Arkansas Community Foundation’s Aspire Arkansas report released in 2011 provides county-by-county data on seven aspirations for our state, one of which is, “People will be healthy.” In this issue of ENGAGE magazine, we examine programs that are working in Arkansas to help families eat better.

I was fortunate to grow up in a family that grew vegetables in a small garden at home. Eating fresh healthy produce — and having a few extras to share with friends — is a benefit that I have taken for granted. And now that I do my own gardening, I also find that planting, watering, fertilizing, weeding and watching my garden grow give me an added bonus — a boost in mental as well as physical health. It is just plain fun to see that first tomato blush from green to red.

Making small changes that add up to a better way of eating isn’t easy. In mid-July, I opened my morning newspaper to read a story that Arkansas is ranked 48th in the nation in a 2011 healthcare report issued by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The previous year, our state was ranked 36th, which means our ranking declined significantly in just one year.

We need to reverse that trend, and good eating is a major contributor to good health.

In this issue of ENGAGE, we bring you the story of a DeWitt family learning to eat healthier (Page 1) and a program in Fayetteville to put more fresh, local food in school lunch rooms (Page 4). Learn how to establish a successful community garden on Page 5, and learn how a farmers’ market in Helena is expanding access to fresh produce for low-income families on Page 7.

Arkansas Community Foundation strives to engage people, connect resources and inspire solutions to build community. We hope this issue of ENGAGE will start a conversation within your community about new ways to help Arkansas families improve their eating habits.
Healthy Eating Is a Family Affair
by Kimberly Dishongh

Seven-year-old Reece Chambless of Dewitt regularly takes it upon himself to remind his father that candy isn’t the best choice for him. “He is always talking about that, for sure,” said his dad, Brad Chambless. He knows his son is right and he tries to comply, although he suspects Reece might just want the gummy bears for himself.

Reece’s parents have always tried to keep the sugar in his diet low, even while indulging themselves, but these days sweets – other than gummy bears – are a rarity in their house. “If it’s here, I’ll probably want it,” said his mother, Jay Chambless, “so we just don’t keep it here.”

Reece started paying closer attention to everyone’s nutritional needs last year when he learned about how nutrition affects the body through a program at his school called OrganWise Guys, provided by the United States Department of Agriculture nutrition education programs and the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture’s Cooperative Extension Service.

OrganWise Guys uses characters like Hardy Heart, Peri Stolic and Sir Rebrum to teach children – and, indirectly, their parents – to make good health, nutrition and lifestyle choices.

Ana Hollis, Arkansas County Extension agent, gets those lessons out to the public by putting posters and displays about best food choices in grocery stores, Department of Human Services offices and food pantries. She also demonstrates recipes at farmer’s markets and distributes information at commodities handouts.

Making the Switch

Reece has been one catalyst in his family’s move toward healthier eating in the last year and a half. His mom, however, is the one who took charge of the grocery list and started buying healthier foods.

Heart disease runs in her family, she explained, and she hopes this will help stave off potential problems. “My daddy actually died of a heart attack in 2006,” she said.

Heart disease is often linked to obesity, but Chambless’s father was slender, just as she is, so she knows it’s not enough just to maintain a healthy weight.

In the beginning, she didn’t tell her family what was afoot. “The first time I did it, I smoked the packages in so they wouldn’t know,” she laughed. “I just wanted to see how they would respond to it. I used ground turkey and whole wheat pasta and I just thought, ‘Oh, they’re not going to eat this!’ I thought they wouldn’t touch it at all.”

No one complained – she wasn’t sure they even noticed – so she kept at it, replacing pork bacon with lower-fat turkey bacon, and making peanut butter sandwiches with low-sugar or sugar-free jellies and jams. She also cut out most processed foods and started serving more fresh or frozen vegetables, and fewer high-sodium canned ones, and added fruits and high protein Greek yogurt where she could.

“It’s amazing, even with my husband – he loves to eat,” she said. “He’s been doing better with this and he’s losing weight.” Brad Chambless has lost 25 pounds in the last year. “I used to weigh probably 285 pounds and just did not feel good. If you put it in front of me, I would eat it, and that is not a healthy way to go,” he said. “I had to have my knee replaced and I thought, ‘You better get back down below 260, and you’ve got to keep it there to heal, rehab and just feel better.’ We started cooking different, eating smaller. It was a way of life or a way of thinking that I would want to have fried chicken or fried fish. Now we grill just about everything, year round.”

