

School Gardens Foster Healthy Kids and Strong Communities

The Situation

The children of North Dakota are its most precious resource, but they are undernourished and inactive. Surveys conducted by the Centers for Disease Control indicate that 92% of its children do not eat enough vegetables and 78% do not get enough physical activity. These rates are among the highest in the nation.

Extension Response

The NDSU Junior Master Gardener (JMG) Program was established to address these concerns. Among its wide range of programs, JMG supported the establishment of 36 school gardens in 18 counties from 2015–2016. Approximately 3,075 children participated in these programs.

The gardens were designed by local teachers to address their priorities (for example, science education, food security and beautification). They forged partnerships with local businesses, government agencies and food banks. NDSU Extension educators assisted in teaching the youth and providing educational resources to teachers.

Impacts

A survey of teachers was conducted after each summer. They reported their projects fostered:

- Enhanced skills in gardening (100% of projects)
- Stronger community partnerships (100%)
- Increased physical activity (96%)
- Beautification of the school grounds (93%)
- Healthier diets (82%)
- Opportunities for community service (75%)
- Increased food security in community (68%)

Other impacts were mentioned by teachers. They reported their children:

- Learned where their food comes from
- Showed interest in environmental stewardship
- Learned the value of teamwork
- Developed pride in their work
- Encouraged their parents to establish gardens at home



Feedback

"It's a great way to get youth involved in service projects and helps them learn along the way!"

"Thank you for allowing us to make a difference in our students' lives. The students are very excited about continuing the tradition of the school garden."

"It was great to see the youth excited in the garden and interested in learning!"

Public Value Statement

School garden programs provide hands-on activities that lead to healthy kids and strong communities.

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Resource Links

<http://www.ag.ndsu.edu/jrmastergardener/>