



Farm Unity: An initiative to bring the community together through local gardens—started by a **dad and daughter**.

Meet the Rathods—Meera and her dad, Jitendra—two Crofton residents who noticed the powerful ability of gardens in fostering **community**.

In May 2023, the Rathods started their very first Farm Unity garden behind the Crofton Library. The operation grew from the duo to **over 100 volunteers**, as they have now! The garden grows all sorts of plants and produce—from sunflowers to pumpkins to okra.

We asked Meera and her dad a few questions to better understand the work of Farm Unity, and here are their responses.

What inspired you to start Farm Unity?

Jitendra: Well, earlier this year I read a book about how Finnish people are some of the happiest in the world—and how it all starts with community-led initiatives. I have a personal garden, but I thought a shared garden could be very useful for the community. I spoke to the library, and they allowed me to use the land, as well as \$5000.

What value(s) were most important to you, when creating this garden?

Jitendra: Community and sustainability. The whole purpose of this garden was everyone coming together, and spending time with each other, having a good time—that's all. And sustainability, of course—I have to make sure that there are ways to continue the garden even when we're not here.

Where does the harvest from the garden go?

Jitendra: Well, some of the fruits and vegetables go to people here—we place produce in the library for people to take it. A lot of it goes to people who need fresh produce—like patients in therapy who receive Medicare and Medicaid benefits.

What roles do volunteers have in the garden?

Jitendra: Anything. Community is the focus, so the most important thing is to make sure people are coming in. Spending time together, enjoying each others company. Some people are taking pictures, other people are shoveling dirt, and sometimes we harvest. No matter what people do, we want to make sure that people do at least come join.

Meera, what has been your favorite part about the garden?

Meera: My favorite part of this whole experience has been seeing the community come together. Helping the community, and allowing people to have fresh access to fresh fruits and vegetables.