Cooking as a Family

On a recent day, Jay Chambless recruited Reece and his younger brother, 3-year-old Jackson, to help prepare their lunch – chicken pizza. She sautéed sliced chicken tenders in olive oil and softened whole wheat tortillas before sliding them onto baking sheets and calling in the boys. Reece used the back of a spoon to spread pizza sauce around his tortilla, and after Chambless helped

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“It helps to get all the food groups in — that’s what we try to do.” — Jay Chambless
Jackson with that part of the process, both boys tossed on handfuls of chicken and sprinkled mozzarella on top. “If my husband was here I would do mushrooms, tomatoes and maybe bell peppers, but my kids won’t eat those,” Chambless said. Reese and Jackson drank water – there’s no soda in the Chambless house – with their lunch, and then eagerly awaited dessert. Their popcicles were the kind to be doled out with no maternal guilt. Chambless had prepared them ahead of time, popping strawberries and plain Greek yogurt in the blender and then pouring that naturally-sweet concoction into a popsicle mold she picked up at the dollar store. She sometimes uses other fruits, and she sometimes adds a cup of fresh spinach for a real health kick. “It helps to get all the food groups in – that’s what we try to do,” Chambless said. “I put them in the freezer – my kids love them. And I like them, too, especially with the spinach. They just make me feel good.”

**Investing in Nutrition**

Chambless, director of the Pattillo Center School in Dewitt, said the hardest part of feeding her family healthier foods is finding them in the first place. Produce is plentiful in the two grocery stores in her town, unlike in some areas. But items like low-sugar or no-sugar-added products and Greek yogurt rarely find their ways to the shelves there so she has to pick those up when she’s out of town.

Eating healthier, she said, has also put a bigger dent in the family’s budget. “We can do it, but I’m not sure people with less money could,” she said. Fortunately, the Extension Services offers programs on couponing and eating right on a budget. Brad Chambless, a lawyer turned banker with Farmers and Merchants Bank in Dewitt, considers the extra work involved to be a good investment.

“It’s a mindset,” he said. “If we continue down the path that we were brought up on and never change to try to make ourselves better, our kids are learning every day from what we’re doing. If we’re not making it better, we’re making it worse on them – exponentially. So the path that we’ve kind of chosen to take, I’m really proud of, that Jay’s done it and And I like them, too, especially with the spinach. They just make me feel good.”

**A Farm-to-School Menu**

During the 2011-2012 school year, Apple Seeds and Fayetteville Public Schools partnered with Chicken Moon Farm and Energy Corps to host farm-to-school lunch days at each elementary school in the district. Students were served an entire meal of locally grown, freshly prepared dishes. Students at Roo Elementary School dined on:

- Herb-roasted chicken from Little Portion Farm in Eureka Springs
- Lightly sautéed snap peas from Brannon Mountain Farms in Crosses
- Spinach and lettuce salad from Charlie’s Vegetable's in Farmington
- Strawberry shortcake featuring strawberries from Dickey Farms in Springdale

“The kids were so excited about their school lunch that day,” said Apple Seeds Director Beth Ashbaugh. “They told us over and over and over, ‘It was like a gourmet meal this every day, I would eat it!’”

**Visit [www.arcf.org](http://www.arcf.org) for more photos and healthy eating resources.**

**2,000 - 2,500** — the average number of calories per day needed by (most) adult males to maintain a healthy weight.

**1,500 - 2,000** — the average number of calories per day needed by (most) adult females to maintain a healthy weight.

*Source: Arkansas Coalition for Obesity Prevention*
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1,000 - 1,500 — the average number of calories per day needed by (most) young children to maintain a healthy weight.

Partnership Brings the Farm to School

During the 2011-2012 school year, Apple Seeds and Fayetteville Public Schools partnered with Chicken Moon Farm and Energy Corps to host farm-to-school lunch days at each elementary school in the district. Students were served an entire meal of locally grown, freshly prepared dishes. Students at Root Elementary School dined on:

- Herb-roasted chicken from Little Portion Farm in Eureka Springs
- Lightly sautéed snap peas from Charlie’s Vegetables in Farmington
- Spinach and lettuce salad from Charlie’s Vegetables in Farmington
- Strawberry shortcake featuring strawberries from Dickey Farms in Springdale

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Pre- and post-surveys indicate that children who participate in Apple Seeds’ after-school gardening clubs are more willing to try fruits and vegetables and more likely to choose fruits and vegetables as snacks after completing the program. Working in tandem, the school district and Apple Seeds are creating a positive, peer-based environment where children are exposed to and encouraged to try new foods. “I went into this thinking I was going to have to get up on a soapbox and beg the kids to ‘just try one bite’. But I’ve never had to do that,” said Ashbaugh. “Sometimes we have kids begging us to give them seconds and thirds on kale or cucumbers!”

