NO-TILL ORGANIC MARKET GARDEN

Community Impact Study

Growing Healthy Communities Through Gardening

The Story of Judy Daniels, Darion and Jessica Daniels, and the Campti Community Development Center

Natchitoches Parish, Louisiana



USDA United States Department of Agriculture

Natural Resources Conservation Service

NO-TILL OMG! Organically Managed Gardening

CAMPTI Field of DREAMS

Community Leaders Profile

For much of her life, Judy Daniels has been dedicated to serving the people of Campti, Louisiana.

A former Mayor of the Town of Campti and longtime community advocate, Daniels has spent decades working to improve opportunities for children, families, and seniors throughout her community. Through the Campti Community Development Center, she has focused on education, youth development, health, and community engagement—always searching for ways to create a stronger future for the next generation.
For Daniels, gardening became one of those opportunities.

Years before participating in the No-Till Organic Market Garden project, the Campti Community Development Center partnered with Campti Field of Dreams to involve children in growing their own food. Students were given small garden plots where they learned to plant seeds, care for crops, and harvest vegetables. Families were invited to Food Day celebrations, where children proudly shared the food they had grown.

The experience revealed an important lesson.
Children who helped grow vegetables were far more willing to eat them.

What began as a gardening activity quickly became a tool for nutrition education, family engagement, and community health.

When the opportunity arose to participate in the No-Till Organic Market Garden project, Daniels saw a chance to expand that work. With the support of her grandson, Darion Daniels, his wife Jessica Daniels, and a dedicated team of volunteers, the Community Development Center established a quarter-acre regenerative market garden designed to serve both educational and community needs.

The project aligned perfectly with Daniels' lifelong commitment to helping people improve their quality of life through knowledge, opportunity, and self-reliance.

> *"My goal is for the parents and the children and the community to continue the tradition of gardening."*
> *— Judy Daniels*



Judy Daniels welcomes project partners during the September 2025 farm tour.

Learning Through Innovation

The No-Till Organic Market Garden project provided an opportunity to build upon years of community gardening experience while introducing new regenerative agriculture practices.



Through workshops, demonstrations, field days, and technical assistance, Daniels and her team learned how no-till production methods could improve soil health while reducing labor requirements and production costs.

The garden became a place where community members could explore practices such as cover cropping, composting, mulching, biological soil amendments, and reduced tillage. These approaches helped improve soil structure, increase biological activity, and create a healthier growing environment for crops.

The educational benefits extended well beyond the garden itself.

Children participating in afterschool programs gained firsthand experience planting seeds, caring for vegetables, observing insects and soil organisms, and understanding where food comes from. Community members who had never gardened before were introduced to practical techniques they could use at home.

Darion and Jessica Daniels played an important role in supporting these efforts. Traveling regularly from Texas, they helped establish and maintain the garden while ensuring that Judy's vision continued to grow.

What emerged was more than a demonstration garden. It became a community learning space where people of all ages could develop new skills, build confidence, and reconnect with the tradition of growing food.

Key Findings

- • Established a quarter-acre regenerative market garden
- • Expanded youth gardening and nutrition education programs
- • Implemented no-till production methods and soil-building practices
- • Increased community participation in gardening activities
- • Created opportunities for intergenerational learning
- • Strengthened local food and health education efforts

Building Healthy Soil

Healthy soil became the foundation for the garden's success. Like many community gardens, the site faced challenges related to fertility, weed pressure, moisture management, and long-term productivity. Through the project, participants learned that healthy soil is built through biological processes rather than intensive tillage.

Cover crops helped protect the soil surface while adding organic matter. Compost and mulch improved soil structure, reduced weed pressure, and conserved moisture. Reduced tillage minimized soil disturbance and allowed beneficial organisms to thrive.

These practices produced visible results over time. The soil became easier to work, retained moisture more effectively, and supported healthier crops. Garden beds became more productive, and the need for intensive cultivation decreased.

The garden also provided an opportunity to teach soil health concepts in ways that were easy for children and families to understand. Participants learned that healthy soil contains living organisms that help plants grow, cycle nutrients, and improve resilience during periods of drought or heavy rainfall. Just as the garden was nurturing healthier soil, it was also helping cultivate healthier habits within the community.

The connection between soil health, food quality, and human health became one of the most valuable lessons emerging from the project.



Charmaine Williams, garden coordinator, in the CCDC garden.





Growing a Farm and a Community

The impact of the Campti Community Development Center garden extends far beyond food production. The garden became a gathering place where children, parents, grandparents, volunteers, and community partners could learn, work, and celebrate together.

Through afterschool programs, community events, and hands-on educational activities, participants developed a deeper understanding of food, nutrition, and stewardship. One of the most powerful outcomes was the way the garden encouraged healthier eating habits. Children who planted, watered, and harvested vegetables were often eager to taste foods they might otherwise have refused. Parents attending Food Day celebrations frequently expressed surprise when they saw their children enthusiastically eating fresh lettuce, carrots, greens, and other vegetables.

The garden also strengthened connections between generations. Elders shared gardening knowledge, parents participated in activities alongside their children, and young people gained practical skills that many families feared were being lost.

Participation in the No-Till Organic Market Garden project helped position the Community Development Center for even greater impact. Building on the success of the garden, Daniels secured a three-year, $198,000 grant from The Rapides Foundation to expand programming focused on youth development, nutrition education, gardening, and community health. More than $107,500 of that investment served as in-kind cost share during the grant period, demonstrating the long-term value of community-based agricultural education.

The project showed that gardens can do much more than produce vegetables.
They can strengthen families, improve health, and bring communities together.



Above: Bill Bean, project consultant, with Judy Daniels at the Campti Community Development Center garden.
Below: Purplehull peas, a local favorite.



Looking Forward

Today, Judy Daniels continues to view gardening as a pathway to healthier families and stronger communities. Future goals include expanding educational programming, increasing community participation, strengthening youth engagement, and ensuring that future generations continue to develop the skills needed to grow food and care for the land.

The continued involvement of Darion and Jessica Daniels reflects a commitment to carrying that work forward. Their support helps ensure that the Community Development Center remains an active resource for community development, education, and healthy living. For Daniels, success is not measured solely by pounds harvested or garden beds planted.

It is measured by the children who discover a love of gardening, the families who prepare healthier meals, and the community members who gain confidence in their ability to grow food for themselves.

Key Themes from Judy's Journey

- Community Health
- Youth Development
- Nutrition Education
- Community Gardening
- Intergenerational Learning
- Food Access
- Volunteer Engagement
- Community Stewardship
- Soil Health
- Rural Resilience



CCDC afterschool class in the garden.

Key Lessons Learned

- Children are more likely to eat vegetables they help grow.
- Healthy soil supports healthy communities.
- Gardens can be powerful tools for education and nutrition.
- Community partnerships multiply impact.
- Intergenerational learning strengthens long-term resilience.

Closing Reflection

Judy Daniels' story demonstrates that regenerative agriculture can be about much more than food production. Through the Campti Community Development Center, gardening became a tool for improving health, strengthening families, preserving traditions, and creating opportunities for future generations. Her work reminds us that when communities invest in children, healthy food, and shared knowledge, the harvest extends far beyond the garden gate.