



A garden to end Yolo's hunger

By JAMES NOONAN / Daily Democrat

Created: 06/12/2010 02:30:25 AM PDT



Jose Martinez, executive director for the Food Bank of Yolo County, tends to some of the recently planted square-foot gardening units. The units allow community members the ability to grow their own food in a limited amount of space. (Deo Ferrer/Democrat)

The old adage about teaching a man to fish rings true for volunteers at the Food Bank of Yolo County, who after 40 years of distributing donated food to members of the community, have taken the fight against hunger to a new level.

"We're trying to educate people about where their food comes from," said Executive Director Jose Martinez, as he thumbed over a growing tomato vine in the food bank's new community gardens. "We'll go over the steps involved, all the way from seed to table."

The gardens, which will work in conjunction with cooking classes held in the food bank's teaching kitchen, are design to educate Yolo County residents about healthy and affordable dining options that can be raised in their own backyard.

Martinez



A view through the gate of the Food Bank of Yolo County's new gardens. (Deo Ferrer/Democrat)

said the garden, most of which was planted only three to four weeks ago, features both traditional growing methods, as well as four units show-casing square-foot-gardening, a practice that has become increasingly popular with those who lack the yard space needed to sustain a traditional garden.

"With these square-foot gardens, even people living in apartments can grow some of their own food," Martinez said.

The units, which are made up of by 4-foot-by-4-foot pen filled with standard potting soil, allows would-be gardeners to plant and harvest 16 different crops in a relatively small amount of space.

In all, Martinez estimated that the materials required to construct a square-foot gardening unit could be

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purchased for around

\$80, but could be cheaper if scrap wood was donated.

The food bank expects to start holding their cooking classes in either late-June or early July, which Martinez believes will help illustrate the ways that community members can play a greater role in what goes into their diet.

"We'll be holding the classes on Mondays and Fridays," he said. "As we go through the class, we'll bring the groups out into the garden to collect some of our ingredients."

In addition, two master gardeners from the UC Cooperative Extension have volunteered to host classes designed to help community members create an optimal growing space for their newly planted gardens.

"They'll go over how much water each plant needs and how much time they should be spending in the sun," Martinez said.

As the garden project picks up into full swing, Martinez said he hopes it will help in the food bank's effort to end hunger in Yolo County, and maybe help put a little family fun back into people's diet.

"Everyone in the family can grow their own crop," Martinez said. "It's a great way to get the kids involved."

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