



# REACHing to a Healthier Anishinaabe

2012

## Growing Good Health through Gardening

Bay Mills Indian Community

### INCREASING ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOODS IN TRIBAL COMMUNITIES

### SUCCESS STORY

#### Summary

In 2010, less than 25% of adults in ITCM REACH tribal communities were eating enough fruits and vegetables each day. Through the Inter-Tribal Council of Michigan (ITCM) REACH grant program, Bay Mills worked to increase consumption of healthy foods and create sustainable change in the food environment by launching a gardening program, in cooperation with Bay Mills Community College and the USDA Commodity Foods Program. By 2012, Bay Mills had developed more than 20 public and personal gardens throughout the community.

#### Challenge

Bay Mills Indian Community, *Gnoozhekaaning* ("Place of the Pike") is

#### FAST FACTS

67%

Adults in ITCM REACH tribal communities do not eat enough servings of fruits and vegetables per day.

68%

Adults in ITCM REACH tribal communities are overweight or obese.

home to about 1,500 tribal community members, centered on 65 square miles of reservation land. Bay Mills is a relatively rural community in the most northern tip of the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, on the shore of Lake

Superior. According to local data, Bay Mills adults were not eating enough daily servings of fruits and vegetables. A healthy food environment is essential to improving the eating habits of community members. However, results of a community assessment found the Bay Mills food environment created many challenges for community members in accessing healthy foods: fresh fruits and vegetables are very limited in availability; the community lacks fresh food outlets such as farmers' markets; local food stores offer very few healthy food and beverage options; grocery stores are 20 miles away in the nearest city, and there is no public transportation system.

## Solution

Beginning in 2011, the Bay Mills REACH project teamed up with Bay Mills Community College, the Traditional Foods Program, and the USDA Commodity Foods Distribution Program to play a key role in educating community members about the benefits of gardening and creating a locally grown foods program. Bay Mills REACH developed and implemented a community garden located on-site at the USDA Food Distribution Center. This location is regularly visited by a good portion of the community, particularly those with limited income.

To expand the impact of this effort, Bay Mills' REACH project explored the possibility and level of need for a second community garden in year five (2011-2012). This work involved working with other tribal departments, gaining support from tribal leadership, and acquiring volunteers from the community. The coordinator worked with members of the community college biology department to gather educational materials regarding community gardening and compost sites and discussed a potential second location. Exploration of a second site led to the important discovery that while community members wanted to have fresh produce, many did not have the knowledge or ability to start a garden on their own. As a result, rather than implementing a second community garden in Bay Mills, it was decided to offer educational sessions and resources for building and maintaining home gardens.

## Results

The community garden provides an affordable option for fresh fruits and vegetables that is located on the reservation, making it an easy place to get healthy food without transportation. The home gardening program builds skills and knowledge among community members, as well as increases the overall availability of fresh produce while promoting traditional practices of growing and gathering food. Following the garden's first successful year, Bay Mills' USDA Food Program took over the planning and maintenance of the project. This supports the sustainability



of the garden and the expanded food options that it has available to tribal families.

As a result of assisting community members with the resources to implement their own gardens, there are now over twenty additional home gardens in Bay Mills. This has improved the food environment in addition to spurring increased involvement in community initiatives by residents ranging from students to elders. Community members volunteering in the gardens also experience the

positive benefits of physical activity and social connections.

Community assessment results from 2010 to 2012 show substantial improvements in policies and environments that support healthy eating. Bay Mills nutrition scores for the Community-At-Large sector of the CDC CHANGE tool increased by approximately 20% over just two years. These figures suggest an overall positive change in the community toward a healthier food environment.

## Future Directions

In the spring of 2013, the USDA Food Program will resume managing the community garden project and continue providing resources to members of the community that enable them to have gardens at their own home. Ongoing programming of the Bay Mills health center, such as chronic disease self-management classes and worksite wellness initiatives, will help to reinforce education of community members about the health benefits of eating fruits and vegetables. The Traditional Foods Program will provide skills-based workshops and community gatherings that use locally grown produce which will also help support healthy eating behaviors.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

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