet,” Ousley added. “We have absolutely no issues convincing them to work with us.”

Every pound of donated produce is documented and tracked, which provides donors with the opportunity to claim the value of the donations against their taxes. After the Harvest also is working with state legislators to establish tax credits at the state level for produce donations.



“The Health Care Foundation provided us with help in strategic planning, administrative support and leadership development. And they’ve also worked hard to help the non-profits that work on food insecurity form collaborations that take everyone forward. They truly understand the importance of what we’re trying to do.”

