Good&HEALTHY SOUTH DAKOTA SCHOOLS

SUCCESS STORY

School Gardens Launched with Grant Support

Challenge

South Dakota ranks among the lowest in the nation for fruit and vegetable consumption. Our youth are not consuming five or more servings of fruit and vegetables daily. In fact, only 18.3% of youth grade 9 - 12 are meeting this benchmark. Additionally, communities needed help to create an alternative learning space, increase access to fresh food and build community assets. School Garden Grants assisted five communities with these issues. Increasing access to high quality, fresh produce also helps to increase fruit and vegetable consumption, which then improves public health.

Solution

Five schools received a South Dakota School Garden Grant administered by SDSU Extension. The grant program, sponsored by the South Dakota Department of Health, was launched to support the development of new K-12 school garden projects in South Dakota. The edible garden programs provided opportunities for youth to gain scientific knowledge while nurturing plants, along with recognizing that fruits and vegetables are a necessary part of a healthy diet.

Grant recipients received 20 seed packets and $1,000 for purchasing supplies, tools, equipment, plants or programming materials. Additionally, SDSU Extension staff provided face-to-face consultations to all sites, as well as technical support during the development stage.

The grant required applicants to form planning teams with at least three members (including a teacher and community member). The planning team was expected to provide leadership and actively participate in the planning process and garden launch. They were asked to explore programs and community partnerships that allowed garden utilization during summer months. The teams were also asked to provide two strategies for gaining community support to create a sustainable garden project.

Results

In total, 595 youth and 168 adults were involved in the development of the projects. The school garden project increased opportunities to learn and practice growing food, reduce food costs and increase food access. Students were provided access to fresh, flavorful and often unique products that may otherwise not have been available. Teachers had an alternative tool to help students engage in science, math, nutrition and other core subjects.

Successes

All five grant recipients were successful at implementing school garden projects. One main component of each project was community involvement and support. Additionally, the involvement of the students in the development process made these programs great learning opportunities. Students participated in real-life initiatives, and the skills gained will help them be more confident in leadership roles, working on a team and problem solving in the future.

Get Involved!

Those interested in starting a school garden project should consider applying for this grant.

The monetary support as well as experience from SDSU coaches can help your community move forward in a positive direction to launch a successful garden project.

Summary

The **Baltic School and Community Garden** created a place for community members to gather, to collect healthy food for the Baltic Food Bank, and to provide students with an opportunity to learn outside of a normal classroom. Students and community members established a goal of developing a plan and timeline for a raised bed garden. The students presented their idea to community organizations, local businesses and other classrooms. The community and students joined forces, supplying time and expertise to propel the project forward and witness a good change for the community. Community members assisted with the garden maintenance and constructed raised beds, as well as formed a committee to further explore other garden projects. Students researched, planted seeds and plants, observed growth, helped measure and build the beds, conducted science activities based around composting worms and plants, and celebrated the harvesting of the produce. By educating their peers, students learned where and how they can grow healthy food for themselves and others.

Since 2010, two schools in Pierre have use garden boxes to support science and math standards, and in 2014 the kindergarten teacher team decided they wanted to expand the program to Buchanan Elementary. The kindergarten team met with staff from the South Dakota Discovery Center and SDSU Extension to discuss the garden project implementation. The teachers at **Buchanan Elementary** in Pierre felt that children were more likely to eat what they grow and understand the plant life cycle if they saw it themselves, so they created garden beds based on models seen at other schools. All four kindergarten classes created seed mats and planted them in the garden boxes. Classes discussed the basic needs of the plants and how to care for them. They had already incorporated the Harvest of the Month program into their curriculum and planted some foods that the students tasted during the year, reinforcing healthy behaviors and learning more about how food grows. The Discovery Center continued the garden care after school was let out. When school resumed, students harvested the crops.

After receiving the grant, **Huron Middle School** (HMS) teachers met with students to create a plan for the garden layout, design, and what should be planted. During the first week in June, HMS summer school students learned about gardens, plants, nutrition, and growing their own food. They also planted beans and peas in little cups that they took home to plant. Students learned about different plants, the growing cycle, and how important plants are to their daily lives and health. They learned how much work it takes to plant, grow, water, and weed a garden, as well as the tremendous success and self-esteem it brings to harvest the produce from that work...and how great it tastes! The project donated extra produce to the Salvation Army to give to those who need good, fresh vegetables.

The vision of the **Wagner Community School Garden** was to establish a sustainable garden that promoted holistic learning from the garden to the table. It is intended that the garden will become a school-community garden, allowing community members to have garden plots. Students started by planting a variety of plants indoors in April. The garden became a summer classroom directed by two high school students. Students worked in the garden once a week, weeding and learning about what it takes to keep a garden growing. Students and instructors used the garden as an outdoor classroom, finding bugs, exploring plants, and of course eating produce. The students formed a partnership with the school lunch program. Produce from the garden was used on the salad bar in the lunch room in August. The garden was also open to people in the community who needed produce.

The **Wessington Springs School Garden** project had goals of exposing youth to the challenges facing the nation's farmers, including feeding the world given the fast growing population. Additionally, the project wanted to give youth a real world project that included preparing the soil, planting, caring for plants, and providing yields to the less fortunate in the community, such as the local food bank and elderly. The school groundskeeper built the raised beds for the program. A local 4-H advisor provided five weeks of gardening classes for kindergarten through fourth graders. Each class session consisted of an hour of hands on activities that focused on science, math and language arts. Class topics included worms, good and bad bugs, erosion, soil types, parts of a seed, parts of a flower, parts of a plant, and pollination.

Resources

www.iGrowSDLocalFoods.org
www.sdharvestofthemonth.org
www.goodandhealthysd.org

Local Contact

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