



[Home](#)

[About USDA](#)

[Newsroom](#)

[Agencies & Offices](#)

[Careers](#)

[Help](#)

[Contact Us](#)

[En Español](#)

You are here: [Home](#) / [Newsroom](#) / [Latest Releases](#) / [Release No. 0121.09](#)

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News Release

Release No. 0121.09
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AGRICULTURE SECRETARY VILSACK EXPANDS "THE PEOPLE'S GARDEN" TO PROMOTE HEALTHY FOOD, PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES ACROSS THE NATION

WASHINGTON, April 22, 2009 - In honor of Earth Day, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack declared the entire grounds at the USDA Jamie L. Whitten Building as 'The People's Garden' and unveiled plans to create a sustainable landscape on the grounds.

"USDA is an every day every way kind of department and this garden will help illustrate the many ways USDA works to provide a sustainable, safe and nutritious food supply as well as protect and preserve the landscape where that food is produced," said Vilsack. "The garden will help explain to the public how small things they can do at home, at their business or on their farm or ranch, can promote sustainability, conserve the nation's natural resources, and make America a leader in combating climate change."

The People's Garden is designed to provide a sampling of USDA's efforts throughout the world as well as teach others how to nurture, maintain and protect a healthy landscape. If practiced, these garden concepts can be the general public's, government's, or business' contribution to providing healthy food, air, and water for people and communities.

In response to the overwhelming public support and hundreds of letters the 'People's Garden' concept has received, Secretary Vilsack challenged USDA facilities around the world to plant their own 'People's Gardens.'

Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan officially kicked off the Earth Day event at the Whitten Building with Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe Chairman Brings Plenty who performed a traditional ceremonial song and planted seeds at the Three Sisters Garden to celebrate American Indians' contribution to American agriculture. Merrigan led volunteers and USDA staffers in planting vegetables, herbs and flowers to complete the first phase of The People's Garden. Eventually, the garden will include organic raised vegetable beds, organic transition plots, an organic urban container garden, an organic kitchen pollinator garden, rain gardens and a bat house.

A Three Sisters Garden is a traditional garden consisting of corn, beans and squash that has been planted by American Indians for centuries. Stories of the Three Sisters refers to a tradition of interplanting corn, beans and squash in the same mound. It is a sophisticated, sustainable planting system that has provided long term soil fertility and a healthy diet to generations of American Indians.

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- [Laws and Regulations](#)
- [Marketing and Trade](#)
- [Natural Resources and Environment](#)
- [Research and Science](#)
- [Rural and Community Development](#)
- [Travel and Recreation](#)
- [USDA Employee Services](#)

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News Releases

- [Latest Releases](#)
- [Transcripts and Speeches](#)
- [Agency News Releases](#)
- [Radio and TV Broadcasts](#)
- [How to Get Information](#)
- [Subscriptions](#)
- [RSS Feeds](#)

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- [Agency Reports](#)
- [USDA Publications](#)

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- [Events by Date](#)

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- [Broadcast Media & Technology Center](#)

The People's Garden is not confined to USDA headquarters in Washington, DC. Secretary Vilsack has challenged all USDA facilities-across the country and around the world-to create similar gardens and create healthier landscapes.

The garden at the Whitten Building was first dedicated on Feb. 12, 2009, to commemorate the 200th birthday of President Lincoln. USDA is planning to have the garden fully certified organic within three years. USDA's vegetable garden will provide a great variety and amount of organic produce, which will be donated to a local food bank.

To expand the People's Garden, USDA partnered with 75 representatives from other federal and state agencies, universities, non-governmental and non-profit organizations to redesign an innovative and sustainable landscape for USDA's headquarters. This landscape will demonstrate environmentally responsible practices and will educate and engage the public through accessible exhibits.

Information about The People's Garden Initiative is available at www.usda.gov/peoplesgarden.

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