



Donation Garden

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The Iowa State Northeast Research and Demonstration Farm (NERF) was used as a site for a home demonstration donation garden. Iowa State NERF and ISU Extension and Outreach partnered to grow and donate fresh and wholesome produce to area food pantries. As both Floyd and Bremer County Extension Councils had chosen “Engaging Iowans in Food Supply, Safety, and Access” under the ISU Extension and Outreach Covid-19 Recovery Action Plan, this fit into their efforts and both county directors agreed to make this a joint program. Partial funding was provided by a Growing Together Iowa mini-grant. Growing Together is a multi-state SNAP-Ed donation garden project that increases access to fruits and vegetables, promotes healthy food access, and provides nutrition and gardening education to individuals and families who are food insecure.

Materials and Methods

Seeds and plants were obtained and donated from various sources, including those at the research farm from vendors, plus plants from the Floyd County FFA greenhouse and growers. Iowa State University Extension and Outreach—Bremer County donated plants grown by Cannon Greenhouse in Westgate as part of their long-term Waverly Community Sharing Garden. Planting was done in mid-to-late May. Planting was done by the ISU Northeast Research and Demonstration Farm staff and assisted by ISU Extension and Outreach directors Milius and Lenth.

Plant types were focused on volume and production where possible, although donations dictated the final selection. Seeds were from those donated to the research farm. Cucumbers, tomatoes, peppers, beans, cabbage, watermelons, beets, peas, and sweet corn were planted.

Daily care, watering, mulching and harvesting was done mostly by the Iowa State research farm staff. Watering was done mainly to get the seeds and transplants started immediately after planting, and grass or alfalfa mulch from yielded test plots was used for water conservation and weed suppression. Deliveries of produce were mainly handled by ISU Extension and Outreach directors Milius and Lenth and farm staff. Each detailed harvest date and weight was recorded by Ken Pecinovsky, farm manager.



Figure 1. Home demonstration garden field day at the Donation Garden.

Results

All the 2021 produce (4,643.1 lbs.) were donated to area food pantries in both counties, plus the Northeast Iowa Food Bank in Waterloo, Floyd County Senior Congregate Meal Sites, and the Community Daycare Center in Charles City. The Food Bank services local pantries in a 16-county area for food-insecure families. In 2021, Floyd donated 2,481 lbs. and Bremer County donated 1,796 lbs. In 2022, Floyd ISU Extension donated 5,581 lbs. and Bremer County donated 604 lbs. from the research farm garden. These donations went to food pantries, daycares, schools, retirement homes, etc. Cucumbers were the largest producer with 2,209 and 3112 lbs. in 2021 and 2022, respectively (48% of total each year). In both years, July was dry (2.53-2.55 in.), followed by beneficial rains starting August 9, 2021 (4.92 in.) and August 6, 2022 (2.87 in.) that increased garden yields. Tomatoes and peppers were set back by a May 31, 2021, late frost, but most of the peppers came back well. The large cabbage planting did extremely well and had some second growths. Beets did quite well for the size of area planted.

Table 1. Weights of garden produce donated to local food pantries –2021.

Produce	Length of harvest	Weight, lbs.
Apples	Sept 12-Oct 20	115.9
Lettuce	June 21-July 9	9.4
Cucumbers	July 16-Oct 5	2,209.0
Peas	July 2-July 13	47.8
Beans	July 19-Sept 17	187.9
Cabbage	July 3-August 26	678.0
Peppers	July 26-October 15	211.0
Beets	July 9-August 4	77.2
Sweet Corn	August 3-August 23	680.6
Tomatoes	August 5-October 14	352.8
Watermelon	August 5-August 26	73.5
Total		4,643.1

Table 2. Monthly rainfall for growing season–2021

Month	Amount, in.
March	1.69
April	0.63
May	3.48
June	1.42
July	2.53
August	10.58
September	1.61
October	1.61
November	2.02
Total	28.46

1st killing frost–October 22

Table 3. Weights of garden produce donated to local food pantries –2022.

Produce	Length of harvest	Weight, lbs.
Apples	Sept 8-Oct 7	920.9
Rasberries	August 8-Oct 7	12.7
Cucumbers	July 19-Sept 30	3,112.0
Peas	July 14- July 25	5.9
Beans	July 21-Sept 1	63.5
Cabbage	June 27-Sept 1	885.3
Egg Plant	Aug 24-October 7	48.3
Beets	July 18-August 22	140.6
Sweet Corn	August 9-August 19	235.1
Tomatoes	August 1-October 7	613.6
Watermelon	August 19-Sept 30	481.7
Total		6,519.6

Table 4. Monthly rainfall for growing season–2022

Month	Amount, in.
March	2.4
April	3.62
May	4.1
June	5.22
July	2.55
August	6.74
September	1.03
October	0.75
November	2.02
Total	28.43

1st killing frost–October 8

Acknowledgements

The team effort with the NERF staff, area citizens, Master Gardeners, plus Floyd and Bremer ISU county directors all worked together to make this a successful venture and provide fresh produce to food-insecure families.