Announcer: The Missouri State Journal, a weekly program keeping you in touch with Missouri State University.

Emily Yeap: Obtaining healthy food is a challenge for many families, especially those living in low-income areas. In Springfield, a collaborative farm-to-table project is on a mission to improve access to fresh, local food for residents in the city’s Zone 1 neighborhoods.

 Springfield Community Gardens is leading the project with support from Missouri State University, The Fairbanks, Life360 Church, Ozarks Food Harvest, Cox North, Springfield Victory Mission and the University of Missouri Extension. The project, which began last fall, is made possible through a $375,000 grant for three years from U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Institute of Food and Agriculture, NIFA. I’m Emily Yeap.

 Maile Auterson, Springfield Community Gardens director; Rachael West, Springfield Community Gardens food hub manager; and Dr. Kathy Nordyke, citizenship and service-learning director at MSU, join me today to explain more about the project.

Auterson.

Maile Auterson: Springfield Community Gardens has 21 gardens in town. Nine of those are in Zone 1. NIFA has given us a generous grant to start a food hub in Zone 1 and that's going to help provide meals and produce to the restaurants, to the daycare, possibly even Cox Hospital. Communities cannot be resilient without a local food system and that's what NIFA is giving us the money to do.

Emily Yeap: One of the project's focus is providing healthy food and education to children at Life360 Daycare at The Fairbanks. West explains.

Rachael West: One of the promises that we made was to use 60% of our garden produce that is grown there at The Fairbanks to feed the Life360 Daycare. It starts with getting the kids to understand the foods that they're eating and where they come from, so we'll be getting them involved in the garden, as well as teaching hands-on classes as simple as having a picture of a beet and having them do beet stamps and then roasting the beets or pureeing them in with mashed potatoes or different ideas, infusing them in pasta. It's just serving them those vegetables over a period of a month over and over again. Getting them used to seeing them and understanding where they come from and what they do.

Emily Yeap: According to Nordyke, MSU is helping to sustain this project by providing service-learning students and student volunteers.

Kathy Nordyke: In the office of citizenship and service-learning, we're all about partnering our students with opportunities that are connected to their coursework that they're currently enrolled in to work collaboratively with learning sites. In this case, Springfield Community Gardens, to help address problems, needs, social justice issues within communities.

 Certainly, the goal and the vision of Springfield Community Gardens to help make healthy communities and to work to bring people out of poverty and provide access to food is a wonderful opportunity for our students. We have students from the biomedical science department, both in nutrition and cell and molecular biology, human genetics. Students from education, from agriculture, entrepreneurial, business management students, the list just goes on and on.

 Those students are involved with Springfield Community Gardens in a number of different roles, from working on educational material to actually being involved in the gardens, looking at what kind of plants and produce should be planted to address cardiovascular disease or diabetes. It really gives our students a wonderful opportunity.

 This past semester alone, all students encompassed as a whole, they donated about 2,250 hours to the project. That translates, if you use the per hour volunteer basis from independentsector.org, which is $21.57 an hour, we contributed just in the fall semester alone over $48,000 in service hours to this project.

Emily Yeap: At the end of the grant’s period, what does Auterson hope the project would achieve?

Maile Auterson: A solid food hub that will infuse the economy in Zone 1 and a permanent education source for people who want to grow their own healthy food and people who want to eat healthy food and people who want to teach their children about healthy food.

Emily Yeap: To help with this project or to find out more, visit springfieldcommunitygardens.org. I'm Emily Yeap for the Missouri State Journal.

Announcer: For more information, contact the Office of University Communications at 417-836-6397. The Missouri State Journal is available online at KSMU.org.