

Farm-



to-Plate Service learning project engages community

Situation:

Childhood obesity has become epidemic in the United States resulting in a rise in early onset diabetes, heart disease, and a myriad of other health complications. Contributing factors include more sedentary lifestyles, an increase in video game playing, computer games and television viewing, consumption of prepackaged and fast food on a regular basis, and a lack of exercise. Several members of the Sublette County Afterschool Advisory Board brainstormed to define ways in which the Sublette County 4-H Afterschool programs could be proactive in combating this sedentary life style. As several members of this group have wanted to implement a community garden in the Pinedale area, this quickly became an area of focus. Sublette County's harsh climate and extremely short growing season make season extension techniques almost essential.

The program received a Learn and Serve grant requiring that youth be involved in an intergenerational/community service learning project resulting in cultivation of fresh produce utilized as healthy snacks for program participants and also made available for the elementary school daily luncheon salad bar. Youth would learn the value of citizenship by giving back to their community through produce donations to the local food baskets. Finally, remaining produce would be marketed and sold at the local farmers market as an entrepreneurial business venture.

Southeast Area extension educator Jeff Edwards held a demonstration workshop to build high tunnel houses for the project. A local businessman and owner of property adjacent to Pinedale Elementary School agreed to donate nearly an acre of land. Although there are no utilities, there is a stream and pond adjacent to the property. With permission from the town of Pinedale, water could be pumped into a gravity-fed watering system.

Impacts:

Twenty-two volunteers constructed two high tunnel houses in May 2010 under the guidance of Edwards. Local Boy Scouts built raised beds inside the structures, the town of Pinedale agreed to provide liability and structural insurance for the property, the local Soil Conservation District agreed to assist with providing landscaping and landscaping design, and many community gardening enthusiasts lent expertise to the project. The first seeds were planted in late August. An open house showed community members their new business/community venture. Participants harvested fresh produce, learned to make healthy snacks, and donated fresh radishes to the school cafeteria salad bar. Finally, participants donated all produce from the final harvest to the local food basket.

Research on short-term impacts is underway. A partnership with the Wyoming Survey and Analysis Center has created baseline data that will be followed up this year. A compelling issue thus far is the surprising lack of understanding of the origins of produce. Of the nearly 50 participants in grades K-5 surveyed prior to program implementation, nearly 75 percent admitted never harvesting and eating a vegetable from a garden. Many could only identify the grocery store as a source for obtaining produce.

Robin Schamber
4-H/Youth Extension Educator
Sublette County
(307) 367-4380
rschambe@uwyo.edu

