

Tending Soil & Sharing Harvests with

Growing Together WI

Shifting from direct education to policy, systems and environmental (PSE) change efforts, Menominee FoodWise Educator Chelsey LaTender saw early efforts of a Master Gardener Volunteer (MGV) in an abandoned plot as an opportunity to develop and learn with the community around garden-based education.

A Challenge

FoodWise Educator Chelsey LaTender does not have a history of gardening. But when her Coordinator Lori Schuettpelez suggested looking into Growing Together WI, a collaboration between Wisconsin Master Gardener Volunteers and FoodWise, Chelsey decided it was an effort to take on. With direct education opportunities either paused with partners or still virtual due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the timing was ripe for exploring this PSE opportunity. Lori submitted an application and the team received a grant, using about \$1500 to support growth of the community garden in 2021.



The Menominee Food Distribution partnered with Chelsey to provide garden space and be a point of contact for people to find and take home produce. An MGV, Francisco, had built garden beds in previous seasons, which made the 1950 square foot space ready for growing. Challenges, however, came one after the other, from needing more volunteer help to maintain the garden, to a particularly hot, dry summer, to difficulties with partners' abilities to recruit participants.

A Solution

Though the garden itself did not have an abundance of in-person participants, the significant amounts of what Chelsey and volunteers learned and grew had wide impacts. People were excited to see the fresh produce at the Distribution Center.

For harvests that were not being taken as readily as ripe tomatoes, Chelsey nimbly worked to offer virtual What's Cooking lessons around those foods. This not only created educational touch-points about the nutritional value of a hearty green like kale, but also encouraged giving unfamiliar produce a try by sharing different ways to prepare and use these items.

Successes



From the 24 different varieties planted, including and not limited to various onions and squash, bell and jalapeno peppers, cabbages, radishes and carrots and cauliflower, 124 pounds of fresh produce was donated to the Menominee Food Distribution and USDA Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR). At least 70 people received and used this fresh produce, with 5 engaging in garden-based direct education programming and 25 individuals through indirect education efforts.

Because gardening is not only about what is produced in a single season, but also about how the soils are tended and cared for in the coming years, Chelsey contacted Extension Agriculture agent Dr. Jamie Patton to learn more about the soil. Dr. Patton found that potassium was lacking. A cover crop such as red clover would help boot and rebalance the soil's nutrients. Patton also was able to offer guidance on where plants like tomatoes or corn might grow particularly well in the space. As the garden was weeded and cleaned at the end of the season, these recommendations were helpful in beginning to think about plans for next spring. Chelsey intends to connect with College of Menominee Nation, where a greenhouse could get seedlings growing strong early on and new partnerships could deepen the community of this garden.