

CommonWealth Gardens

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In the summer of 2007, Sellus Wilder and his wife Jessie Bessinger converted their front yard into a vegetable garden. So many friends and neighborhood children showed an interest in their yard that they soon realized there was enough support in the community to warrant a public garden in Dolly Graham Park.

The Frankfort Parks department happily gave them permission to convert a section of this City park into a community garden. Sellus went door-to-door distributing fliers inviting the community to an initial planning meeting. Countless volunteers pitched in to establish guidelines and break ground. The garden was a success, and it soon filled to overflowing as folks from other neighborhoods started to get in on the action.

The organizers of that first garden decided to form a network whose goal is to establish a community garden in every neighborhood in Frankfort. They determined that they could realize their vision within only a few years by growing exponentially (literally doubling the number of gardens every year). The network has actually grown so rapidly that they are already a full year ahead of schedule. They also expanded their mission to include school gardens, and are working to incorporate core curriculum requirements into these 'outdoor classrooms' so that students can discover math, science, and humanities in a healthy outdoor setting.

Along the way, the network branded itself as CommonWealth Gardens and became an official non-profit under the guidance of president Kris Shera and a dedicated board. UK's Franklin County Extension Office has been CommonWealth Gardens' closest ally. The network is also partnering with the local YMCA and the 'Pioneering Healthy Communities' initiative (generously supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to combat childhood obesity) in an effort to expand school gardens to every school in Franklin County. Kentucky State University MBA students have assisted in the grant-writing process, and recently helped secure a Home Depot Grant to help with school gardens. The Kentucky State University Land Grant Program and Agricultural Department also provide invaluable resources and expertise to the network. CommonWealth Gardens is also actively partnered with the City of Frankfort, the Governor's Office, and numerous community groups such as the Y-Corps and Go Frankfort.

One final goal of CommonWealth Gardens is to link the community and school gardens into a farm-to-school program that will integrate locally produced food into school cafeterias. To that end, some members are also engaged in the local farm-to-school effort, and are working to build support for a 'community kitchen.'

The following is a list of gardens that are either pending or currently in the CommonWealth Gardens network:

Logan Street Community Garden

Todd Street Community Garden

Bellepoint Community Garden

East Frankfort Park Community Garden

Immanuel Baptist Community Garden

Franklin County Women's Shelter Community Garden

Frankfort Firefighters Post 2 Garden

Elkhorn Elementary School Garden

Elkhorn Middle School Garden

Hearn Elementary School Garden

Collins Lane Elementary School Garden

Capital Day School Garden

Frankfort High School Garden

The Governor's Garden at Berry Hill Mansion

Franklin County Regional Jail Garden (pending)

State Street Community Garden (pending)

Riverside Park Community Garden (pending)

Kentucky State University Garden (pending)