Visit www.arcf.org for more on the Farm-to-School movement.
How Does Your Garden Grow?
Community Gardening Advice from Lake Village’s Delta Sprouts Program

About seven years ago, folks in Lake Village started talking about one of their agricultural community’s great ironies: though they were surrounded by acres and acres of commodity crops, almost no one grew their own food. Small patch farming was all but nonexistent. From those initial conversations grew the Delta Sprouts.

The program, supported by Heifer International, included initiatives to teach residents to raise their own livestock and to establish a farmer’s market and community garden. It took about three-and-a-half years to go from imagining a community garden to harvesting their first crop, but today, the Delta Sprouts’ thriving garden is a model of community engagement. Gardeners have gone from one to over 100, from sharing a table of salad to providing a 250-member community with fresh and healthy food.

The Delta Sprouts’ program started with a vision of sharing the love of gardening and creating a sustainable food source for the community. It has grown into a multifaceted program that teaches gardening, cooking, and healthy eating. The program includes workshops, classes, and a farmer’s market where local farmers and gardeners sell their produce. The Delta Sprouts garden provides individual water faucets (split from a single water line) for each bed and tools and compost for communal use.

1. Start with small raised beds. Although ground plots take less start-up time, Bunker recommends raised beds, constructed with wood or cement landscape pavers. They make weed control easier, let less strain on gardeners’ backs and can be spaced apart for wheelchair accessibility. And when building beds, don’t bite off more than you can chew. “You get plenty of food out of a 4' by 12’ plot,” says Bunker. Although it’s exciting to picture spacious beds filled with leafy greens, large plots can be overwhelming for inexperienced gardeners.

2. Provide resources to make it easy for gardeners. The time and effort you invest in infrastructure pays off in community engagement. Gardeners are more likely to stay invested in the project if it’s easy to stop by and maintain their crops. The Delta Sprouts’ garden provides individual water faucets (split from a single water line) for each bed and tools and compost for communal use.

3. Enlist local experts. Cooperative Extension agents and Master Gardeners are founts of horticultural knowledge and have access to resources like soil testing kits, planting calendars and educational events. As your garden grows, enlist these local experts for support. Soon, as community gardeners gain experience, they’ll be able to pass along their knowledge to new participants.

4. Build buy-in with individual plots. Although it’s not a bad idea to have some plots for communal crops, Bunker recommends prioritizing plots for individual use. The Delta Sprouts’ individual plots are reserved on a seasonal basis, allowing new gardeners to rotate in and existing gardeners to rest occasionally for communal beds. Bunker recommends giving away at least some of the produce to local families in need. “That purpose drives people to continue to show up.”

5. Be the candle for your community. An unintended consequence of the Delta Sprouts’ success has been an increase in backyard gardens across town. “The number of people gardening has gone up dramatically in this area; and the local seed supplier says plant sales have gone up dramatically.” Bunker’s advice? Build your garden with the intent to be a “candle” for the community, inspiring neighbors to take up home gardening. “When you garden, you start making healthier choices. Once you start eating out of a garden, food from a can ain’t the same.”

Help Stop Hunger in Arkansas
by Kim Evans

925 million people worldwide do not have enough to eat. In Arkansas, 1 in 6 people live below the poverty line and struggle to provide adequate nutrition for their families. Poor nutrition is one of those challenges that can seem insurmountable. But progress IS happening!

Organizations right here in Arkansas are working to expand the number of feeding sites available to children during the summer, help eligible families enroll to receive government food assistance, create mobile food pantries to bring food to people who lack transportation, teach people to cook healthy meals with cheap, easily accessible ingredients, promote backyard gardening, teach canning and preserving and more!

Progress is possible, and you can help make it happen. Here’s how:

• Find resources in your community. If you don’t know what programs are available in your town, you can’t fully understand the need. Find out who’s working to address hunger, obesity and poor nutrition in your community. If there’s an unmet need, could you partner with other concerned citizens to help gather resources to fill the gap?

