

IMPACT

University of Idaho
Extension

Teton County
208-354-2961, Fax: 208-354-3516
235 S. 5th E. Driggs, ID 83422

4-H changemakers tackle hunger and food security in the Tetons

AT A GLANCE

With high economic inequality and growing interest in locally produced food, UI Extension Teton County begins 4-H food donation program for underserved individuals and families.

The Situation

The U.S. Economic Policy Institute reported in 2016 that Teton counties Wyoming and Idaho have the highest income inequality in the U.S. (Sommeiller et al. 2016). In Teton County, Idaho, 12 percent of the population and 17 percent of children are considered food insecure (Feeding America 2014). In a recent United Way study of financial hardship, researchers found that 45 percent of Teton County, Idaho working households were living below the necessary income required to satisfy the minimal cost of the five basic household necessities – housing, child care, food, transportation and health care (this is known as the ALICE threshold, which describes households that are Asset Limited, Income Constrained and Employed) (Hoopes et al. 2016). Despite being amongst the wealthiest of communities in the United States, many individuals and families in the Tetons are forced to make tough decisions about household necessities, including buying nutritious food. In 2016, UI Extension Teton County began working with the Community Resource Center of Teton Valley to tackle the issue of food access and hunger relief through 4-H youth-driven food donation programs.

Our Response

One of the many benefits of 4-H is that participants learn through hands-on experiences. Giving back to the community through civic engagement and service is also a goal of 4-H. With increased awareness



University of Idaho Extension educator Jennifer Werlin shows 4-H youth how to thin seedlings in their "Teton 4-H Giving Garden."

of keeping dollars within the community and supporting the farmers and land that grow our food, interest in and production of local food and agriculture products continues to grow each year in the Teton region (Newman et al. 2014).

In the spring of 2017, Teton County 4-H received two Community Foundation of Teton Valley grants to plant the seed for community and 4-H hunger relief projects. Tying into UI Extension Teton County community food systems programming, local 4-H participants grew nutritious and organically grown produce for donation, raised two beehives located at Full Circle Farm (a small, biodynamic farm in Victor, Idaho), as well as raised and donated a 4-H market pig to feed underserved individuals and groups identified through the Community Resource Center of Teton Valley. Donation recipients included the Seniors West of the Tetons, the Teton Valley Food Pantry and Family Safety Network.

Program Outcomes

The hunger relief efforts produced social, economic and environmental benefits. The market pig donated to the Seniors West of the Tetons center yielded an estimated 175 pounds of pork, with an in-kind value greater than \$800. Other 4-H livestock buyers in the community also donated their processed animals to charitable organizations, multiplying the impact of the food donations.

With volunteer, business and philanthropic support, infrastructure, equipment, raised garden beds and supplies were purchased and installed in the spring of 2017. The “Teton County 4-H Giving Garden” was born.

Over the course of the growing season, UI Extension staff, youth and volunteers cultivated the garden and learned about charitable food donations and food security. In addition, with Extension educator support, youth and adult volunteers were able to learn about high-altitude and short-season gardening and beekeeping in an experiential, project-based setting. With the small, yet productive first-year garden, over 100 pounds of the 4-H produce was donated to Teton County families and individuals in the first growing season. Both food donation projects accomplished goals such as providing hands-on, place-based learning opportunities for youth and empowering youth and adult volunteers to help alleviate food insecurity and hunger in the Tetons.

The Future

There is positive momentum towards UI Extension and 4-H food donation programs. In the spring of 2018, UI Extension Teton County, our 4-H youth and the Community Resource Center of Teton Valley (CRCTV) are planning on starting a Teton Valley “Grow a Row” garden donation program. Promoted by our partners and the Teton Food and Farm Coalition, this program will encourage community members to grow extra garden produce for the CRCTV’s food donation and waste recovery program. Along those same lines, Teton County’s UI Extension office will work with the fair board and livestock sale committees to improve tracking the outcomes of 4-H livestock sale donations. The Teton County “4-H Giving Garden” will also be expanded and refined as the 4-H gardening and beekeeping club grows.

Cooperators and co-sponsors

Teton Food and Farm Coalition, Community Foundation of Teton Valley and Community Resource Center of Teton Valley



The Teton County 4-H swine club donated one of their market pigs to the Seniors West of the Tetons in 2017. Photo credit: UI Extension Teton County.

References

- Feeding America. (2014). *Map the Meal Gap*. Retrieved March 1, 2017, from <http://map.feedingamerica.org/>
- Hoopes, S., Abrahamson, A., Hills, L., Mao, H., & Thall, J. (2016). *United Way ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) Pacific Northwest: Idaho, Oregon, and Washington Study of Financial Hardship Report*.
- Newman, S., Dearien, C., Gray, D., & Saul, D. (2014). *Assessment of Teton View Agriculture for Local and Regional Markets*. Moscow, ID: University of Idaho and High Country Resource Conservation and Development Area, Inc.
- Sommeiller, E., Price, M., & Wazeter, E. (2016). *Income inequality in the U.S. by state, metropolitan area, and county*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Economic Policy Institute.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Jennifer Werlin, Extension Educator
University of Idaho Extension, Teton County
235 S. 5th E.
Driggs, ID 83455
Phone: 208-354-2961
Fax: 208-354-3516
Email: jwerlin@uidaho.edu