

Cultivating Community through Gardening

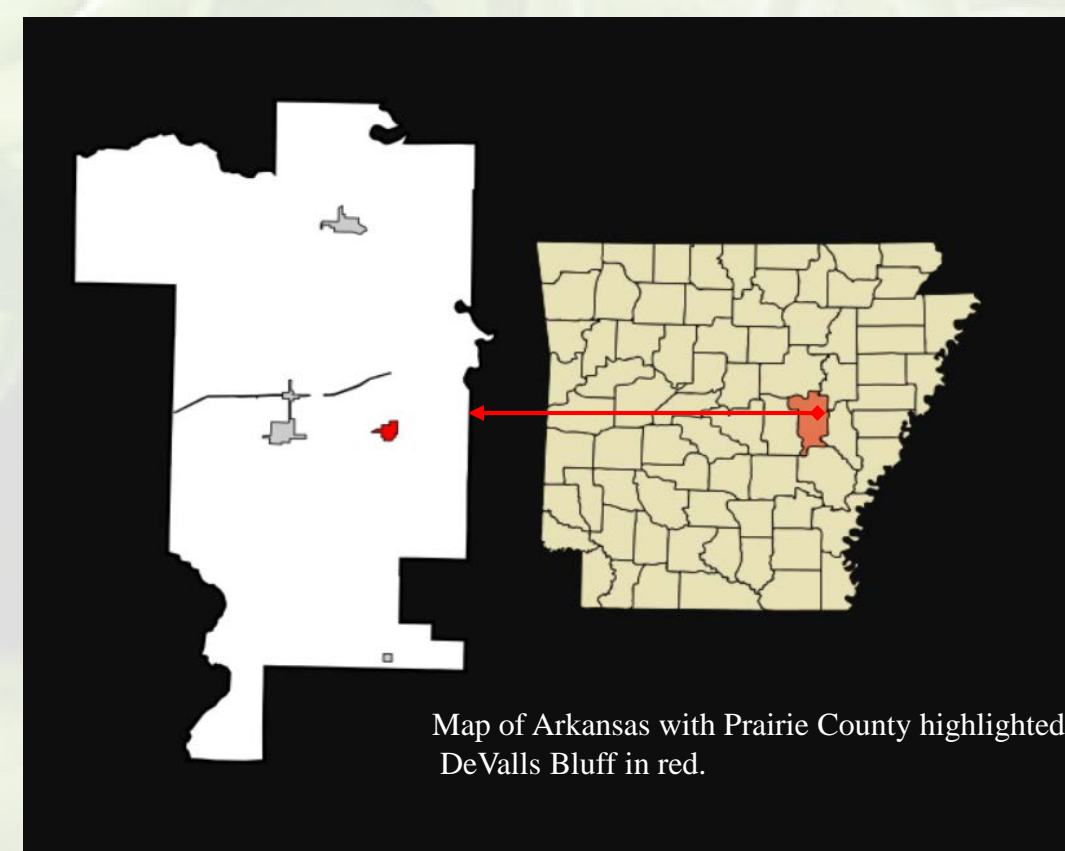


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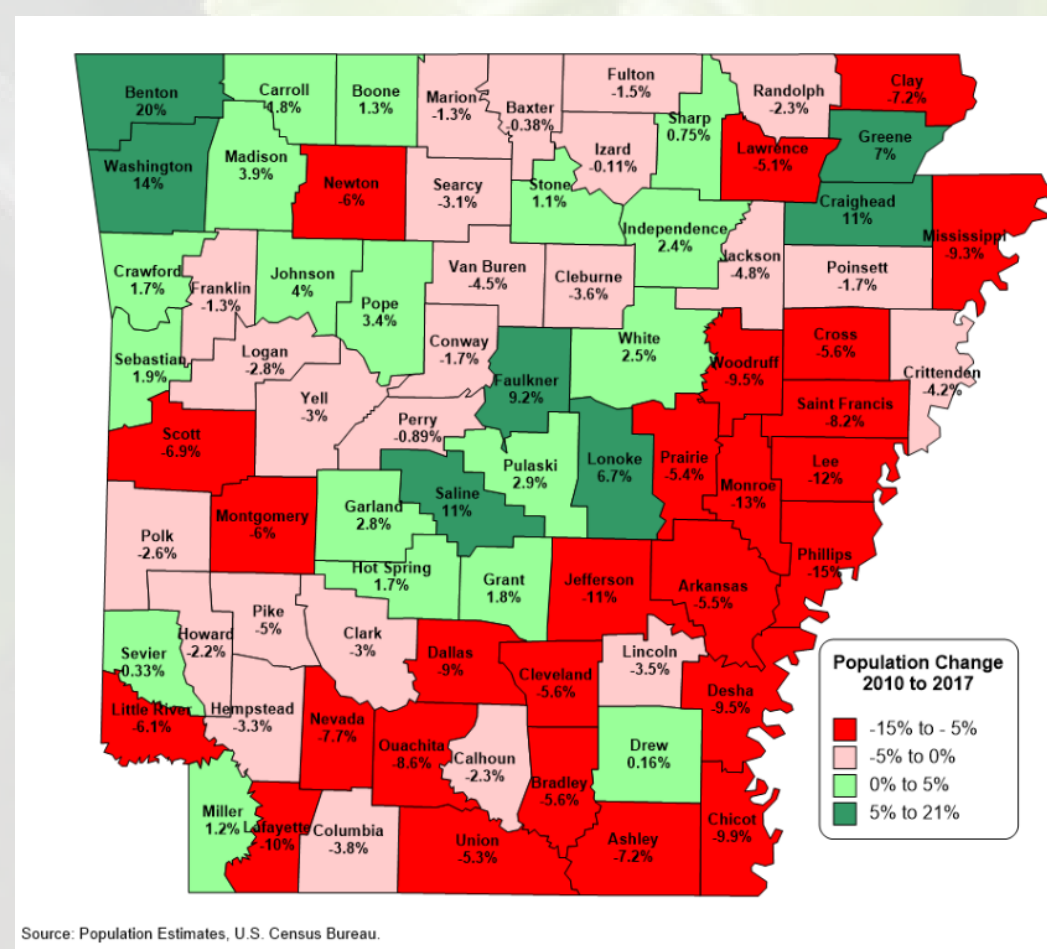
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Introduction

Prairie County, AR is located in what local health officials consider to be a food desert. For DeValls Bluff residents, the closest source of fresh produce is more than ten miles away. Including community gardens in public and low-income housing developments can promote community, increase access to healthy food and support engagement of residents.



The population decline in rural Arkansas counties includes ages 0-19 and 30-54 age groups. With a relative increase in the of population of people 65 years of age and older. The decline in population of the working age population suggests a decline in employment opportunities. Which is directly related to economic decline in the delta counties, resulting in insufficient sources of fresh foods.



Objective

In 2017, 2018, and 2019 Prairie County Extension partnered with Christopher Housing Authority to implement a community gardening program for the residents with the intent purpose to:

- Provide an accessible tabletop and raised bed garden onsite in a common area.
- Teach hands-on gardening practices and nutrition education.
- Provide healthy cooking demonstrations and tasting using fresh vegetables from the garden.
- Increase opportunities for physical activities and socialization
- Improve food security for low-income residents



Result

Prairie County Extension Service improved outreach to an underserved population and improved food security to create an environment where individuals could thrive.

Program successes include:

- 53% of the residents were actively engaged in the gardening process, which increased daily physical activity.
- 75% of the residents increased knowledge about nutrition, food preparation, and gardening techniques.
- 10 different varieties of vegetables were grown, providing 15 residents with access to fresh produce.
- Cost savings of over \$500 considering traveling expenses and cost of produce
- Plans are being made to expand the garden in 2020



"This Program has truly has an impact on the residents of this complex. It has made their participation in all activities soar over the last few months. They look forward to Tuesdays because they know they will be tending the garden with Amy or will get to enjoy a cooking demonstration with Shea. The residents have really taken ownership of the garden by watering it when it's needed or just making sure everything is growing as it should be. It has really helped them get out of their units more and socialize with each other. I hope that this is a partnership that we can continue as the years go by." ~ Site Director