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KANSAS CITY NONPROFIT EXPANDS INTO RURAL KANSAS

Giving Grove orchards provide free fruits, nuts and berries for neighborhoods facing food insecurity

Kansas City, MO – A Kansas City-based nonprofit serving food insecure communities has recently expanded its services into rural Kansas in partnership with The Big Garden in Omaha, Nebraska. The Giving Grove has traditionally served urban communities, but with grant funding from the United Methodist Health Ministry Fund, The Big Garden will open a satellite Giving Grove program in Kansas to serve food insecure individuals and families in rural communities.

Since its launch in 2013, The Giving Grove has planted 241 orchards that provide free, holistically-grown fruits, nuts and berries for communities with high rates of food insecurity. Giving Grove’s mission is to provide healthy calories, strengthen community, and improve the environment through a nationwide network of sustainable little orchards that dramatically increase access to healthy foods.

“Rural communities represent some of the highest rates of food insecurity in America. Our original Giving Grove program model only addressed hunger in urban areas. We are proud that The Big Garden has found a way to expand the number of people we reach,” said Giving Grove CEO Robert Reiman. “This is the power of The Giving Grove Affiliate Network. Our model allows our affiliates, such as The Big Garden, to take the Giving Grove program in new directions. The compounding effect of shared knowledge and best practices ensures that we are operating at our highest capacity, feeding more people and creating more environmentally friendly community space.”

The Big Garden will plant four orchards this fall in Colby, Emporia, Wichita, and Bonner Springs. Each of the steward organizations that will tend the orchards has committed to donating future harvests to food pantries, soup kitchens, and local social services agencies. They also plan to involve volunteers with limited access to fresh food in caring for the orchards as well. “It is more important than ever to teach others how to grow food and to give back to their community,” said rural Kansas Giving Grove program coordinator Molly Baurain.

After finding success with its model in Kansas City, Giving Grove began expanding to other cities with high rates of food insecurity, launching affiliate programs in St. Louis and Omaha in 2017, and Memphis and Louisville in 2020. This most recent expansion of the Omaha Giving Grove program into rural Kansas marks its first attempt at addressing food insecurity with orcharding in a rural setting. At full implementation, Giving Grove orchards will reach 15% of all food insecure Americans. The typical Giving Grove orchard will produce more than 10,570 servings of holistically-grown, free, healthy foods worth nearly \$9,000 each year. With a 50-60+ year lifespan, each orchard will produce over its lifetime more than 232,000 servings of food for people in need while sequestering carbon, reducing stormwater runoff, and providing urban tree canopy.

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Giving Grove’s vision is thousands of little orchards in food insecure neighborhoods across the nation, creating a system of local food production that feeds people for decades. Learn more at www.givinggrove.org.