

School Gardens are Green and Growing in North Dakota

We know from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey that students in North Dakota are not consuming the recommended amount of vegetables and fruits per day, or getting the recommended amount of physical activity. Unhealthy dietary behaviors and inadequate physical activity are two of the priority health risk behaviors contributing to the leading causes of death, and disability in the United States.

The North Dakota Department of Public Instruction - Coordinated School Health (CSH) staff administers health-promoting programs in schools with emphasis on nutrition and physical activity. At a Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Funded Partners Meeting in January 2005, the CSH staff learned of a school gardening/greenhouse project in Belfast, Maine and believed a similar project could also work in North Dakota. A greenhouse/garden project would address both nutrition and physical activity for students, staff, and community members.



North Dakota has a short growing season, which is not conducive to growing an abundance of vegetables and fruits. Schools with greenhouses could potentially grow produce all year long, and students and staff tending the crops would be physically active.

Learning soil preparation, planting, nurturing, and harvesting vegetables, fruits, and herbs would increase student's knowledge of their food supply. Lessons could be used in Science, Math, Agriculture, Marketing, and other classes. Schools could host taste tests, use some of the food in the school meals program, donate produce to a local food pantry, or sell the produce at local Farmer's Markets - so others can eat healthier as well!

Since garden produce is fresh and tastes better, students are also more likely to eat the foods they grow.

In February 2005, CSH staff recruited partners from the ND Dept. of Agriculture, ND Career and Technical Education, NDSU Extension, and the ND Department of Health; 5 + 5 Communities, and are called the Green and Growing Collaborative.

The collaborative developed an on-line survey and surveyed schools to determine interest in a greenhouse/garden project. Forty schools expressed interest and in the spring of 2005 the collaborative processed survey results, visited and interviewed school teams, and selected two schools as pilots. Pilot schools were selected based on three criteria: 1) current physical resources, 2) school resources (including financial resources) and 3) community resources.

The pilot schools are Burlington/ Des Lacs with a greenhouse at the high school, and TGU Granville High School which also has a greenhouse. During the 2005-2006 school year both schools broke ground for gardens, and started some plants in the greenhouse. The pilots were supported with grant funds from NDDPI Coordinated School Health, the Dept. of Agriculture – Farmer's Market funds, community grants, and donations.



Collaborative members visited both schools in May to observe students and staff planting their gardens and again in early September to participate in the harvest. The ND State Superintendent, and the ND Agriculture Commissioner joined the collaborative in September to participate in a Green and Growing School Garden media event.

Even though ND experienced a dry summer both pilot schools had a good harvest. Tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, radishes, potatoes, peas, eggplant and beans have been available in the school salad bar. Pumpkins and squash will be harvested at a later date to be eaten and used in classroom projects.



Burlington/Des Lacs highlights:

- Students, staff, and community members worked together to prepare the garden site, tend to the crops, harvest, and serve the produce.
- Some plants were started in the Des Lacs High School greenhouse, and high school students assisted the younger students.
- The produce is available in the school salad bar, and will be used in classroom projects.
- A high school student volunteered to weed the garden as part of her community service hours and school staff and community members watered the garden.
- The fifth grade students were very pleased with the work they had done and look forward to another garden next year.
- Next year teachers and the principal hope to try new crops such as peanuts.

TGU Granville High School highlights:

- 200 premiums were used for the FFA exhibit at the North Dakota State Fair
- Produce was donated to the local food pantry
- Produce is available in the school salad bar
- Some produce was frozen to be used later in the school meals
- Students, staff, and community members worked together to prepare the garden site, tend to the crops, harvest, and serve the produce.
- Grant funds and donations from the community helped the school purchase fence, and garden tools/equipment.
- Students and staff look forward to the garden project next year, and plan to use the greenhouse for vegetables and fruits this winter.

The two pilot schools completed a project summary which will serve as a replication model for other schools in the state.