

Community benefits from FFA garden

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
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Those in need get free produce at Farmer's Market booth.

Pumpkins, tomato and other vegetables and fruit flourish on a neighborhood street corner.

Most days, Gothenburg FFA'ers show up at the community garden. at the corner of Avenue G and 12th Street, to pick produce which they sell at the Farmer's Market.

But money is not exchanged for all of the produce sold at the Thursday market in Ehmen Park.

Some is given to people who have cards they receive from the local food pantry that allow them to fill up a bag of free produce.

FFA president and Gothenburg High School senior Jessica Schmidt oversees the garden project.

Wanting to give produce to people who need it was a thought she had last year.

This summer, she took the concept to a leadership conference in Washington D.C. where others helped her brainstorm about how to do it.

What evolved was a plan where those in need could present a card for free produce grown in FFA's community garden.

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“Most of the food from the food pantry is canned and people are not getting all of the nutrients they need,” Schmidt said.

Schmidt’s brother, Roman Schmidt, who is also an FFA’er, said the people who present cards are “always happy with what they walk away with.”

Once produce became ripe for picking in mid June, Schmidt took 10 bags to Stone Hearth Estates and the rest has been sold or given away.

Since the Farmer’s Market began on July 11, she said 48 people have filled a bag with free produce.



“It makes me feel good because I know I’m helping someone,” Schmidt said.

So far, the FFA’ers have raised about \$203 from sales at the Farmer’s Market which they plan to donate to the community.

“The FFA chapter has to vote on what that will be,” she said.

Interestingly, a community garden as a service project came from another leadership conference in D.C. and was spearheaded in 2011 by FFA’ers Morgan Kowalewski, Madison Costello and Kristin Bartlett.

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When Schmidt graduates this May, she hopes another FFA'er will step forward to continue the community garden and the selling of and giving away produce.

As for Schmidt, she hopes to be chosen as a state FFA officer this spring and take college classes after graduation.

"FFA has done a lot for me," she said. "It was difficult to talk to people before."

By honing parliamentary procedure skills, doing public speaking and going out for high school speech, Schmidt said she came out of her shell.

She's also learned through FFA such things as how to work with and motivate people and about science and livestock management.

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