WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
KING COUNTY EXTENSION

King County

Food $ense CHANGE
Cultivating Health And Nutrition through Gardening Education

In King County, as in the rest of the United States, obesity has become an epidemic. Over the last 20 years, the percentage of US children who are overweight has nearly doubled. The percentage of overweight adolescents has increased even more rapidly. The rise in obesity is a cause for concern because it carries with it an increased risk of developing diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease, three major causes of premature death. Obesity rates are higher among low-income populations, who have greater difficulty accessing healthy diets that are high in fruits and vegetables and whole grain foods. Food $ense CHANGE works with schools, community centers, and low-income housing communities to teach the foundations of healthy eating through gardening and cooking-enhanced nutrition education. People who eat more fruits and vegetables have a lower incidence of chronic diseases. For this reason, CHANGE works with students to learn how to make good food choices, how to grow food, and how to prepare healthy snacks and meals. Through outdoor garden classrooms, students plant seeds, measure their growth, and harvest fruits and vegetables to eat. They learn where their food comes from and make connections between what they eat, their health, and the environment. Community gardens also improve access to fresh produce for residents of King County with limited-resources.

OUTCOMES:

- Improve the nutrition of limited-income King County residents by teaching nutrition experientially through gardening and cooking.
- Food $ense participants increase their consumption of fruits and vegetables, increase their level of physical activity, and learn skills that enable them to access and prepare fresh, safe, culturally-appropriate, affordable foods.

Growing Food in the Schools:

Food $ense CHANGE developed a 10-lesson garden-enhanced nutrition curriculum for primary and intermediate elementary students and was in 6 schools in South King County, reaching 2,000 students in 70 classrooms in the Highline and Tukwila School Districts during the 2003/04 academic year. Teachers are using the gardens to integrate nutrition and science concepts into existing curricula.

Salmon Creek third grader eating broccoli flowers, a late-winter delicacy.
Photo S. Lerman

Cooking in the Schools:

Students in small learning teams prepare diverse recipes using produce from the gardens. They learn to measure, follow recipes, prepare seasonal recipes, and learn about the nutritional value of produce. Students enthusiastically take the recipes home and prepare them with their families. Food $ense CHANGE is working with Highline School District Nutrition Services to add these fresh vegetable recipes to the school lunch menu.

3rd grade student at Salmon Creek Elementary shows off his Food Guide Pyramid snack.
Photo S. Lerman

Growing Healthy Kids Conference:

In April 2004, Food $ense CHANGE hosted a conference, bringing together teachers, parents, and the community to learn how to teach nutrition through gardening and cooking. Approximately 115 people attended the event, which offered hands-on workshops, demonstrations and sharing sessions covering topics ranging from: techniques for cooking and gardening in the classroom to composting and food cultures to ways to promote physical activity with the students. The event concluded with a chef from PCC demonstrating how to prepare a variety of salads that PCC donated for the event.

June 2004

CHANGE in the Communities:

Mentorship Project:

In the spring of 2004, Food $ense brought together two of our partners: New Start, a program of the King County Work Training Program, and Salmon Creek Elementary School, to collaborate in building a bench for the school garden. The New Start High School students gained skills as mentors and the Salmon Creek sixth grade students shared their cooking and nutrition skills. The students and their mentors have prepared nutritious meals and snacks together. Youth from New Start will be growing food in the school garden over the summer, as well as starting seedlings in their greenhouse, that will be donated to the school garden this Fall.

4th grader shows off the corn and zucchini she planted. Vintage Park garden. *Photo S. Lerman*

Community Food Gardening:

Elementary and middle school aged youth in limited-income housing communities plan and grow gardens where they learn nutrition and gardening principles. The gardens improve access to fresh produce while serving as a locus from which to teach nutrition and cooking. Residents learn the importance of increasing their fruit and vegetable intake while preparing a variety of seasonal recipes and tasting new foods. The garden projects culminate in harvest celebrations where youth harvest foods from the garden and then cook up a feast for their families and the community while sharing their experiences about learning to grow their own food.

Student and Teacher Impressions:

"Because of what I learned in Food $ense I get healthier every day. My dad is a gardener and he agrees with you." - 4th grade student

"What I really enjoyed was all of the new foods that we tasted and the new recipes that we learned. The gardening was probably my favorite though. We planted tomatoes and when they are ready, we will hopefully eat them!" -5th Grade Student

"The kids talk more about eating healthier. They also have tried many of the recipes at home, and are willing to taste and eat foods they don't usually eat." -Teacher, White Center Heights Elementary School

"The Food $ense lessons have changed my ways. For the potluck today I brought a fruit salad when I usually would have brought cookies." - Teacher, Salmon Creek Elementary School

Community Partners:

King County Parks and Recreation, New Start, New Futures, South King County Housing Authority, Greenbridge, Kent Youth & Family Services, Seattle Department of Neighborhoods P-Patch Program, Girl Scouts Totem Council

Elementary School Partners:

White Center Heights, Salmon Creek, Hilltop, Mount View, Cascade View, Southern Heights

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