



## **NRC Enhanced Garden Project: A Model for Other Communities** **Chris Zdorovtsov – 8/5/2013**

Written by National Relief Charities with contributions and review by Chris Zdorovtsov.



**Photo:** Courtesy of National Relief Charities

**National Relief Charities** (NRC) has worked in Indian Country for nearly 25 years to improve the quality of life for Native Americans by providing opportunities for them to bring about positive changes in their communities.

Gardening is one way that NRC assists individuals and programs in reservation communities. **Gardening** is a sustainable solution that helps people and communities become healthier and more self-sufficient.

NRC's enhanced gardening service enables families and communities to apply for and receive free garden tilling, seeds or seedlings, beginner to advanced training on how to plant and tend a garden, and individualized mentoring and review of garden impact.

NRC enhanced gardening service also includes mentoring and support for reservation communities establishing garden clubs, as well as leadership training for local gardening club coordinators. NRC also provides chickens and training for poultry care for family gardeners.

In recent years, NRC has witnessed a growing interest in **gardening and Farmer's markets** on the reservations. In 2012, National Relief Charities supported family and community gardens on the Pine Ridge, Lower Brule and Crow Creek reservations. This resulted in 146 healthy gardens

for community members. In 2013, National Relief Charities supported individual gardens on the Pine Ridge Reservation and 24 community gardens on the Pine Ridge, Rosebud, Cheyenne River, Yankton Sioux and Crow Creek reservations. This resulted in 108 gardens for the communities.

Mark Ford, NRC's Collaboration & Training Coordinator, says, "The participation and enthusiasm of families, communities, and collaborative partners in the enhanced gardening project has been tremendous. Working together, we are all making a bigger impact on healthy, locally-grown foods, gardening skills, and individual and community empowerment." NRC continues to advance and refine its model for supporting gardening projects on reservation communities. This year, NRC expanded its enhanced garden service to include:

- Coordinating two pre-gardening training sessions with collaborative agencies that support gardens in 4 communities (Oglala, Kyle, Porcupine and Wanblee on the Pine Ridge Reservation)
- Coordinating with a Rapid City Boy Scouts group to build 50 raised garden boxes, for use by Pine Ridge Elders
- Coordinating summer trainings for family gardeners on food canning and preservation
- Providing garden boxes and tilling for 9 Elderly Nutrition Centers that are growing fresh produce for use in congregate meals
- Supplying over 15 dozen chickens and 4 turkeys for individual and community gardeners
- Renovated and provided 3 chicken coops for individual and community gardeners
- Improving impact surveys to gauge individual gardener's needs and experience
- Involving reservation community-based programs in promoting gardening and accepting applications for tilling
- Inviting organizers of new and existing community gardens to be part of a larger collaborative in support of gardening
- Coordinating fall festivals to celebrate the accomplishments of gardeners
- Providing tools such as hoes, rakes, garden hoses and trowels for individual gardeners
- Continuing to collaborate with local organizations like SDSU Extension that support gardening, and proactively listen to the needs of individual gardeners and local community leaders

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