



UC CalFresh – UCCE Alameda County revitalizes preschool gardens in Oakland

The Issue

Servings of fruits and vegetables consumed per day among all ages are below the Dietary Recommendations for Americans. Research shows that nutrition and gardening experiences, linked to academic standards for a specific age group, can increase vegetable and fruit consumption and physical activity. Gardening activities can help increase children's interest in eating fresh fruits and vegetables and improve their understanding of the health benefits and major nutrients found in the plants grown.

What Has ANR Done?

UCCE Alameda was funded by the East Bay Community Foundation (EBCF) in 2012 to develop a garden-based curriculum to integrate garden education into an ongoing Oakland Unified School District Sustainable Nutrition Urban Garden (SNUG) program operating at 20 early childhood school sites. The school sites with gardening received teacher training and technical assistance on nutrition and physical activity in the classroom and playground. When EBCF funding ceased in 2013, the 20 school garden structures lay fallow. UC CalFresh funding allocated in 2014–2015 revitalized the gardening activities at six sites. UC CalFresh provided materials, tools, and educator-trained teachers at each site on the Grow it! Taste It! Like It! and Go Glow Grow curricula. Eight teachers engaged the children in the gardening experience and classroom discussions, and two parents at each site assisted with planting, harvesting, and taste-testing the fruits and vegetables.



Preschooler is watering tomato plant. Photo by Ron Benbow, Teacher

The Payoff

UC CalFresh funding brings garden education back to six sites, reaching 200 preschool children

Over 200 preschool children at the six early-childhood revitalized garden sites learned to prepare the soil; use gardening tools; identify fruits and vegetables; planted seeds and buds; care for them; and then harvest and taste the fruits and vegetables grown. Studies have found that direct exposure to vegetable gardening, in combination with nutrition education, increases children's willingness to taste, prefer, and consume vegetables. Furthermore, the experiences at these garden sites provided 2 or more additional hours a week of physical activity, which can help improve children's hand-eye coordination and fine motor skills. All eight teachers gained confidence using gardening as a learning tool. Four new sites now added for the 2015–2016 school year brings the total number of sites to ten, with 31 teachers serving almost 800 children.

Clientele Testimonial

"I could never have imagined the transformation of my students. They loved to work in the garden, and loved the vegetables we produced! Thank you so much!" - Teacher

Contact

Supporting Unit:

UC CalFresh Nutrition Education Program UCCE Alameda County

Tuline Baykal, UC CalFresh Program Supervisor
tnbaykal@ucanr.edu 510-639-1272