

impact

of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences



Healthy, Well-Nourished Population Improved Nutrition through School Gardens

Issue

Obesity in youth has risen dramatically in the U.S. According to a recent issue of *Science* magazine, 25 percent of American children are overweight or obese, and this figure is rising. Children are eating more and moving less. Gardening can teach children about healthier food choices, and encourage them to add more fiber-rich produce to their diets.

What has been done?

More than 3,000 students from ten Arizona schools, ranging from grades K through 8, participated in a school gardening program, with assistance from the UA Cooperative Extension, and a year-long grant for July 99-June 2000. These schools are located in a variety of settings, both urban and rural, and include one school on the Gila River Indian Reservation, and a school for autistic children. All of the gardens included herbs and vegetables. Some had edible

landscapes that the children ate from. One school had a chef who actually prepared lunchroom menus from the harvest. Cooperative extension faculty worked with more than 110 teachers, 500 parents and 50 new volunteers and staff to develop nutrition education activities and hands-on garden projects for their classes. They provided resources, education and training for teachers, staff and school personnel.

"It's a great way to introduce the children to foods they might not otherwise try," said Leslie Honaker, UA Cooperative Extension. "They take ownership of the food they grow and will try more of it. It's a small step in opening their minds."

Impact

More than 3,000 children added healthy, home-grown produce to their diets at school as a result of the program. Sample testimonials:

"The children at Desert Sonora Elementary are eating healthier, thus improving their quality of life and future eating habits. We in the Food Services Department know this because of the daily production records and the increase in the amount of fruits and vegetables need for each day at the campus."

—Desert Sonora Elementary School

"We found less aggression from students who worked in the garden regularly. Parents began taking more interest in family nutrition. One overweight child lost 30 pounds with the change in diet."

—Flor del Sol School

"Garden produce was shared at Indian Study Days, the reservation garden conference, school bingo, school lunches, with student families, and at the tribal employees recognition luncheon. Ten teachers and 15 parents remained active during the school year to participate in garden-based nutrition classroom activities."

—Sacaton Middle School

Funding

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