Farm to School Educational Activities

The projects that were awarded funds helped to strengthen and deepen community relationships with others (organizations & school-based partners). Each project, in unique and meaningful ways, educated students with hands-on farm to school activities and provided opportunities to taste new and healthier foods. These activities, serve children to make healthier lifestyle choices into their futures!

Looking to strengthen how farm to school activities can be sustained beyond the school year, Farm to Table initiated a new strategy focused on engaging farm to school teams, while building local capacity, supporting the integration of farm to school activities in schools; maximizing our role as a co-host for FoodCorpsNM; developing local champions within schools; and, exploring ways to increase connectivity and relationships.

Atrisco Heritage Academy High School, Albuquerque –
Project’s impact: 2,500 9th to 12th graders, parents, and school community.
This public school FoodCorps site successfully:
Brought the school garden back to life, by making it an inviting space for use by the school community – teachers, parents, students.
Formed a structured school garden committee–for planning and design.
Incorporated important design input from Special Ed students plus one student organization.
Students gained knowledge and hands-on experiences – seeding, planting, transplanting plant starts, weeding, soil building, irrigation setup, constructing water ditches and maintenance, art, basic nutrition.
Integrated scheduled garden education and cooking classes further into the school.
Created greater sustainability of the garden through the summer months and into new school years.

This strategy served to anchor our capacity-building technical assistance and furthered the impact and viability of projects within the school setting. Farm to Table made available $14,900 to 11 projects, in 13 schools, 7 of which have FoodCorps connections, across 7 school districts.

“The students enjoyed their time spent in the garden; the teachers appreciated the addition of garden and nutrition education into their curricula; and, staff and administration acknowledged the beauty and benefits of the garden space.”

—Project Coordinator, Atrisco Heritage Academy High School
Camino de Paz School & Farm, Santa Cruz—
Project’s impact: 359 PreK to 12th graders, parents, and school community. This small farm-based private school successfully:
Facilitated community visits which increased community connections, specifically for over 185 PreK-12th grade students from area schools including McCurdy Charter School, Las Cumbres Pre-School, Journey Montessori School, La Mariposa Montessori School, Dragonfly and Acequia Madre Schools.
Middle school students learned from their role as teachers, mentors and guides expanding their development as educators and nurturing citizens.
The experience allowed all participants to gain knowledge and experience in Ag & Food production techniques and about the interconnectedness of all the elements of the farm, referred to as the Web of Life, both by ‘doing’ and ‘tasting’ the fresh foods grown in the school.

While at a local restaurant one weekday morning and passing a table where an older gentleman was a young boy, Camino de Paz School’s Education Director heard a small voice excitedly call out—

“Are you Patty? Are you Patty? You have the farm with all the goats, and the horses and the chickens and the carrots. I saw it!”

—the young visitor was from Las Cumbres and had visited the school with his class. According to his grandpa sitting with him, the visit had made a big impression.

Lockwood Elementary School/Healthy Kids-Curry County, Clovis—
Project’s impact: 500 K to 5th graders, parents, and school community.
This public school successfully:
Developed a new hoophouse garden that will be used for fruit and veggie tastings and for classroom education with the start of the 2015 new school year.

“I am excited for the students at Lockwood to use our hoophouse garden. This is something that can change not only our school but our community”
—Mrs. Westbrook, Principal
Lockwood Elementary School

Students grew tremendously through having to guide groups of all ages around the farm giving demonstrations of harvesting, milking goats, and showing how an apple blossom grows to an apple or how to make cheese.”
— Camino de Paz School & Farm

Tours conducted by Camino de Paz Students
“reinforced their understanding of what they do on a daily basis... and the younger visitors seemed enamored with being instructed by a teenager.”
Patricia Pantano —Camino de Paz School & Farm
East San Jose Elementary School, Albuquerque—
Project’s impact: 300 K to 4th graders, parents, and school community. This public school FoodCorps site successfully:
Implemented the Keeping it Local Initiative which included a school-based farmers market and a Family Diner, featuring healthy cooking demos, tastings and a celebration of culture. Increased access to local fresh healthy food; knowledge about where to find it to purchase; the tasting and eating of more fresh produce; and, learning how to prepare these foods in this dual-language (Spanish-English) setting where over 90% of the student population is of Hispanic origin and where 100% of students participate in the free and reduced lunch program.
Families learned about the importance of supporting local agriculture and were surprised to know that so much produce is grown in Albuquerque’s South Valley.