• Support innovation. The organizations working on the front lines of these issues need support to try out new strategies. Could your charitable dollars provide the startup funding to help a local group pilot a new project?

• Endow your local food pantry. Feeding programs can’t operate without funding to keep the lights on and pay staff. You can establish an endowment through Arkansas Community Foundation to provide a permanent source of funding to support the daily operating expenses for a local food pantry.

• Support our Giving Tree program. When you support ARCF’s Giving Tree endowments, you enable us to make grants to hundreds of local nonprofit organizations each year. Your charitable dollar never stretched so far!

Arkansas Community Foundation can help you get connected to the causes you care about and use your resources to build your community through philanthropy. Contact Vice President Kim Evans to learn more about your philanthropic options, kevans@arcf.org or 501-372-1116.
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18.6% of Arkansans experience “food insecurity,” meaning they don’t always know where their next meal will come from.

Source: Feeding America

Visit www.arcf.org for more information about community gardening in Arkansas.
Farmers’ Markets Break Down Barriers to Healthy Food

It’s 9:00 on a summer Saturday morning in Helena-West Helena. Under the farmers’ market pavilion, a kaleidoscope of fresh fruits and vegetables gleams appetizingly from vendor booths – fat pink tomatoes, eggplants of all shapes and sizes, purple hull peas, ears of corn, new potatoes, green beans and jars of jams and preserves begging to be sampled.

Traditionally the Main Street Helena Farmers’ Market has been a cash-only enterprise, but starting this summer, a new electronic payment system will make these nutritious fruits and veggies accessible to shoppers who receive government assistance through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

This new shopping outlet provides much needed access for low-income residents of the downtown area. “The closest grocery store is two miles from Court Square,” explained Julia Nordsieck, president of the Main Street Helena board of directors. “For people who don’t have transportation, the only access to food is at the gas stations, which serve fried chicken, soda pop and other less healthy options. We see accepting SNAP benefits as a great way to break down some of those barriers to fresh healthy food.”

The payment system, purchased with support from a grant from Arkansas Community Foundation, enables SNAP recipients to swipe their EBT (electronic bank transfer) cards to buy farmers’ market tokens. These tokens can be used like cash to purchase produce from farmers’ market vendors, who cash them out with the market director at the end of the day.

“It’s a win-win-win situation. SNAP recipients are able to purchase fresh, healthy foods using benefits for which they’ve already qualified. Farmers’ market vendors expand their customer base, and the community benefits from a thriving farmers’ market and increased availability of locally grown produce.

“We want to make the market a viable source of income for our farmers,” said Nordsieck. The Main Street Helena Farmers’ Market opened about five years ago with just a handful of produce vendors, but has grown to about 10. “One of the things farmers have really connected with is that we are accepting SNAP. There’s a possibility to make good sales there, but it’s also a way for them to give back, and they’re excited about that.”

As the farmers’ market grows and attracts more customers, it’s supporting a resurgence in vegetable farming. Vendors like Harold McGahee, who’s been farming in the area for more than 60 years, exhibit their wares alongside newcomers like Pat Wilhelm, an organic gardener who travels in from Marianna.

Across the state, a growing number of farmers’ markets have begun to accept SNAP benefits. Heather Friedrich, a professor in the department of horticulture at the University of Arkansas, has worked with a cooperative of nine farmers’ markets in Northwest Arkansas to implement EBT systems, funded through a USDA Farmers’ Market Promotion Program grant. Friedrich noted that participation in the program has been especially strong in larger communities like Fayetteville and Bentonville.

Outreach work has been key in encouraging SNAP recipients to visit the farmers markets. “We created brochures and flyers and took them to Head Start programs, libraries, food pantries and other public spaces. We also created a website,” Friedrich said. As the Main Street Helena Farmers’ Market’s EBT system gets up and running, the organization is planning similar outreach efforts in their area.

“It’s one piece of the larger picture that we can do to help fight obesity and end food deserts,” said Friedrich. “We’ve got to do whatever we can do to increase access for lower income people and everyone in general – everybody needs access to fruits and vegetables.”
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As the farmers’ market grows and attracts more customers, it’s supporting a resurgence in vegetable farming. Vendors like Harold McGahee, who’s been farming in the area for more than 60 years, exhibit their wares alongside newcomers like Pat Wilhelm, an organic gardener who travels in from Marianna.

