

Catawba County Cooperative Extension Center Joins Nourishing North Carolina to provide fresh produce, physical activity to community

Communities in Catawba County and across the state gain access to fresh produce

Newton, N.C. – Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina (BCBSNC) has awarded the Hmong demonstration Site a grant through Nourishing North Carolina, a statewide community garden effort making local, healthy food more accessible to people across the state. In June 2011, BCBSNC launched the program in partnership with the North Carolina Recreation and Park Association (NCRPA) to create or enhance community gardens in all 100 North Carolina counties.

“This grant will allow us to expand our garden so we can provide fresh, local produce for more people in our community and encourage healthy eating habits,” said Der Xiong, the Immigrant Agriculture Program Coordinator with Catawba County Cooperative Extension Center. “We are proud to be part of the Nourishing North Carolina network. Our garden not only provides healthy food, it also provides a safe area for our neighbors to work together, share a public green space and be physically active through gardening.”

North Carolinians continue to face serious health issues, and the state’s obesity rates remain at alarming levels. In fact, nearly two-thirds of adults in North Carolina are overweight or obese due to unhealthy eating and physical inactivity, which is above the national average¹. Community gardens are just one targeted but impactful way to address health issues across North Carolina.

“Communities across North Carolina are embracing this initiative and rolling up their sleeves to help North Carolinians eat better and live healthier lives. This is important work that reaches far beyond the growing season,” said Brad Wilson, BCBSNC president and CEO.

The Hmong Demonstration Site at the Catawba County EcoComplex Facilities first started in 2009 when they open the site to six other Hmong families in the county to have access to land and water. The Hmong demonstration site served as a site to showcase to these farmers different sustainable techniques to help them produce more and extend their growing season. The site also served as a community garden for six different families to utilize. The farmers raise vegetables that are native to their homeland and their diets. These vegetables are then harvested and taken to the market or donated to other family members. One of the biggest goals the demonstration site hopes to accomplish is to bring more youth into the program. “Many Hmong youth has lost touch with their grassroots background. We hope that we can get more youth

¹North Carolina Division of Aging and Adult Services, 2011

involve to gains some of their cultural background back as well as help these individual develop into productive members of society through trainings such as goal setting and living healthy and viable lifestyles” said Xiong.

By 2014, Nourishing North Carolina is expected to ultimately provide North Carolina communities with 190,000 pounds of produce, which will enhance the nutritional value of nearly 150,000 meals. Just in its first year, the program donated more than two tons of produce to food shelter and rescue organizations across the state

Other agencies involve in this includes Catawba County Soil and Water Conservation District, Catawba County Public Health Department, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University Cooperative Extension Program, Conover Farmers Market, Future Farmers of America Club and Catawba County Utilities and Engineering Department.

For more information about the Hmong Demonstration Site, visit www.catawba.ces.ncsu.edu And for a complete list of participating gardens, visit NCRPA’s Nourishing North Carolina webpage at www.ncrpa.net/NourishingNC. Also, like Nourishing North Carolina on Facebook.

About BCBSNC:

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina is a leader in delivering innovative health care products, services and information to more than 3.6 million members, including approximately 900,000 served on behalf of other Blue Plans. For 78 years, the company has served its customers by offering health insurance at a competitive price and has served the people of North Carolina through support of community organizations, programs and events that promote good health. Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina was named one of the World’s Most Ethical Companies by Ethisphere Institute in 2012. Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina is an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association. Visit BCBSNC online at bcbsnc.com.

About NCRPA:

Founded in 1944, the North Carolina Recreation & Park Association (NCRPA) is a nonprofit education and advocacy organization, dedicated to the advancement of the park, recreation and leisure professions in our state. NCRPA empowers park and recreation professionals and citizen board members through educational opportunities that enhance their ability to change lives and impact communities on a daily basis for the citizens of North Carolina. For an overview of the programs and services offered by the organization, visit www.ncrpa.net .