

## Family Garden Program

In 2010, the Johns Hopkins Center for American Indian Health developed a Community Visioning Board with members of a Tribe in the Southwest. The Visioning Board consisted of local community members and partners that were interested in improving food access and nutrition in local communities. The board decided that a family garden program was crucial to providing families with access to healthier foods.

The Tribe's family garden program was established in 2010 as part of the overall Feast for the Future program. Forty family gardens were created throughout the Reservation. The family garden program is a resource for community members and families to start their own backyard gardens. It is intended to help them build the skills necessary to grow and cultivate their own fruits and vegetables. The program also helps to foster healthy behaviors such as physical activity and improved diets through increased access to different varieties of fruits and vegetables. A unique aspect of the family garden program is that it introduces families to new fruits and vegetables. It also reintroduces traditionally grown crops (i.e., corn, squash, sugar cane) that were vital to the Tribe's food systems.

The goals of the Family Garden program were:

- To serve as a resource for community members interested in developing their own gardens.
- To provide a garden model for communities and families.
- To provide technical assistance to existing family garden participants.
- To reach as many communities as possible throughout the reservation.

The Feast for the Future program staff observed many individual benefits of the Family Garden program firsthand, including participants' increased gardening knowledge, increased access to healthy foods such as fresh fruits and vegetables, and stress relief. We have also observed family benefits, including more family time and togetherness, improved home aesthetics, and beautification. Community benefits may include an increased awareness about local food systems, decreased food insecurity and food deserts, community connectedness and Farmers Market participation. Gardening may also help to prevent diet-related diseases such as obesity and diabetes.

There are also various challenges in developing a family garden program, stemming from factors including location, climate, and availability of natural resources. Environmental challenges include soil availability and quality, weather, animals such as horses, and water availability. Additional challenges may include transportation, pest control, family relocation, and money.