Across the state, a growing number of farmers’ markets have begun to accept SNAP benefits. Heather Friedrich, a professor in the department of horticulture at the University of Arkansas, has worked with a cooperative of nine farmers’ markets in Northwest Arkansas to implement EBT systems, funded through a USDA Farmers’ Market Promotion Program grant. Friedrich noted that participation in the program has been especially strong in larger communities like Fayetteville and Bentonville.

Outreach work has been key in encouraging SNAP recipients to visit the farmers markets. “We created brochures and flyers and took them to Head Start programs, libraries, food pantries and other public spaces. We also created a website,” Friedrich said. As the Main Street Helena Farmers’ Market’s EBT system gets up and running, the organization is planning similar outreach efforts in their area.

“It’s one piece of the larger picture that we can do to help fight obesity and end food deserts,” said Friedrich. “We’ve got to do whatever we can do to increase access for lower income people and everyone in general – everybody needs access to fruits and vegetables.”

Visit www.arcf.org to see video of the Main Street Helena Farmers’ Market and for information on other Arkansas farmers’ markets that accept SNAP benefits.
With a child poverty rate of 26.8 percent, children and families in Arkansas can often face barriers to accessing healthy, nutritious food. Additionally, rural or impoverished communities have areas called “food deserts” where fresh, non-packaged foods aren’t locally available.

When it comes to kids, it’s especially important that children have a healthy start in life that includes good nutrition. Many children get more than half their calories each day at school through school breakfast, lunch and after-school programs. In the 2010-2011 school year, almost 300,000 children were part of the free and reduced lunch program in Arkansas. Community members can encourage local school districts to adopt policies that make sure school meals will help them grow and thrive:

1. Community Gardens: community gardens produce nutritious food, reduce family food budgets, and conserve resources. Additional benefits include opportunities for recreation and exercise and social interaction with neighbors.

2. Gleaning: the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance works with farmers across Arkansas to glean fields after the first harvest. One million pounds of fresh produce is expected to be available to low income Arkansans through the Alliance’s network of food banks. Recipes are available to recipients who might not be familiar with the fruit or vegetable.

3. Shopping Matters/Cooking Matters: the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance works with communities through two programs called Shopping Matters and Cooking Matters to teach families how to shop for and prepare low-cost, easy to prepare and nutritious meals. By participating in these programs, we can help improve the nutrition, and the lives, of Arkansans.

For additional data on health and poverty and historical trends for your county, visit www.arcf.org/AspireArkansas.
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Proper nutrition plays a vital role in overall human development. A healthy lifestyle can affect everything from how well our children can focus in school to how productive our workforce is. There are several ways that we can work together to ensure that families in Arkansas are receiving the proper nutrition that will help them grow and thrive:

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People Will Be Healthy

Arkansas Community Foundation’s Aspire Arkansas report released in 2011 provides county-by-county data on seven aspirations for our state, one of which is, “People will be healthy.” In this issue of ENGAGE magazine, we examine programs that are working in Arkansas to help families eat better.

I was fortunate to grow up in a family that grew vegetables in a small garden at home. Eating fresh healthy produce — and having a few extras to share with friends — is a benefit that I have taken for granted. And now that I do my own gardening, I also find that planting, watering, fertilizing, weeding and watching my garden grow give me an added bonus — a boost in mental as well as physical health. It is just plain fun to see that first tomato blush from green to red.

Making small changes that add up to a better way of eating isn’t easy. In mid-July, I opened my morning newspaper to read a story that Arkansas is ranked 48th in the nation in a 2011 healthcare report issued by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The previous year, our state was ranked 36th, which means our ranking declined significantly in just one year.

We need to reverse that trend, and good eating is a major contributor to good health.

In this issue of ENGAGE, we bring you the story of a DeWitt family learning to eat healthier (Page 1) and a program in Fayetteville to put more fresh, local food in school lunch rooms (Page 4). Learn how to establish a successful community garden on Page 5, and learn how a farmers’ market in Helena is expanding access to fresh produce for low-income families on Page 7.

Arkansas Community Foundation strives to engage people, connect resources and inspire solutions to build community. We hope this issue of ENGAGE will start a conversation within your community about new ways to help Arkansas families improve their eating habits.