Eating From the Garden

The Impact of Eating from the Garden on Students, Families and Communities

Authors:
Rebecca Mott, Jo Britt-Rankin, M.S., Ph.D., Candance Gabel, R.D., Larry Roberts, Kimberly Keller, Ph.D.

University of Missouri

Introduction:
Eating from the Garden is a nutrition and gardening program. This curriculum increases knowledge on gardening methods, nutrition, food safety and the food cycle through 13 interactive lessons for youth that include recipes and games.

Concepts from the experiential learning theory were used to develop Eating from the Garden’s evidence-based curriculum. This hands-on horticulture experience challenges students to think differently about their food and make more educated and healthy food choices in the future. The Eating from the Garden curriculum aligns with Missouri’s Grade Level Expectations (GLE) for nutrition, math and science subject areas. The program benefits from collaboration among school teachers, 4-H educators and volunteers, master gardeners and trained community volunteers.

Program Objectives:
- Promote healthier food choices and physical activity
- Increase consumption of fruits and vegetables
- Increase gardening and food preparation knowledge and skills

Results:
Ongoing evaluations occur to ensure the success of the program. Pre- and post-test evaluations monitor participants’ understanding of key concepts. Parent questionnaires assess students’ interest in gardening and fruit and vegetable consumption at home. Lastly, teacher and volunteer questionnaires evaluate changes seen in students and themselves. This monitoring system allows for adjustments that ensure the best learning environment for students.

Participating students indicated increased interest in nutrition and garden-related topics. Specifically, students:
- Enjoy growing fruits and vegetables and would like to grow them at home
- Eat more fruits and vegetables at home through discussion with and encouragement from parents
- Want to learn more about gardening and nutrition

In addition to increased student interest in nutrition and gardening, there were several unplanned results from this program. Along with learning gardening skills themselves, students brought those skills home to their families. Several young people reported that the handouts and curricula they brought home had inspired their parents to begin gardens at home. In one location, a group of parents even founded a family garden group.

Community members and local businesses donated seeds, compost, garden tools, lumber, transportation, money and time to help make this program a reality in Missouri. Additionally, numerous schools and non-profit organizations around the state collaborated with Eating From the Garden to extend the benefits of the program.

Due in part to generous donations from area businesses and individuals, Eating From the Garden sites around the state produced over $20,000 worth of produce that included 32 varieties of vegetables and herbs in 2014.

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Donors

Collaborators

Granny's Farm and Home
University of Missouri Child Development Lab
Missouri Master Gardeners
University of Central Missouri Horticulture Department
Healthy Schools, Healthy Communities
Missouri Agribility
Fredericksen Farms
Russellville FFA Chapter
Joyful Gardening Greenhouse
Ozark Landscape Supply
Yardbirds Greenhouses and Landscaping
B & C Lumber
Ozark Landscape Supply
Baker's Creek Heirloom Seed Company
Lowe's
University of Missouri Horticulture Club
Wolf Farms
Joyful Gardening Greenhouse
Day Care centers
Missouri Master Gardeners

Conclusions and Implications (Abstract):

Through participation in the Eating from the Garden program, youth learned to give back to their communities in addition to working toward accomplishing program objectives. Missouri communities valued the program objectives and the concept of youth gardening, allowing community partnerships to develop to a greater extent than anticipated. Schools and community partners were generous in their support of this program, as evidenced by donations of time, goods, and services to support the program. Eating from the Garden participants often reciprocated out of the great pride in their efforts by donating produce from their gardens to other community programs.

“Thank you for giving my child an opportunity that I could not. This has helped her to choose fruits and vegetables over junk food snacks.”
-(parent of a participant)

“Thank you for giving my child an opportunity that I could not. This has helped her to choose fruits and vegetables over junk food snacks.”
-(participant)

“I started having 1 to 2 cups of vegetables for breakfast every morning. I have lost 5 pounds.”
-(participant)

“I loved what I saw of the program — kids loved the garden and eating from it. They thought of it as their garden.”
-(classroom teacher)