

OACAA Briefing

June 2012



Agency Happenings

Ironton-Lawrence County CAO Work Farm Program a Win, Win, Win

Ironton-Lawrence County Community Action Organization has partnered with area agencies to organize a work farm program where low-level offenders receive an alternative sentence to work on a farm rather than serve jail time. The offenders receive job skills and training, the jail and community food banks and programs will receive the vegetables grown on the farm, and the county will save money on food. The pilot program is truly a win, win, win for the community!

Dan Palmer, director of the Lawrence-Scioto Joint Solid Waste District (operated by the Ironton-Lawrence County CAO) first came up with the idea of the work farm while researching an enforcement action to serve on litter violators. He got the idea from a program being run in the neighboring community of Greenup County, KY.

Those sentenced to the farm work from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. and participate in programs through the county One Stop Workforce Development Center (also run by ILCAO) to receive supportive services such as counseling, job screening and training, GED classes if necessary, and other intervention activities.

Planning for the work farm began in March 2012 and by April the first farm activity was underway. They now have approximately 10 to 15 acres in planted gardens and are averaging 15 to 20 alternatively-sentenced individuals per day working on the farm. They are expecting their first crops to be ready for harvesting in approximately two weeks.

ILCAO staff coordinate the day-to-day activity on the farm and Chef Anthony Keith Taylor at ILCAO will utilize the vegetables. He commented in a local newscast on the program, "Our whole county will benefit from our program to help people in need, our jails, our Head Start program – giving our kids healthier options, our senior feeding program." Taylor estimates this program will save the county at least \$20,000 in food costs.

As of the end of April two program participants received job placements, showing that the program is off to a good start. D.R. Gossett, Executive Director commented, "Logistics have been challenging, but with the support and commitment of all the program participants including the county commissioners, sheriff, probation, workforce development, etc. we have been able to work through many of the logistical issues." Gossett continued, "We are working on plans to assure sustainability [of the farm] and hopefully continue to build on programs to the various supportive services and diversion aspects to the program."

