**HEAL Edible Forests**

**Summary:** With a population of 1,500, Edmonston, MD is located within an area that has the highest rate of deaths due to heart disease and obesity within the state of Maryland. The nearest grocery story to Edmonston, MD is a mile away. The nearest national grocery chain store is 2.5 miles from Edmonston.

Fruit can be very expensive for families. Yet, fruit is a critical component of a healthy diet. So Edmonston worked with Prince George’s County’s Department of the Environment to purchase 32 native fruit trees through their RELeaf Program. The town of Edmonston also purchased 15 additional American Plum trees.

Edmonston passed a policy that all fruit grown in the town’s right of way (including parks and medians) could be harvested and eaten by the town’s residents.

**Challenge:** Edmonston is a low to moderate income community with a median per capita income of $19,000. Approximately 48% of the town’s population is Latino with 40% of the families speaking another language other than English in the home.

With an annual budget of $1,469,000, Edmonston’s resources require that they need to create partnerships with funding partners, such as the Prince George’s County Department of the Environment and the State of Maryland Tree Nursery program.

Edmonston also had to find fruit trees that would be able to thrive in a hostile growing environment such as a median next to a busy street or in an area next to a parking lot and would be popular with the residents of the community.

**Solution:** To create a solution, the town of Edmonston created a partnership with the Prince George’s Department of the Environment’s RELeaf Program. They also took advantage of a program set up by the State of Maryland’s Department of Natural Resources where Maryland DNR’s Tree Nursery sells whips (year old trees) to public agencies to reforest public areas.

Through Prince George’s County DOE, the town of Edmonston was reimbursed for the purchase of 34 native fruit trees (pawpaws, serviceberries and American persimmons). The type of fruit trees were chosen with the assistance of Kimberley M. Knox, a certified arborist and the Program Coordinator of the Port Towns Community Health Partnership. Pawpaws are similar to mangoes and are related to the soursap/custard apple family. Serviceberries are similar to a cherry that is popular in Latin America, while American persimmons are similar to Asian persimmons that are readily available in Latin supermarkets throughout the metro Washington D.C. area.

Edmonston purchased American plums for $1.00 each from the Maryland Department of Natural Resources’ State Nursery. American plums are a native tree and can produce fruit within five to six years.

Edmonston planted the trees with help from local residents and volunteers from a local medical clinic and the neighborhood high school’s Green Team.

**Results:** It will take four to five years for the pawpaws and plums to fruit. It takes the American persimmon seven to eight years to fruit. Serviceberries will fruit within two to three years. So this project will take some time to provide fruit for the community. But we have already made a difference. The Bladensburg High School’s Green Team (which helped us plant some of the trees) were so inspired by the idea that they have planted native fruit and nut trees on their campus.

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