Farm to School

Striking a balance between scientific investigation and feelings of wonder and appreciation through on-the-farm site visits, hands-on garden and cooking activities!

Farm to Table’s Farm to School Educational Program – Girls Inc. of Santa Fe’s garden is one of 22 projects across the state that participated in the Farm to School Educational Activities program at Farm to Table in 2013.

Farm to School Educational Activities consist of a wide range of programs teaching children the basics of gardening, building agricultural awareness, exploring the idea of farming as a career, developing openness to experiencing new and fresher foods, encouraging personal healthy choices, and developing an appreciation of the environment. Activities supported through this program include school gardens, creating garden environments beneficial to insects and plants, farmers visiting schools, field trips to farms, taste testing events, special local food focused community events, and culinary, nutrition, and health education that have a locally-produced-foods focus.

In 2013, with support from the Nirvana Mañana Institute and First National Bank of Santa Fe, Farm to Table made available $18,543 to 22 projects across the state.

Girls, Inc., Santa Fe— Many educational goals can be addressed through gardens, including personal and social responsibility. "The main areas of focus of the garden program are food justice, drought awareness, ecology, cultivation of practical skills, and biophilia (a positive association with nature). Making connections in an outdoor space is what it is all about.

The girls learn to appreciate why we garden, what we garden, and how we garden in New Mexico. I have truly been amazed by their intuition when it comes to ecology and critiquing our global food system.

These girls are strong, smart, and bold...their voices should matter" explains Zoë, AmeriCorps Member, Garden Facilitator at Girls, Inc. of Santa Fe
Students visited the farm regularly to learn about crop rotation, maintenance, and harvesting. Not only are their visits very helpful, but it is a joy to see kids excited about sustainable living.”

Joni Cunningingham (owner of Taos Village Farm)

Students worked with local farmers and learned to prepare healthy meals with local produce utilizing the Taos County Economic Development Center’s commercial kitchen while also securing a food service permit to sell their products into the school.

“It was cool to have people buy our salsa and tell us how good it tasted.”

Madison (7th grade)

“I like it when we sell out of our dishes for lunch because kids like our food so much!”

Taylor (7th grade)

“From one seed I could produce more seeds, so that I will never have to buy bean seeds again in my life, which is kind of a cool idea if you really get into it.”

Simon (11th grade)

Taos Academy, Taos

Taos Academy’s project epitomizes the integration of gardening and culinary arts programs, including learning about nutritional values of foods grown and prepared for public consumption and business marketing techniques. In so doing, the project addressed a key goal of their schools’ Wellness Policy.

Students also learned about their community and social responsibility. As a result they incorporated delivering plant starts that they grew to other schools and sharing fresh produce with the local food banks.

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Joni Cunningingham (owner of Taos Village Farm)
Rio Grande Community Farm—Albuquerque

Farm to You is a school-based education program tailored to elementary school students. Additionally, the Garden Sprouts program is geared toward children under five years of age, and focuses on hands-on exploration of the garden, singing, story time, and opportunities for discovery. These curricula are designed to deliver high-quality, farm-based, hands-on educational experiences to students in the classroom and at the farm.

The VISTA associates that worked to develop the programs had many “a-ha” moments during the curriculum development and this was an excellent opportunity to transfer important skills to four women passionate about sustainability and environmental education.

They learned how to determine grade-level appropriateness, to align lessons with the Common Core State Standards Initiative, to link lessons, and to develop extension lessons that can be delivered by teachers and parents at school and at home.

Three of the four VISTA associates intend to become educators and are currently pursuing degrees in sustainability or education.

Among other items, the Rio Grande Community Farm was able to purchase solar ovens, skillets, and a fifth burner that go hand in hand with solar and cooking units—In their own words…

“Our students now have excellent tools to use to cook directly in the garden or at their schools. Having these resources to use directly in the garden enhances the soil to plate connection we are trying to teach, and allows us to reinforce crucial concepts of sustainability.”

“The books we purchased with the award provided our education interns with the resources necessary to develop a fun and interesting Science in the Kitchen unit. The dry goods we purchased provide excellent kitchen stock for the first two sessions of the Garden Sprouts program.”

“Due to budget cuts and increasing demands on teachers to meet mandated standards, fewer students are able to attend meaningful field trips each year.”

