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UGArden grant extends outreach to UGA food pantry

April 25, 2019 · by Sadie Lackey



Food insecurity is an issue among college students that is rarely discussed but all too common. With limited funds and sometimes–inconsistent income streams, college students sometimes have to choose between paying rent and buying groceries.

With this issue affecting their friends and neighbors, students working at UGArden, the University of Georgia’s student–run farm, decided to take action.

With the help of a \$5,409 grant from the UGA Parents Leadership Council, a group of highly engaged parents, UGArden will now be able to provide fresh produce to the UGA Food Pantry, said John McGinnis, president of the UGArden Student Club.

Lily Dabbs, a second–year geography major working toward a certificate in urban and metropolitan studies, delivers the first crop of UGArden vegetables to Student Pantry Director Ava Parisi, a health promotion and behavioral medicine major.

The grant will be used to buy harvesting supplies, a refrigerator for the garden and one for the UGA Food Pantry. The refrigerators will extend the shelf life and food safety of the produce.

The pantry was established in 2011 by the UGA Panhellenic Council and is located at the Tate Student Center. The student–run resource center serves about 100 students a day. While the volunteers have always had canned goods and packaged foods available, storage had been a major hurdle in supplying the pantry with produce, McGinnis said.

“We did some research and found that the food pantry did not really have much produce,” McGinnis said. “That is where we came up with this idea.”

With one–in–five college students struggling with food insecurity it seemed to make sense to help their peers in the best way they could — with fresh vegetables, he said.

“Fresh produce is super important for the pantry because our goal is to provide students with meals that are not only delicious but also healthy,” Ava Parisi, the UGA student pantry’s director and student majoring in health

promotion and behavioral medicine major. “We care for a lot of students’ well-being, so being able to provide healthy and fresh options helps tremendously.”

UGArden already supplies vegetables to community organizations and local middle schools with produce. Most of the produce goes to Campus Kitchen, a student-run community kitchen operated through the UGA Office of Service-Learning that provides meals to senior citizens around Athens. OSL is a UGA outreach unit that is overseen by the vice president for public service and outreach and the vice president for instruction.

This is the kind of project that the Parent Leadership Council was excited to support.

“The UGArden is making an important and positive impact on the student experience in its own unique way,” said Elizabeth Correll Richards, chair of the Parents Leadership Council. “The Parents Leadership Council is proud to help with the funding needed to continue its excellent programming.”

For more information on the UGArden and its impact

For more information about the UGA Food Pantry

For more information about the Parent’s Leadership Council

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