The Initiative, which furthers the work that the successful school garden illustrates, is a pilot project that is serving as a model for schools throughout Albuquerque Public Schools.

Magdalena Municipal Schools, Magdalena—
Project’s impact: 169 K to 12th graders and school community. This public school site successfully:
Integrated high school students, both past and present, to assist teachers in mentoring younger students. In this way empowering these young adults in ways that serve their community while also exciting the younger students’ interest in learning.
Developed small scale projects made possible through the purchase pollinator activity kits and garden domes for Kindergarten thru 2nd grade classrooms as well as indoor classroom-scale growing kits for 3rd to 5th grade classrooms.
Younger students were able to have their own small scale project to work on in their classrooms... something they were very excited about because of participation by the high school students in a greenhouse project.

“"To increase the interest in eating healthy, we encouraged our students to grow their own fruits and vegetables.”

—Teacher, Magdalena Municipal Schools

...on the importance of Farm to School Educational Programs in schools...
McCollum Elementary School, Albuquerque—
Project’s impact: 414 K to 5th graders, parents, and school community. This public school, which services all types of students including those with varying special needs, successfully:

Built and planted raised garden beds through the efforts of students, parents and school volunteers which served as a catalyst for the entire school.

Inclusion of students with special needs is a vital part of their program. We sincerely believe that all children benefit from observing and interacting with children who have different levels of social, language, academic, and other skills.

The activities motivated the school to produce a Health Fair that incorporated food tastings, art, and school-wide gardening projects across grade levels.

During the Health Fair, the entire student body toured the garden and talked with the participating class members. Students participated in one hour shifts in three groups combining 5th and 2nd graders, 4th and 1st, and kinder and 3rd graders.

Throughout the Fair and while the garden was being built and planted, Teachers and other staff members expressed interest in becoming a part of a school wide gardening project.

One educational assistant became inspired to create a four senses garden in the courtyard of the cafeteria. Using four large pots she included plants for a taste, touch, scent, and sight experience.

When extra funding is available, the goal will be to have a garden in each of the 5 courtyards of the school. Also, the Health Fair will be an annual event in the spring. —Project Coordinator

Carrie McGill, McCollum Elementary School
The garden will continue to be maintained by the functional skills class and their chosen partner class. As the vegetables and herbs grow, they will use them for cooking each week, instead of buying these ingredients at the store. Project Coordinator on how the project at McCollum Elementary School became an inspiration across grade and skills levels, and led to school wide integration of farm to school activities.

Salazar Elementary School, Santa Fe—Project’s impact: 600 K to 6th graders, parents, and school community. This public school site successfully:

Was able to pay a dedicated parent/community organizer aka ‘Garden Coordinator’ for her work, which has been substantial as a neighborhood volunteer.

The Garden Coordinator convenes a weekly garden club through the afterschool program, supports the Annual Harvest Festival, coordinates all garden volunteers, and the tasks and projects in the thriving garden, that involve all parts of the school community.

“Our ability to secure support for Daisy has been essential in helping to build sustainability, she also works with many other parents, as well as volunteers. In fact, the Summer tasks [of maintaining the garden] were supervised by Daisy and her 6 year old daughter, and done by them and a team of dedicated volunteers.”

—Christopher Sabo
Salazar Elementary School
La Semilla Food Center, Las Cruces & Anthony—Project’s impact: 1,915 Kindergarten to 8th graders, parents, and school community.

This public school FoodCorps site successfully:

- Constructed heavy-duty raised garden beds which will withstand flooding and allow students to engage in garden-based activities year-round at multiple school garden sites. Due to unexpected destructive rain events in the area, there were several school gardens that needed garden bed re-build. Now, three schools have new and heavy duty garden beds that will be usable for many years into the future.

- Students at Gadsden Elementary also helped develop their garden design and painted their shed.

As continuation of this project, students and volunteers will develop a draining system by digging a trench around the garden site and filling it with gravel.

Quotes by Rebecca Wiggins-Reinhard, Farm to School Coordinator at La Semilla Food Center:

"The use of fresh vegetables and fruits picked from the garden always excites students. It makes a big difference when they are able to pick their own vegetables and fruits and eat them right from the garden. They are more willing to try new foods, and they learn basic skills including cutting, chopping, and food safety that enable them to prepare simple healthy snacks at home."

