

Wyoming Hunger Initiative actions strengthen anti-hunger efforts across state

The scope of the Wyoming Hunger Initiative has grown in ways no one could have imagined when launched in October 2019 with a very specific goal in mind: do whatever possible to support anti-hunger organizations working tirelessly throughout the state.

The Wyoming Hunger Initiative (WHI) has witnessed tremendous strides in its fight against food insecurity in Wyoming during these uncertain times. Four programs were launched under the WHI banner in the last 18 months: *Food from the Field*, *Food from the*

Farm + Ranch, *Wyoming Angel Accounts*, and *Wyoming Hunger Initiative Grants*.

Each addresses a specific Wyoming need and is built on invaluable partnerships that make their success possible. These programs have made a



County 10 News

Pushroot Community Garden in Lander was one of the 39 organizations that applied for Grow a Little Extra funding to enhance their garden space and ensure they had the necessary supplies to donate produce to their local food pantry. First Lady Jennie Gordon stopped by the garden in May to help plant tomatoes. Since May, over 300 pounds of produce has been donated to Lander Care and Share Food Bank.



Wyoming Hunger Initiative, in partnership with University of Wyoming Cent\$ible Nutrition and Master Gardener programs, distributed six varieties of seeds to all 23 counties in Wyoming as well as growing instructions and information on how to donate harvested produce. Anyone who was interested in growing a little extra this year could donate through their local University of Wyoming Extension office.



Go to www.NoHungerWyo.org for more information about the Wyoming Hunger Initiative.

significant impact in the state. *Food from the Farm + Ranch* is discussed in greater detail below with specifics for the *Grow a Little Extra* program.

Food from the Farm + Ranch

Food from the Farm + Ranch focuses on two areas. First, provide high-quality, locally grown protein to food pantries throughout Wyoming. Second, make fresh, locally grown produce available to those in need. More than 15,000 pounds of Wyoming-raised beef, pork, and lamb have been donated by Wyoming ranchers and other community purchasers through local county fair livestock sales. This generosity has made the program's vision a reality for scores of families; it's truly a Wyoming solution to a Wyoming challenge.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, it was easy to look to the world of agriculture for hunger solutions. There was no better time to recognize Wyoming agriculture while meeting the unprecedented increase in food needs across the state. Although protein was being processed and distributed across the state, fresh produce was lacking. We wondered if there was a way to include fresh vegetables. In particular, was there a way for vegetable growers to donate a portion of their harvest to provide a well-balanced meal for all of our Wyoming neighbors in need? From this need, *Grow a Little Extra* was born.

Grow a Little Extra

WHI regional directors Caitlin Youngquist and Lori Dickinson, both from University of Wyoming Extension, spearheaded the newest effort within *Food from the Farm + Ranch* that encouraged gardeners to *Grow a Little Extra* for their neighbors in need.

The program, a collaboration between WHI and the University of Wyoming's Cent\$ible Nutrition and Master Gardener programs, targeted three groups in Wyoming: home gardeners who might "grow a little extra" to share with local food pantries; existing community gardens that could dedicate one or two

sections to growing food specifically for local food distribution agencies; and churches or community organizations interested in starting a new garden to grow food for their local community.

Many Wyomingites were looking to help during the pandemic, and this was one option to make a difference in their own local communities.

To better support local organizations that wanted to *Grow a Little Extra* in 2021, WHI partnered with the Hughes Charitable Foundation to distribute \$18,600 to 39 grant recipients across the state and the Wind River Indian Reservation.

The funding helps provide materials or supplies to grow additional produce for families in need within a local community. Items eligible for grant funding include irrigation supplies, potting soil, tools, plant starts, raised bed supplies, and scales, just to name a few.

Seed packets were also purchased by WHI and distributed to the Cent\$ible Nutrition Program in every Wyoming county so anyone interested in *growing a little extra* could pick up seed packets and growing instructions. CNP educators serve as an invaluable local resource, so it only made sense for them to collect incoming produce donations, weigh them, and distribute them to local anti-hunger organizations. Recipe cards were distributed with the produce to serve as an educational component. More than five tons of fresh produce had been donated as of October, 2021. This is the power of partnership!

You don't need special training in fighting food insecurity to make a difference. You only need to identify a need and figure out how best to help fill it. Food insecurity isn't always readily apparent, but every Wyoming county has an army of anti-hunger heroes who are always ready to welcome new warriors to the fight. Consider this your invitation to get involved. Together, we can end hunger in Wyoming.

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Wyoming First Lady **Jennie Gordon** launched the Wyoming Hunger Initiative in October 2019.

Local effort, local harvest, local benefit

Stories like the following remind us you're never too young or inexperienced to serve. A 9-year-old 4-H'er committed to gardening throughout the summer. When his first 9 pounds of carrots were ready to harvest, he wanted to distribute them himself to every single car that came through his local pantry that week. He felt pride in his harvest, and his excitement in sharing the "vegetables" of his labor will no doubt make an impact on him throughout his life.

He isn't the only one in Wyoming new to the gardening scene, either.

Head Start preschoolers grew their first squash and beans while learning about the concept of the life cycle. Elementary schools around the state established gardens for the first time, enabling students to participate in the planting and care of a garden all summer long. Local effort, local harvest, and local benefit: that's a Wyoming solution to a Wyoming challenge, too.



Jace Mitchell grew carrots this year with seeds provided through Wyoming Hunger Initiative for his first 4-H project. He harvested 9 pounds of carrots he was able to donate to his local pantry, Afton Food Pantry, and he was able to walk his produce out to all 24 cars that came through the pantry that week.

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