



### **Hunger Relief: The Local Supply Line**

*In Kansas City, fighting hunger increasingly means growing food locally.*

*John Hornbeck is the Director of Community Relations for Episcopal Community Services and the Episcopal Hunger Relief Network. He is also a member of the Greater Kansas City Food Policy Coalition and the Greater Kansas City Homeless Services Coalition, and he is on the Advisory Board for Society of St. Andrew--West. John has been involved in programs responding to hunger and homelessness in Kansas City and surrounding communities for more than twenty years. And, yes, he loves to garden.*

By John Hornbeck

On a beautiful spring morning in 2010, a group of people gathered at St. Anne's Episcopal Church in Lee's Summit, MO, to bless a brand new community garden. Named the "Garden of Eat'n", this is one out of a network of community gardens in the greater Kansas City area that contribute to hunger relief in this city. And it all begins with people who care.

There are numerous challenges to feeding the hungry in Kansas City, but few are more important than the need to provide nutritious fruits and vegetables in the form of fresh locally-grown produce. Key to addressing this challenge is the growing network of gardens, each of which enhances the ability to respond to hunger in a variety of ways.

Take, for example, the community garden at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in the heart of the city at 40th and Main, Kansas City, MO. This garden provides individuals an opportunity to work their own plot of land. You will find almost everything planted here, from herbs to flowers, from tomatoes to corn, from berries to greens. Many of the families working these plots do not have anywhere else to grow their own produce. And St. Paul's is helping with mulch, composting, a water source and other resources that might be difficult for the gardeners to obtain.



Hunger relief increasingly includes locally grown, healthy produce.

The best news though is when these growers have a bountiful harvest of more than they can use for their own family. Naturally, they can do whatever they wish with the overage but in many cases the growers donate their excess harvest to the food pantry at St. Paul's.

In addition, there are a number of plots that are dedicated specifically to supplying produce to the food pantry. Without the community garden, the pantry would need to spend more of its limited budget on purchasing fresh vegetables. The end result is the ability to provide a wider variety of nutritious food to the neighbors who visit this pantry--more than 17,000 in 2009.

This same story is repeated in other hunger relief programs across Kansas City--and in some other unique ways. For example, St. Michael and All Angels Episcopal Church in Mission, KS, recognized a need this spring. With cutbacks in summer feeding options for children who rely on free lunch programs during the school year, a different approach was developed and "Michael's Market" was born. It is probably best described as a cross between a food pantry, a CSA and a farmer's market. In addition to providing a sack of shelf stable groceries to needy families, this church has what is, in effect, a very small private outdoor market where families can select fresh produce grown in the church's community garden.

All of these are stories of providing better nutrition and healthy produce to Kansas Citians. However, this barely scratches the surface of what is possible in the future. Episcopal Community Services and the Episcopal Hunger Relief Network served more than one million meals to the hungry in 2009--through community kitchens, food pantries, meals-on-wheels, special hunger relief programs for children, and other ministries. As part of that response, we have developed an active Food Rescue Initiative that collects groceries including fresh produce and refrigerated products from sources such as Whole Foods, supplying both pantries and community kitchens. We have started a new project of organizing gleaning teams that, in partnership with the Society of St. Andrew and growers throughout rural communities around Kansas City, will go into fields and salvage end-of-harvest produce that might otherwise go to waste. This produce is sometimes delivered to local food pantries, with any excess being delivered to another of our important hunger relief partners, Harvesters--The Community Food Network.

There is simply too much hunger in Kansas City for any of the locally grown food to be wasted. One of our goals for 2010-11 is to develop additional collaborative relationships with the vital urban agriculture movement in Kansas City, with farmers markets and CSAs in the Kansas City area, and with other resources that occasionally will be fortunate enough to experience a bountiful harvest in one form or another. Through such resources, it is possible to expand the response to hunger in our community. It all starts with people who care and with people who work the earth.

*Reach John at [jhornbeck@episcopalcommunity.org](mailto:jhornbeck@episcopalcommunity.org).*