"This project gives students the tools they need to make healthy choices by teaching them about the links between food, our health, and our environment, by allowing them hands-on opportunities to grow, cook, and try new foods...engage in physical activity when working in the garden to construct the raised bed structures."

Students at Gadsden Elementary pose with their new raised garden beds.
La Mesa Garden Park has truly become a transformative space! ... we took an abandoned blighted piece of property and turned it into something vibrant and meaningful [for the school and community].
—Reynaluz Juarez, La Mesa Elementary School

La Mesa Elementary School, Albuquerque—Project’s impact: 911 PreK to 5th graders, parents, and school community. This public school FoodCorps site successfully:

- Developed a garden park space across the street from the school where now teachers, students, families and community members use the space for a variety of activities.
- The newly transformed garden park, is now used by teachers and students for learning and growing food as well as for special activities.
- In the process of creating the garden park, the students and teachers discovered verdolagas (purslane). They are learning that although considered a common ‘weed’, verdolagas has amazing health benefits and are using them for different recipes at Homework Diner and in other cooking and food-based activities at the school.
- Students are also growing square watermelons, fresh chiles, and other foods that are being shared with families of the students.

“With a restructured garden space that prevents flooding, students will also enjoy the garden more during the late summer and early fall months when plants are producing the most in the garden”

“Students also learn about water harvesting and resource conservation in a time of drought all while maintaining their garden spaces and learning about planting and harvesting.”

“Students also learn about water harvesting and resource conservation in a time of drought all while maintaining their garden spaces and learning about planting and harvesting.”

“When we first envisioned and planned [the design of the empty lot], our community talked about wanting a healthy healing place to bring family members. Our Native American Youth Drum club sang and we made prayers during the ground breaking”

“The fact that verdolagas found their own way to our garden has been a blessing for us...we have made ‘beans and greens’, smoothies and salads [with them]"
Guadalupe Montessori, Silver City—
Project’s impact: 75 PreK to 12th graders, parents,
and school community.
This private school FoodCorps site successfully:
Participating in a Youth Food Justice Workshop, youth
students designed, developed, and executed a special
project, aimed at garden sustainability, local pollinator
health, and curricula development for younger
students and community members.
Physical changes to the environment designed and
completed (or planned for the new school year) by
students, parents and teacher volunteers included: a
re-built and invigorated grape arbor, a hedgerow of
additional edible and pollinator friendly plants, a food
justice pollinator-themed mural, added curriculum
materials to support pollinator education, and grocery
shopping carts as mobile growing spaces for veggies in
the community.
Engaged younger students in learning about what is
and how to create pollinator friendly habitats as part
of the youth student-led tours.

Inspiration: photo of shopping cart planter,
GreenReview Blog

“One of our [youth]
participants, Grace,
was super inspired
by a TED talk that
we watched and the
discussion that followed. In the TED talk they
showed old shopping carts growing potatoes in
a big city. Grace immediately went out
and got a grocery store to donate grocery carts,
filled them with potting soil and started
growing vegetables in them!
It was wonderful to see her inspiration become
action and see the shopping carts out on the
street, reminding people walking by that you
can grow your own food in many creative ways!

Unless otherwise noted,
Quotes on these two pages
are from
Elena Mitchel,
Project Coordinator &
FoodCorps Service Member
for farm to school activities
in the Silver City projects.
“Community building for a common goal...The shed raising party, organized in conjunction with Martin Luther King Jr. National Day of Service, was a wonderful, fun way to connect with the community and [to] harness community support.”

—Elena Mitchel, Project Coordinator & FoodCorps Service Member, TVC of Grant County

The Volunteer Center of Grant County (TVC) & Sixth Street Elementary School, Silver City—
Project’s impact: 338 K to 5th graders, parents, and school community. This public school FoodCorps site successfully: 

BUILT a substantial toolshed in the school garden of Sixth Street Elementary School. 

INSTALLED an automatic irrigation system which assists with summertime and weekend garden sustainability.

We had a great turnout of volunteers. One of the counselors at the school came with her husband and parents. One of the teachers came with two sons, a daughter and three grandsons. Two parents came, one brought her daughter to help. The Volunteer Center staff came...

We also had a number of other community volunteers, some of whom brought tools for us to use during the work days. We had a great response from local businesses who donated cookies, coffee, hearty lunch and other snacks to serve the volunteers on both days.