Thinking In and Out of the Box: Garden Explorations for Children
Extension Response to Community Forums Pilot Program

The Situation
The NDSU Extension Service recognized that to be effective they needed to seek feedback from their stakeholders about crucial issues and challenges. More people are interested in knowing the origin of their food. Programs that implement gardening have been shown to improve skills among both the children and families, improve consumption of vegetables and promote physical activity.

Extension Response
The objective of this multidisciplinary project was to implement educational demonstration gardens in five childcare and community-based settings to enrich youth, feed our communities, and improve health. Todd Weinmann and Julie Garden-Robinson taught how to plant, fertilize, when to harvest, and weed or vegetable identification. Todd, Julie, and Monique taught the Dig In! Standards Based Nutrition Education from the Ground up Curriculum USDA.

Impacts
The children (n= 153; ages 3 to 13; 32% Native American, 25% Caucasian, 28% Asian, 11% African American, 4% other) learned the science of growing foods, nutrition concepts and had tasting experiences. The program used research-based, hands-on curricula throughout summer months with assistance from teachers at the sites. According to teacher post-surveys, 100% of the teachers read the educational materials, 100% of children showed the teacher the garden and talked about trying new vegetables, 86% of children talked about the activities, and 43% observed children eating more vegetables. According to parent post-surveys, 87% of children were more willing to try vegetables, 75% taught parents about the garden, and 100% planned to make the recipes at home. Produce was donated to community food banks.

Feedback
“This active learning for the kids is truly a great way to learn.” Instructor Charism Center
“A heartfelt thanks to NDSU Extension agents and nutrition specialists for their education, support and face to face interactions with children on gardening. Our common goal is to help children and families experience the fun of gardening to become lifelong gardeners!”
Debra A Habedank, Director, Center for Child Development, NDSU

Public Value Statement
Gardening programs can improve children’s and families’ engagement in a collective purpose while improving consumption of vegetables thereby enhancing their overall health.

https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2879179/

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