## The Healthy Harvest Program to Improve Access to Healthy Foods and Quality of Life in Low-Income Communities

(Abstract developed for Environmental and Contextual Factors in Health and Behavior Change in the content area of Nutrition)

Access to healthy foods is often limited in low-income communities and prevents the adoption of a healthy diet needed to meet national dietary recommendations, reduce chronic disease, and prevent obesity. The Healthy Harvest Community Gardening Partnership is a community-based participatory research program between faith-based organizations, academic institutions, local philanthropy, and other non-profit institutions created in 2009 for improving access to healthy foods and quality of life through a community garden network. Healthy Harvest uses a social ecological framework combining individual, interpersonal, and community level influences into a single program, and employs a train-the-trainer approach for providing expertise in gardening and community-capacity building to low-income, predominately African American communities. To date, garden sites have been constructed at 4 churches (average church size N-353, 98% African American) and one school (287 students, 98% African American) in an inner-city, low-income community. Six trainings have been conducted on gardening and communitycapacity building. Monthly evaluations of gardening activity indicate that a total of 239 individual garden plots have been constructed of which 101 show signs of use; 79 have visible plants, and 31 have visible produce demonstrating initial feasibility. Qualitative data is being collected to evaluate the effect of Healthy Harvest on lifestyle (physical activity and diet) and social (perceptions of neighborhood, feelings of connectedness) variables. Furthermore, Healthy Harvest plans to develop

A system for distributing produce, therefore providing access to healthy foods on a broader scale. Overall, this program provides a novel approach for improving access to healthy foods and improving quality of life in low-income communities that could have implications for reducing chronic disease and preventing obesity.

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Dr. Kitzman-Ulrich pictured with liaison gardener, Steve Turner and community garden volunteers at the Golden Gate Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas

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