

Profile: David Holben

We have all heard the old adage about teaching a man to fish. Well, the same can be said for gardening.



In this spirit, Earth Month 2010 kicked off with an organic gardening workshop, led by professor of Nutrition Dr. David Holben. The workshop was part of his multi-faceted project: ECOhio Garden—Everyone Can [in Ohio] Garden plants And

Rake Dirt to Enhance Nutrition.

A former U.S.-Canada Fulbright Scholar, Holben received their eco-leadership award, which provided grant money to support a beginner gardening workshop, a community garden plot intended to grow food for donation to local agencies, as well as the addition of public fruit trees to city and university property.

Holben's research is focused on food insecurity and subsequent health outcomes. Having grown up in an impoverished home in Appalachian Pennsylvania he is dedicated to improving the health of families facing poverty, which he sees as the greatest impediment to food security and nutrition in the region.

Within poor communities it can be difficult to access nutritious foods; consequently, health outcomes spiral toward obesity and chronic diseases such as diabetes.

“Improving the dietary quality of individuals is [as] vital to improving health” as increasing physical activity levels, says Holben. Despite the dire state of national health problems among poor families, Holben hopes his projects will have lasting impacts on food security and nutrition at the local level. With stewardship from community members the fruit trees “will continue to contribute to the wellness of individuals in our region for years to come,” he says.

Holben consistently incorporates gardening into his curriculum, not only to benefit his students' self-sufficiency, but so that they will understand the importance of passing these skills on to future clients and patients. As a former participant of the Environmental Studies department's Kanawha Project, he created the Nutrition in Community course to make connections between human health problems and unsustainable food systems.

And while the bounty of the fruit trees and the lessons from the gardening workshop will continue to increase local individuals' self-sufficiency, Holben is looking ahead to new projects. One of which will provide fresh produce to Appalachian women and assess its impact on their health, and another that will examine nutrition and food security among individuals with diabetes and HIV in the region.

At home, Holben makes sure his sons are learning the skills they need to provide for themselves with what the land has to give. Together they enjoy beekeeping, raising chickens and growing vegetables, which they can and preserve every year.

By: Kim Criner