

GARDENING AND GOOD HEALTH: TRY THEM!



Americans are finally getting the message, especially in the Delta, that obesity and diabetes are shortening lives and impairing happiness in nearly every family. But they need clarification on all the conflicting messages about how to fix the problems.

There is clarity and little dispute about one solution: a daily diet that includes properly prepared vegetables from the garden or the produce counters at the grocery store. Raw or lightly steamed or boiled fresh vegetables are far better than the canned and highly processed kind you get from the shelves.

The Boys, Girls, Adults Community Development Center has been driving those points home for many years in its campaign against obesity and diabetes, especially in children. Its vegetable garden and restaurant are servants and symbols of the cause. Willie James Spriggs, once the president of BGACDC and a longtime volunteer, started the BGACDC garden in 2013. It is an educational tool for children, who learn about the source of food and fiber and the value of eating healthily and exercising. The garden's greens, cabbage, onions, beans, tomatoes, and other leafy vegetables are turned into delicious and healthy meals at the BFT (Best Food in Town) Restaurant at the BGACDC headquarters.

"We encourage families to follow our example and grow their own fresh vegetables or, if they can't, seek them out at the market," said Mrs. Beatrice Shelby, executive director of BGACDC. "We hope they'll realize the connection with health and happiness and spread the word. If families will create their gardens, fresh, healthy foods and exercise are just as close as their backyards."

Preventing obesity is only an abstract ideal until fresh, healthy food is actually on the table. BGACDC took its campaign against obesity to that level this spring. It is growing its vegetables, putting them on the table at its soul-food restaurant at Marvell, and encouraging local families to follow the example and grow their backyard nutrition. For 30 years, BGACDC has operated the BFT Restaurant, where delicious Delta soul food is served regularly. Soon, freshly harvested greens, beans, cabbage, tomatoes, onions, and Irish potatoes will join the daily menu of chicken, roast beef, pork chops, and yams.

Thanks to the creation of the garden, BGACDC formed a long-term partnership with the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture Phillips County Extension Office to help maintain its garden to this very day. This project is financially supported by LISC.

