

*Workshops at CBFNC's Annual Gathering can be seen as seeds being sown. This year, there will be 60 workshop opportunities. That is a lot of seed! Here's an illustration of how the seeds sown at a recent workshop produced much fruit.*

Bill Brown (the volunteer CFO — Chief Farming Officer) and David Jordan (Associate Pastor) led a workshop, “Church Gardening as a Ministry for Everyone!” at the 2015 General Assembly which was hosted by their church, Providence, Charlotte.

David had taught a Wednesday night series where he shared that the church over the centuries had been a source of hospitality, safety, and food for many by using church land for gardens that would help to feed the community. David says, “We have 22 acres around Providence, and, afterwards, several people said that we should be doing something like that. We agreed to try a pilot project of two raised beds to see what would happen.

“As word got out, folks began to donate money, volunteers began to call, and, next thing we knew, we had to start building new beds. Now, 4.5 years later, we have 29 beds and a huge series of muscadine vines that have provided many jars of excellent muscadine jam. Last year, we also planted two pear trees, two apple trees, and a peach tree that we hope will produce in the next year or two.” The produce goes to Friendship Trays and Meals on Wheels home delivery. Since 2012, they have surpassed 3,700 pounds of fresh produce contributed. There are also two beds designated for Burmese refugee families (they grow some wild stuff!) and five beds for the Weekday Education Program where preschoolers get to learn about veggies and grow some themselves that they then eat for lunch during the spring and summer.

Jim and Susan McConnell, members of First, Shelby, attended the Annual Gathering workshop and were inspired. They shared the news with fellow member Doug Sharpe who

runs the Cleveland County Potato Project. Jim, Susan, and Doug pondered the need and the potential for a community garden. Doug says, “Jim and Susan were strong encouragers for FBC’s gardening efforts. The church owns a lot in a neighborhood that contains many people deemed to be in need of food. Then, money became available. Operation Inasmuch provided a great labor force. People liked the idea of a garden shaped like a cross. When the idea was expressed in a small group, a member offered to pay for a plot containing only flowers as pollinators.”

The garden at First, Shelby, consists of several 5x20’ raised beds. They plant only high-producing vegetables such as peppers, tomatoes, okra, and a bed for blueberries. It is a “help yourself” garden for local residents. Some of those locals did not want to become consumers only; they asked if they could keep the garden weeded and watered.

“The garden has been worked by church members, residents of a ladies homeless shelter that is a block away, people who are interested in the efforts of CBF missionary Cecelia Beck, and residents of the men’s homeless shelter (about a mile away),” Doug says. He continues, “I support anything we can do to encourage an active role for Christians in our own neighborhoods. And nothing is more local than a community garden when you expect the produce to be harvested by people living in the neighborhood. This garden is a symbol of God’s love.”

Susan McConnell’s cousin saw the garden by First, Shelby, on Susan’s Facebook page and was inspired to create a community garden through his church, First United Methodist Church of Asheboro. It received a grant from Randolph Heath. The church owned a vacant lot that was tilled by tractor and nourished with tons of cow manure and rotten leaves. In April, volunteers

planted the garden. They also built seven raised beds (6x16’) that they filled with organic soil. They added water spigots and hoses to keep the garden watered. From June to August, the garden produced 233 pounds of cucumbers, 138 pounds of squash, 1181 peppers, 480 ears of corn, 337 tomatoes, and 2206 pods of okra. Hundreds of zinnia flowers were shared with nursing homes. Then, they had a large fall crop of turnips, cabbage, and broccoli. The produce goes to a local men’s homeless shelter, the local soup kitchen, the Christian United Outreach Center, and a shelter for abused women.

Since it is located on a heavily traveled road, it attracts a lot of attention and has been featured in the local newspaper several times. According to Felix Ward, “The experience has been good for the youth and some members who were completely new to gardening. It’s a great church project that helps others in the community and demonstrates love and compassion.”

