Wyoming State Forestry Division

The Wyoming State Forestry Division Community Forestry grants program provided nearly $100,000 for 10 community food forest projects to aid in efforts to reduce urban food deserts, provide locally sourced fresh fruits, as well as create educational opportunities to community members. Partnering with the University of Wyoming Extension offices across the state and Master Gardener programs, these community gardens will be well-tended and boast fruitful harvests in the coming years.

Food deserts are areas where large proportions of households have limited access to a variety of healthy and affordable food, typically seen in areas with low income, inadequate transportation, and limited food retailers with affordable prices (Dutko et al., 2012). Between the years of 2007-2009 to 2017-2019, Wyoming had a statistically significant percentage point increase and increased average prevalence of food insecurity per household (Coleman-Jensen et al., 2019). Food deserts are not uncommon in rural states like Wyoming.

In spring 2021, to make locally sourced fresh produce more accessible, Wyoming State Forestry Division (WSFD) provided funding to create, enhance, and implement Community Food Forests/Urban Orchards. These projects primarily included planting fruiting trees and shrubs and incorporating pollinator friendly plants to promote pollinator habitat. These development grant projects were required to have an educational component.

WSFD partnered with the University of Wyoming Extension to work with the Master Gardener (MG) programs across the state. By working with MG volunteers, these projects have and will gain exposure to a like-minded community network of volunteers, provide public beautification, and offer numerous training demonstrations for the public, local interest groups, and MGs. These trainings could include class topics such as proper planting, identification, pruning, harvesting, clean up, and propagation. Harvested produce will be made available to those in need - by being donated to those who come to harvest on their own or by donations made to local food banks.

In an effort to reduce the reliance on imported fresh fruits, ten urban orchards were installed in Buffalo, Casper, Cheyenne, Gillette, Laramie, Lingle, Rawlins, Sheridan, and Worland. The variety of fruiting tree species included: peach, apricot, cherry, pear, plum, and apple. In total, the local community efforts and volunteer hours plus the WSFD Community Forestry program pass through grant funds provided over $96,000 with match.