—Julie Hirshfield, Education Director
Rio Grande Community Farm

...on the crucial need to support Farm to School Educational Programs in schools...
La Puerta School for the Arts, Sciences and Agriculture, Abiquiu

With the goal of encouraging children to investigate and explore foods from the perspective of their ancestors, this holistic project encouraged students to compare and contrast existing conditions through cooking lessons, gardening, hoophouse development, visiting farms and farmers markets, and through the engagement of other community groups.

The project’s coordination with another awardee, Northern Youth Project, brought the age groups together to teach and learn from one another, empowering these young people around health, food access, and other issues in their community.

The project incorporated many forms of learning, cooperation and coordination with several other community groups to explore the full food system, past and present, through gardening, cooking, and nutrition education.

Some children discovered a new taste that they liked, others’ faces told the story that maybe they didn’t particularly care for the taste of the fresh greens. As we continued to harvest, we demonstrated that you can vary the taste of the food in how you prepare it.

Erin Manzanares, School Director
La Puerta School for the Arts, Sciences and Agriculture
The students learned about different irrigation methods used by our ancestors locally and those of other ancient civilizations and applied new knowledge to the school’s irrigation system. In partnership with the Eastern Rio Arriba Soil Water Conservation District we were able to irrigate our hoop house. We also purchased rain barrels to capture run-off from the school to water our raspberry bushes—which as of this year have become a bee habitat! While harvesting berries this year, the children noticed an increase of bee activity. This is great as we have also planted a few fruit trees that need these essential pollinators.

—La Puerta School for the Arts, Sciences and Agriculture

“I really enjoyed eating the mustard greens that the children had grown in the hoop house. They were really excited at harvest time. The children are learning to cook and are so proud of their creations. They are very aware of all the safety procedures that are involved with cooking. They wash vegetables and hands thoroughly.”

Ann Cunningham, Board Member

“I like that we can harvest and make our own food because the food we harvest is delightful. I like the flavor of totsoi, mustard greens, collard greens, radishes and cilantro. I had never tasted the totsoi, mustard greens and collard greens before, but now I like them. The totsoi and collard greens taste like spinach when cooked.”

Rio, Student, 10 years old

“I think having the hoop house provides wonderful experiences for the kids. They learn how things grow and what the final outcome will be. It teaches them about responsibility by having to water and check the plants that they are growing. It’s also great to teach children about kitchen safety. When cooking they are learning to follow directions by reading recipes and how to measure accurately.”

JulieAnne Herrera, Parent

“Our children are growing up in a 21st century world surrounded by technology and ‘quick-fix’ stimuli. To be able to offer our students an opportunity to see nature take its course, in her own time, is at the heart of our school mission. Our reward is to see the sense of accomplishment the children feel when they successfully grow a garden!”

Erin Manzanares, School Director
Northern Youth Project (NYP), Abiquiu

More than 214 students and community members volunteered over 2,300 hours of their time to work, learn, and enjoy the Northern Youth Project Heritage Garden, celebrating the health and beauty of northern New Mexico’s land, culture, and community.

NYP, a homegrown effort started by local teens, succeeds in offering and executing a well-rounded, hands-on experience to rural northern NM youth that combined art, agriculture, community service, and leadership projects in a way that celebrated the past, and prepared youth for the future in terms of their health, academics, and over-all wellbeing.

Youth have built and manage a garden, preserve traditional techniques (Flood, Drip, Waffle Beds), cultivate native crops, cook in traditional ways, and integrate farmers market sales.

“A student wrote on her reflection card “I loved being part of something bigger than myself.”

Another learned “things are harder then they seem,” while a [visiting] youth said, “the way the teen project engages youth in a way that promotes self-sufficiency is inspiring. I liked watching Darian’s face as she talked about the cilantro she planted and how much it had grown [referring to her NYP youth guide].”

“I learned practical information about acequias, and if I could change anything I would want more support for this wonderful project.”

— Youth Participant, Northern Youth Project
The teens served as tour guides to visiting groups, served as mentors to younger students in several venues, sold products at farmers markets, and some teens are even reporting the development of new home gardens!

