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Community gardens to provide fresh produce to those in need

In an effort to provide fresh fruits and vegetables to low-income individuals and families, Mid Michigan Community Action is helping to coordinate seven community gardens across central Michigan.

Gardens, of various sizes, are being planted in Bay, Clare, Gladwin, Mecosta, Midland and Osceola Counties. In order to coordinate such a widespread project, Mid Michigan Community Action (MMCAA) is collaborating with several different local agencies.

Overall, over 41,000 square feet of garden has been planted between the seven locations. If the gardens produce well, 9,000 pounds or more of fresh produce will be harvested and distributed throughout mid-Michigan.

Two local nurseries have made significant donations to the project. Elm Creek Nursery of Farwell and Seres Farm and Garden of Gladwin donated nearly 80 flats of vegetables. Many of these were added to the gardens, but over 2,300 plants were given to mid-Michigan families in an effort to promote home gardening.

“The support from area businesses is greatly appreciated, Jill Sutton, MMCAA Executive Director, said. “This is another example of our communities pulling together to help those in need.”

The Bay County garden is nearly one acre in size and is being maintained by the Bay County United Way’s Retired Senior Volunteer program. Similarly, the Mecosta County garden is a raised-bed garden with seniors from the Commission on Aging providing the day-to-day maintenance. The Clare and Gladwin County gardens are about 2,000 square feet in size and are coordinated and cared for by groups of local youth (ages 18-24), employed by MichiganWORKS! Summer Youth Program.

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Community Gardens, 2

Midland County's garden is being maintained in collaboration with the Salvation Army and the HOPE Youth Board/Michigan Youth Opportunity Initiative. The Osceola County garden is located on the grounds of Eagle Village.

Each garden is being planted with a variety of fruits and vegetable including potatoes, greens, cabbage, tomatoes, melons, peppers, brussels sprouts, eggplants and beets. In addition to providing fresh produce, the gardening project will also offer education opportunities for residents to learn about the advantages of gardening and how to cook using fresh produce.

"The goal of these gardens is to provide individuals and families with produce that may not be able to afford it, Sutton said. "We also hope to provide information and resources so that they can plant their own gardens," she said.

In order to coordinate the project, MMCAA is partnering with the University of Michigan-Flint's Center for Applied Environmental Research. CAER is a center within the University Outreach department at the University of Michigan-Flint that addresses regional natural resource issues and provides public education; particularly in the areas of land protection, water quality, and outdoor recreational opportunities. CAER supports MMCAA in the role of coordinating their community gardening program.

Mid Michigan Community Action Agency is a non-profit, human services agency serving Bay, Clare, Gladwin, Mecosta, Midland and Osceola Counties since 1966.

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