



GLOBAL FOOD INITIATIVE

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Pennsylvania Harrisburg First Community Garden

by Marianne Fitzkee

The Harrisburg (Pa) First congregation has been tending to their community garden for about five years now, thanks to the original initiative of former pastor Belita Mitchell and a grant from the Global Food Initiative (GFI). The current garden coordinator, Waneta Benson, cites this year as the best year yet! She came to Harrisburg First as the church's second Brethren Volunteer Service (BVS) worker and served faithfully ever since through developing the children's ministry, playing organ for worship, and now spearheading the gardening effort along with her son—a role she's very qualified for, having lived around gardens for 80-plus years.

The garden, which can be found tucked behind a garage in the church's back parking lot, is home to six raised beds growing tomatoes, greens, cauliflower, peppers, herbs, berries, and more. This year, the gardeners—mostly church members who live in the surrounding Allison Hill community—will enjoy their harvest with their families. Pre-COVID, the church hosted a baked potato dinner using their own potatoes to share the bounty.

In addition to the raised beds, there also is a bench with some decorative flower boxes located in the garden, where people can relax and soak up the scenery.

"Grandma Waneta," as she is called by some of this year's gardeners, loves to see children get involved with the garden and notes how community gardens are a great way to utilize vacant lots to create green space in the city.

In future years, she hopes to relinquish some responsibility for the garden but looks forward to seeing how it continues to evolve. Future projects may include painting a mural on a wall adjacent to the garden or growing vines and flowers on the surrounding fence to add beauty and attract pollinators. Along with fruits and vegetables, this garden cultivates relationships, peace, and love in Allison Hill—that will surely continue to grow.



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Jeff Boshart,
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David Young

Louisiana Capstone 118 Grant

Hurricane Ida damaged fences used for livestock at Capstone 118's urban farm in New Orleans' Lower 9th Ward. The storm also made it impossible to find hay to feed Capstone's small goat herd. Capstone's executive director, David Young, explained that portable fencing would be helpful as grass was plentiful on several vacant lots in the neighborhood. The GFI was glad to provide a \$1,000 grant to procure the fencing.

Dominican Republic GFI Exploratory Visit

Leaders of **Iglesia de los Hermanos** (IDLH,- the Church of the Brethren in the Dominican Republic) invited GFI's manager, Jeff Boshart, to visit the Caribbean nation to help with the design of a farm credit program. Boshart, along with GFI volunteers Eric Ramirez and Linda and David Dows-Byers, traveled to the Dominican Republic in May to better understand the needs of farmers and how a GFI-supported project might be useful.

During the week-long visit, the GFI team visited with farmers in nine communities where IDLH has a church presence. Farmers expressed the difficulty in receiving credit for inputs and especially labor costs for farm activities such as weeding and harvesting, and in some cases land rent, leading to loss of productivity and farm income. Modes of travel during the week included pickup truck, horse, and homemade ferry.

Dominican church leaders see a farm credit program for farmers in their communities playing an essential role leading to self-sufficiency for congregations and ultimately the national church. Although the program shows promise and farmers are enthusiastic about the possibility, several legal and institutional hurdles need to be cleared before the program is ready for funding. Follow-up conversations between the GFI and IDLH are ongoing.



Ariel Rosario



Candlyn Fitchner

Pennsylvania Alpha and Omega Community Center Grant

The **Alpha and Omega Community Center** in Lancaster, Pa., provides food to between 500 and 600 families each month. A GFI grant of \$2,000 led to the purchase of a new refrigerator and freezer. This will allow the organization to receive more fresh and frozen food donations from the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank and local churches.

Pennsylvania and Maryland Community Garden Exchange

In **July of this summer**, youth and advisors from the Lancaster (Pa.) congregation spent a day serving together with members of the Graceway International Community Church (Dundalk, Md.). Utilizing funds from the GFI, raised beds were constructed and planted with fall season vegetables. Graceway's pastor and church planter, Yakubu Bakfwash, expressed he was grateful to God for the visit.

As of 2020, the Lancaster congregation also has a community garden. Both congregations are slowly turning church lawns into productive gardens. Lancaster youth pastor and GFI review panel member Linda Dows-Byers reported that a young apple tree in the center of the garden showed promise with its first two apples. All involved are hoping that like the apple tree, the relationships and the gardens will continue to grow and bear much fruit in future years.

Linda Dows-Byers

