



Healthy Gardens, Healthy Youth

The “*Healthy Gardens, Healthy Youth*” People’s Garden School Pilot Project is an Extension partnership, and a nationwide research project funded by the USDA’s Food and Nutrition Service. Aimed at addressing childhood obesity and improving nutrition, the pilot project spans four states, serves an estimated 4,000 students at 54 elementary schools over two and a half years, and engages low-income students in the physical activity involved in growing food, learning life skills, and teaching science and math through school gardens.

“*Healthy Gardens, Healthy Youth*” is part of the People’s Garden Initiative, launched by Agriculture Secretary Vilsack on February 12, 2009, as an effort to challenge USDA employees to create gardens at USDA facilities. An idea that started with one garden to commemorate the bicentennial of Abraham Lincoln’s birth has grown into an international movement. It is a collaborative effort of over 700 local and national organizations all working together to establish school gardens, community gardens and small-scale agriculture projects in urban and rural areas, collectively referred to as community-based agriculture.

“School gardens hold great promise for educating our kids about food production and nutrition,” said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack in April 2011 when the \$1 million grant award was announced. “Learning where food comes from and what fresh food tastes like, and the pride of growing and serving your own fruits and vegetables, are life-changing experiences. Engaging kids in our efforts to end childhood hunger and curb childhood obesity is critical if we are going to succeed.”

The schools selected to participate in this pilot come from urban, suburban, and rural communities and have at least 50 percent of their students qualified to receive free or reduced-price school meals. The four states involved represent the ethnic, climatic, and geographic diversity of the United States. Leadership for “*Healthy Gardens, Healthy Youth*” is provided by Washington State University Extension in collaboration with the Cooperative Extensions of Cornell University, Iowa State University and University of Arkansas. This collaboration illustrates the strengths of the land grant university system and its ability to implement a pilot project of this scale - conducting research, disseminating information, and building capacity within entire communities to sustain their local school gardens.

In addition to assessing both the process of implementing gardens and the nutritional outcomes of the project, HGHY has set four primary goals:

- **Engage youth** enrolled in high-poverty schools to increase access to, and consumption of, fruit and vegetables through hands-on learning about growing food.

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“*Healthy Gardens, Healthy Youth*”
PEOPLE’S GARDEN SCHOOL PILOT
PROJECT



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- **Empower youth** to use and share their new interests, knowledge and skills to grow and sustain gardens and choose healthy foods at school, home and in their communities.
- **Contribute toward a sustainable environment and food system** by developing an appreciation for the public health, environmental and social benefits that gardens provide to local communities.
- **Build a nationwide network** of Extension educators and volunteers to leverage existing federal, state, and local investments in programs such as 4-H/Youth Development, SNAP-Ed, Master Gardener Volunteers and community-based horticulture programs through a common garden-based learning program, which can be replicated nationwide.

Schools are active partners in “*Healthy Gardens, Healthy Youth*”, collecting research data as well as delivering educational lessons and activities. Food service and physical education staff will be engaged to create an integrated approach to improving students’ nutrition and health. Family member will contribute information about the home environment and eating practices, learn about nutrition concepts, and try out new recipes at home.

To support the educational activities, a comprehensive toolkit has been compiled utilizing portions of the nation’s best nutrition and gardening curricula. The toolkit contains lessons in planting, maintaining and harvesting gardens; learning about eating fruits and vegetables; and other aspects about working together to use natural resources to grow food. All lessons are aligned with STEM concepts (science, technology, engineering and math) and based on the 4-H Youth Development model of Do – Reflect – Apply. Pre-recorded webinars and other downloadable resources make efficient use of technology by providing clear and consistent on-line training for educators implementing the project from coast to coast.

“This important pilot program will make a significant contribution to the development of national models,” said Kevin Concannon, USDA Under Secretary for Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services. “This program moves us toward our goal of improving the health and nutrition of our kids and communities, and instilling healthy eating habits that can last a lifetime.”

The project continues through the 2012-2013 school year.

Follow the progress of “*Healthy Gardens, Healthy Youth*” on-line:

- Project website: <http://peoplesgarden.wsu.edu>
- facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/HealthyGardensHealthyYouth>
- YouTube channel: <http://www.youtube.com/user/ExtSchoolGarden>

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