Relevance
Starr County is located in South Texas, Rio Grande Valley, and is a border county with Mexico to the South. The highest percentage of Hispanic residents of any U.S. county are in Starr County, with over 98% of residents speaking Spanish. Colonias, which are very low income areas that often lack safe and sanitary housing and have inadequate physical and social infrastructure, are found throughout the county. Almost 40% of Starr County residents live below poverty, and approximately 35% of residents are uninsured. Health indicators for Starr County are very poor, including:
- approximately 28% adult obesity rate,
- approximately 15% preschool obesity rate,
- 26% physically inactive, and
- 20% diabetes rate.

Response
The Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) is funding Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service for three years to support a chronic disease prevention program in Starr County. The project is focused on improving the health environment of Starr County by increasing the residents’ access to:
- fresh fruits and vegetables,
- physical activity opportunities/places to be active,
- smoke-free environments, and
- preventive community and clinical health care.

Under the leadership of the local Family and Consumer Sciences AgriLife Extension agent, a comprehensive health coalition was formed (Starr Working on Wellness [WOW]) to assist in identifying local health and nutrition needs. Fifteen community planning and implementation meetings were held in 2014.

Results
During 2014, significant environmental health improvements were made.
- The local mobile farmer’s market reached over 13,500 Starr County residents within identified food deserts and colonias areas. Over 86,400 pounds of locally grown produce was sold at 25 mobile market sites.
- Ten school and community gardens that promote fresh produce consumption, as well as physical activity, were maintained. The gardens yielded 8,500 pounds of fresh produce, which were distributed to families, garden volunteers, and area church and food pantries.
• One community park was revitalized with the installation of lights, benches, repainting, and cleanup of playground equipment. The park and walking trail are now in full use. Additionally, work began on enhancing a city park to include fitness stations, resurfacing of walking paths, and mileage markers. Also, work began with the local South Texas College (STC) Rio Grande Campus to identify and route a walking path on campus for students and faculty to utilize as a part of their employee wellness initiative. Mileage markers and signage were purchased to support this initiative.

The leveraging of existing AgriLife Extension programs, funded through other grants projects, is also improving access to and integration of community prevention health services for limited-resource individuals in this underserved county. Specifically, the ¡Si, Yo Puedo Controlar Mi Diabetes! type 2 diabetes education program and the Friend to Friend breast and cervical cancer screening program are now being offered on a regular basis in Starr County, with support from the local hospital.

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