



NEWS RELEASE

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USDA Launches Database for Public to Sign-up and Show their People's Gardens on Interactive Map; Promotes Access to Healthy Food, Sustainable Practices

WASHINGTON – March 11, 2011 – Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today urged people across the Nation to start People's Gardens in their communities and to register their gardens in the new People's Garden database, a tool for USDA partners to showcase their People's Gardens on an interactive map. This past year, thousands of USDA employees and partners heeded Secretary Vilsack's call to give back to their communities by volunteering their time to participate in the department-wide People's Garden initiative.

"Real and effective change starts small and it starts in our own communities, and through the People's Garden initiative, people can be engaged in their own towns and neighborhoods to promote access to fresh, healthy food, as well as sustainable practices," said Vilsack.

With the opportunity for the people to enter their People's Gardens into the database, they will be able to describe each garden, identify who is involved, where it is located as well as attach photos and add the contact information for their partners. For those who start a People's Garden, they can ask to have a People's Garden sign shipped to them. To view the interactive People's Garden map and access the database, go to www.pubinfo.usda.gov/garden.

The People's Gardens initiative was launched by Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack on Feb. 12, 2009, to commemorate the bicentennial of President Abraham Lincoln's birthday. Because Abraham Lincoln called USDA "The People's Department," it was fitting to create the initiative, The People's Garden, as a platform through which USDA could challenge others to create gardens which benefit the community and incorporate sustainable practices.

A recent example of a People's Garden community partnership is with Powell Elementary School in Washington, DC and the Washington Capitals Defensemen and 2011 NHL All-Star Mike Green. Last month, USDA and Mike Green held a session which captured the school community's best ideas for elements that were important to the success of its garden. This week, the design was revealed to the school before garden construction begins. In late April, the new garden will be unveiled.

The People's Garden at USDA Headquarters is now one of 1,241 gardens that have expanded to all 50 states, two U.S. territories and three foreign countries. The surge in the number of gardens

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can in part be attributed to USDA's recent partnership with Keep America Beautiful and demonstrates how others can get involved and make a difference.

Initially, the initiative started as an effort by USDA to challenge its employees to establish People's Gardens at USDA facilities or help communities create gardens through collaborative efforts. Today, Agriculture Secretary Vilsack urges people to join the movement. Each 'People's Garden' can vary in size and type, but they must include the following three components:

- **Benefit the Community:** Gardens benefit communities in many different ways. They can create spaces for leisure or recreation that the public can use, provide a harvest to a local food bank, be a wildlife friendly landscape, or be a rain garden to absorb storm water runoff and protect the soil from erosion.
- **Be Collaborative:** The garden must be created and maintained by a partnership of local individuals, groups, or organizations.
- **Incorporate Sustainable Practices:** The garden must include gardening practices that nurture, maintain and protect the environment such as:
 - ❖ Capturing rainwater in rain barrels
 - ❖ Composting and mulching
 - ❖ Planting native species
 - ❖ Encouraging beneficial insects that feed on destructive pests

More information about The People's Garden initiative can be found at www.usda.gov/peoplesgarden or follow the initiative for real-time updates at twitter.com/peoplesgarden. Information also is available on the USDA Facebook page at www.facebook.com/USDA and photos are available at www.flickr.com/photos/usdagov. Blogs from the gardeners involved in these "People's Gardens" are featured at www.usda.gov/blog/usda.

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