—Leona Hillary, Northern Youth Project Director

The group works with many partners to fulfill their learning objectives and as a way to draw the community into the development of these youth: boys and girls clubs, La Puerta School (another awardee), surrounding towns’ teen centers, public libraries, Ghost Ranch, Natural Resource Conservation Service, and Farm to Table’s Pollinator Partners Project.
La Semilla Food Center, Anthony & Las Cruces
Implemented across two school districts, at the following schools: Conlee Elementary, Gadsden Elementary and Middle Schools, Loma Linda Elementary, Lynn Middle, Sierra Middle, and Valley View Elementary Schools

Engaging students in garden, cooking, and nutrition education that continues through the summer months, the project’s Garden Coordinators, along with student gardening and cooking clubs, maintain seven school garden sites, in which they are adding pollinator plantings emphases.

“We can eat these raw?” exclaimed a 7th grader at Loma Linda Elementary referring to a snap pea

“Garden Club is the highlight of my week!” exclaimed Cameron, 8th grader at Sierra Middle

The project has much community support for increasing elementary and middle school students’ understanding of where food comes from, how it is produced, and how it affects our bodies, communities, and environments.

The programs help to connect Schools Wellness Policies by the incorporation of physical activity, and safe environments, supporting a complete learning experience, health, and nutrition education.

Reflections of coordinators:

“Each student tried each item raw, and then they had the opportunity to try steamed beets and sautéed turnips. They also could choose to try lime or lemon juice, salt and pepper, humus, salsa and dressing on their salads. All the students raised their hands when asked if they were eating something they liked, and if they would make this at home!”

“Students harvested cucumbers, tomatoes, and beans from the garden. They tasted all of these plain, and then with a little salt. All of the kids enjoyed at least one or two things on their plate and asked for seconds! “

Students made their own compost! They were excited to pull compost ingredients out of a ‘mystery bag’ and to learn that fruits and vegetables provide nutrients for us while the scraps of these same foods provide nutrients for plants in our garden.

— Garden Coordinator at La Semilla Food Center
The degree of intergenerational exchange, the amount of cultural knowledge transferred to the young campers, and the newfound enthusiasm for growing local, sustainable food made this [program] a standout.”
— Val Wangler MD, Camp Organizer

Zuni Youth Enrichment Project, Zuni Pueblo
Implemented at Summer Camp Garden at Twin Buttes High School and Ashiwi Elementary – reaching K through College and Beyond

The Summer Camp hosted 65 students and 17 counselors. Integrating cultural learning, intergenerational exchange, and community involvement (organizations, agencies, families). During the Spring semester High School students integrated into their regular classroom activities lots of soil prep, seed starting, and planting in preparation for the summer garden.

The enthusiasm of the students and the consistent success of the camp have created a community-wide interest in restoring traditional agricultural practices and increasing the availability of fresh, local produce for all. They are now starting a new elementary school garden and the re-build of a community garden at the Zuni Comprehensive Community Health Center.

Additionally, plans are afoot for a garden at the Middle School and distributing garden starter kits to families.

This garden project is a good example of a community-wide blossoming around agriculture, health, and food.
— Val Wangler MD, Camp Organizer
Parent volunteers and teachers built a 12’ x 20’ hoophouse on school grounds that will significantly enhance student learning of growing food year round. Children Pre-K and K grades experienced educational activities related to worms, soil, pollinators, pollinator plants, and carrot juice!

Even before the completion of the Hoop House, the program has had a number of accomplishments. [A worm bin was constructed by Farm to Table’s Farm to School Director]. Through observations and hands-on experiences, preschoolers learned the different anatomical parts of a worm, which lunch leftovers the worms ate, how to make a worm bin, how to create rich soil optimal for planting, and how to grow food throughout the fall and winter by using a frost cloth.

After participating in Farm to Table’s Pollinator Partner Project, summer campers, ages 3-5, learned what a pollinator is, how they pollinate, and the interdependence of pollinators and pollinator plants like catmint, apache plume, strawberries, squash, cucumbers and fruit trees.

“A pollinator? That is something that goes to flowers and sucks pollen and brings it to the beehive, if it is... it is a honeybee!”
—Sebastien, age 4

Our hope for the future is that students in all of the grades of our school, preschool to 8th grade, will use this new outdoor classroom to explore how they can lead as Citizen Scholars, learning how to reduce their carbon footprint by growing their own food locally year round.

—Perli Cunanan, Executive Director, Santa Fe School for the Arts and Sciences