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Community Food Assessment pinpoints food needs and opportunities in Gresham food desert

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon's (EMO) Interfaith Food and Farms Partnership (IFFP) is wrapping up a grassroots community food assessment in Gresham Rockwood neighborhood, which is considered a "food desert." The goal of the assessment is to engage neighbors in a process of collectively examining food-related issues and assets in order to prompt changes and build food security. The assessment was led by the Neighborhood Assessment Team, comprised of eight Rockwood residents of different cultural backgrounds. The results of the assessment will be shared at the third and final community forum on July 22 from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. at Rockwood Adventist Church, 1910 SE 182nd Ave., Portland, Ore.

Since the fall of 2012, the Neighborhood Assessment Team has been conducting surveys and focus groups in Rockwood to determine the needs of the community. Results from the surveys show that over 43 percent of survey respondents cite transportation as a challenge to getting groceries. With 76 percent of respondents doing their main grocery shopping at Winco in Portland because of affordable prices, most Rockwood residents' food dollars do not economically benefit their own community. The new food resources that respondents most wanted in Rockwood were farmers markets, grocery stores and community gardens (in that order) in their neighborhood. Three focus groups were also conducted, including one in Spanish and one in English.

This information is only the beginning in terms of implementing necessary changes around food equity in Rockwood. Concerns about food exist in many individuals in the neighborhood, and they can be addressed in an effective way when residents come together to create a stronger, united voice around food equity and security in Rockwood. IFFP is already responding to some of the needs identified by the

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assessment by working with community groups to start a community garden at NE 196th and Glisan, as well as other collaborations with local residents and organizations to improve healthy food retail access and nutrition education.

“There is tremendous energy and vision among Rockwood residents and social service agencies to improve the quality of life through food,” says Jenny Holmes, EMO Environmental Ministries director, “but local governments, foundations and businesses must be willing to invest and work with the community to scale up solutions to effect enduring change.”

The project was made possible by a Community Food Project grant from the United States Department of Agriculture with matching funds from the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, Presbyterian Hunger Program, The Jackson Foundation, and in-kind services of agencies, individuals and businesses.

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon's (EMO) Interfaith Network for Earth Concerns connects, inspires, informs and empowers people, congregations and religious institutions to work for justice and the care and renewal of the earth. EMO is a statewide association of Christian denominations, congregations, ecumenical organizations and interfaith partners working together to improve the lives of Oregonians through community ministry programs, ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, environmental ministry and public policy advocacy.