From Seed to Vegetable: Making the Connection

The Situation
Food comes from the grocery store! As the US population is increasingly disconnected with agriculture many of today’s youth have little to no understanding how seeds become plants and then produce the vegetables we eat.

Extension Response
Burke County Extension Ag Agent Dan Folske used Jr. Master Gardener funds supplemented by local dollars to take vegetable production into the schools in Bowbells, and Lignite, and to 4-H youth throughout the county. School participants included K-6th graders in Bowbells and 1st-6th Graders at Burke Central in Lignite.

Presentations and hands on activities were adjusted for the age of the students. The first sessions included introduction to seed shapes, sizes, and colors. Pre and post tests for seed identification were given to students. Tomato, pepper, cabbage, pumpkin, and flower seeds were planted into flats and other containers.

After most plants had emerged the second session in the schools focused on cotyledon shapes and sizes and seedling care.

Third sessions included transplanting into containers which students took home. Extra plants were distributed to teachers and other individuals for use in home and community gardens.

In Bowbells all starting trays were kept in a single activity room with designated teachers and students responsible for watering. At Burke Central School each participating class took starting trays to their own rooms and were responsible for watering.

Impacts
All participating grade levels at each schools showed measurable improvements in seed identification test scores following the seed education sessions. The average improvement across all participants was over 225%!
Students also learned about the effects of planting depth, under or over watering and adequate or inadequate light. Many of the students were able to successfully produce and consume fresh vegetables from their container plants or from plants transplanted into home gardens.

Feedback
“I hope you will come back to our classroom next year”
“It was so cool to eat a pepper I grew myself”

Public Value Statement
Successful gardening has been shown to improve self-esteem and problem solving. Successful gardeners have better access to fresh vegetables and studies show improved health with consumption of more fresh vegetables.

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