



# Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL) Initiative



Gonzalee Martin removed an empty carton from the top of a table at the McCormick Farm Market located across the street from a large public housing community in Fort Wayne.

“Nothing on the table except produce,” he told one of the

neighborhood teens hired to work at the market. “How much for cucumbers?”

Gonzalee began to drill the teens on the prices of the beautiful vegetables in front of them, much of which was grown by Gonzalee and the teens only a few yards away at the Growth in Agriculture through Education (GATE) Farm. It would be only a few minutes before people in the community would be coming, some with cash and others with food stamps, to purchase gorgeous produce like zucchini, cucumbers, tomatoes, cabbage, carrots and more.

Gonzalee is strict about the appearance of the market he manages as the founder of GATE. He wants things to look professional and welcoming. After all, that will drive in more people from the community each Wednesday from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m. when the market is held.

This is the second year for the McCormick Market and it is one of a handful of fresh produce markets supported by the St. Joseph Community Health Foundation initiative called Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL). The Foundation, along with Parkview Health, is supporting HEAL to respond to a lack of healthy, affordable food in low-income areas of Fort Wayne. In addition to farm markets, HEAL is also piloting a fresh food delivery to seniors “shut in” and unable to travel to grocery stores. HEAL is also supporting community gardens and piloting an eight week “Our Healing Kitchen” cooking classes in area homeless and transitional housing shelters.

With rates of obesity (33%) and diabetes (10%) on the rise in Allen County, the HEAL markets are crucial.

HEAL’s most successful market is McCormick, where shoppers can pay with cash, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). The Foundation together with Parkview Health match dollar-for-dollar for anyone paying with a SNAP or WIC card. Locals love having the option to use food stamps to pay, and some stock up on so much produce that they bring wagons to carry it all.

“But the impact of the markets, which is increasing fruit and vegetable consumption among the nearby community, extends even beyond healthier eating.” According to Meg Distler, Executive Director of the Foundation, “We see it in the smiles on their faces. The people are taking pride in their neighborhood markets and the community gardens where the produce is grown.”

“We get a lot of volunteers,” Gonzalee added. “They’ll come by and ask if they can water the garden, and we’ll let them do that. However they want to help, we’ll try and find a way.”

Gonzalee has hired local teens because people from the neighborhood feel a sense of community when they come to the market and see familiar faces behind the tables. “Two of the kids speak Burmese, another speaks Spanish, and that’s huge,” Gonzalee said, in reference to Fort Wayne’s large Burmese refugee and Spanish-speaking populations. “Now, the residents know they can come here and buy fresh produce, and then they also have someone to interpret for them.”

*As the Foundation strives to “strengthen, improve and sustain long-term community health in Allen County,” the HEAL Initiative fits perfectly into the Foundation’s mission. Reaching the poor and underserved by providing them with a more nutritious food option is just one of the many ways the St. Joseph Community Health Foundation follows in the footsteps of the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ.*

---

 Natalie Trout, Communications Coordinator,  
St. Joseph Community Health Foundation