



School Gardens and Food Safety

NC Sustainable Local Food
Advisory Council

Health, Wellness, Hunger and Food Access
Subcommittee

January 20, 2011

What are other states doing?

- **Garden to Café Program, NY**
 - The Garden to Café program works with schools that have gardens to use the produce in the cafeteria
- **HB 3601 2008 Laws, OR**
 - ...requires the Dept of Ed to establish the ...School Garden Program...help schools utilize...produce from school gardens
- **Farm-to-School Program, WA**
 - Working on creating a state-wide policy for serving school garden produce in school cafeterias
- **Elgin-centered U-46 district, IL**
 - There are more than 40 school gardens, but none of the produce is served in the lunchrooms



What are other states doing?

- **Riverside Unified School District, CA**
 - “In California, many schools use produce grown in school gardens in the cafeteria. One could argue the produce grown in schools is safer due to fences that prevent animals, unlike most farms.”
- **Garden to Cafeteria Program, CO**
 - There are 50 Denver Public School gardens. The GTC allows students to grow fresh vegetables in their school gardens with the aim of supplying some of their harvest to the cafeterias.
- **Healthy Foods for Healthy Kids, DE**
 - They work with 11 elementary and middle schools in 3 different School Districts. The student-grown vegetables are served in the school cafeterias or in the classrooms
- **The Edible Schoolyard, CA**
 - The Edible Schoolyard is a one-acre garden and kitchen for grades 6, 7, and 8. The produce grown in the garden is not used for school cafeterias.



Common Safety Protocol Themes

- Soil testing
- Water source
- Chemicals
- Sanitary washing station
- Washing and handling guidelines



Congress

- **October 21, 2009: Secretary of Agriculture authorized to “provide assistance, through competitive matching grants and technical assistance, to schools and nonprofit entities for projects that improve access to local foods . . . including school gardens.”¹**
- **December 2, 2010: Congress enacted additional amendments to the National School Lunch Program in the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act (S.3307) that require the Secretary of Agriculture to provide competitive grants which can be used to develop school gardens.²**

1. 42 U.S.C. § 1769(g)

2. Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010 (S.3307), § 243 “Access to Local Foods: Farm to School Program” (amending 42 U.S.C. § 1769(g))



What does the USDA say?

- **Q: Can a school sell food grown in their school garden that was funded using the nonprofit school food service account?**
- **A: Yes, as long as the revenue from the sale of the food accrues back to the nonprofit school food service account. Schools can serve the produce as part of a reimbursable meal or sell it a la carte, to parents, to PTA members, at a roadside stand, etc.**

- **Q: Are there health/safety issues involved with school gardens?**
- **A: Yes. School Food Administrators need to familiarize themselves with the Federal, State, and local requirements regarding health and sanitation issues.**

July 21, 2009 FNS Memorandum 32-2009 titled "School Garden Q&As" (Prepared by Cynthia Long, Director, Child Nutrition Programs) (available online at http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/governance/Policy-Memos/2009/SP_32-2009_os.pdf).

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What does the USDA say?

- Q: Is there a resource that explains how to follow good food safety practices when incorporating school garden produce into the school meal program?
- A: It is important to ensure that safe growing principles are used to grow produce from any source, including gardens. Before using any produce from a school garden, visit the garden and ask the master gardener about growing practices, including the history of the land use, water sources, soil sampling and results, use of fertilizers and pesticides, and animal control measures . . .Contact your local extension office for specific resources. One such resource is from the University of Maryland's Extension on food safety and school gardens.

http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/f2s/Food_Safety_QA.htm

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What is recommended safety

Other considerations and recommendations

Review school district rules and regulations that can cause serious allergic reactions

Align a school garden program with any district wellness policies, school procedures, gifts and donations, working with parents and volunteers, and district liability policies

Safe handling information should be provided to staff involved in the growing, harvesting, and distribution from a school garden.

Consider using your school garden program to teach students about food safety and incorporate curricula that align with your garden educational plan

The best practices outlined in this brochure can serve as a framework for developing an individual school safety plan

These best practices were developed by food safety practitioners from across the state, including Haggy, Noll Hoye, Dana Hudson, and Amy Winston. This was created with the support of the Farm to School Network www.farmtoschool.org

FIVE STEPS TO FOOD SAFE SCHOOL GARDENING

Establishing and maintaining a garden in a school setting is a great learning project for students, staff and the surrounding community. All involved will certainly feel a sense of pride as the garden yields fruits and vegetables that were planted by their own hands. Teaching basic food safety practices is a great way to incorporate healthy habits that will last a lifetime.

Increasingly, foodborne illness outbreaks are being traced to lettuce, tomatoes, cantaloupe and other raw fruits and vegetables. These outbreaks are caused by pathogenic (disease causing) bacteria, viruses, molds and parasites found on raw produce. These microorganisms are a natural part of the environment and can be a problem whether you choose to use organic or conventional gardening methods.

You can reduce the levels of these microorganisms with good gardening and harvesting practices. Thorough washing and careful preparation will further reduce the level of the pathogens found on the outer surface of fresh fruits and vegetables. It is also possible to get sick from contamination of produce with chemicals such as cleaning solutions, fertilizers, pesticides, and heavy metals (lead) and other chemicals that may be found in garden soil or well water.

FIVE STEPS TO FOOD SAFE GARDENING
Here are five simple steps school gardeners follow to reduce the risk of foodborne illness from eating the produce from your school garden.

STEP 1- PREPARE THE GARDEN FOR PLANTING

- Be aware of your school's rules and regulations and how they pertain to your garden project.
- Test soil for contaminants, particularly lead, prior to planting.
- Locate vegetable gardens, particularly lettuce, ferns, and other plants, away from manure piles, well caps, garbage cans, septic systems, run-off from any potential sources of contamination, and areas where wildlife, farm animals, or pets roam.
- Use compost safely. Compost is the natural breakdown product of leaves, stems, manure and other organic materials and is a source of nutrients. To be safe for gardening, your compost must reach a temperature of at least 130°F. Check the temperature with a compost thermometer. Do not use any animal waste, including pet waste, meat scraps or dairy product waste in your compost bin. Do not use any animal waste, including pet waste, meat scraps or dairy product waste in your compost bin.
- Work with the maintenance staff at the school to ensure safe practices on the school grounds near the garden.

STEP 2- MAINTAIN THE GARDEN

- Schools must water their gardens with water from an approved public water system. You can be sure that water from a municipal or public water system is safe and potable (drinkable).
- Surface water (lakes, ponds, rivers and streams) can be polluted by human sewage or animal waste, fertilizers and pesticides from lawns and farm fields, or chemicals from industry and should not be used.
- Instead of using chemical herbicides, control weeds by using mulch or pulling them out.
- During the gardening season, keep cats, dogs and other pets out of the garden, as animal waste can be a source of bacteria, parasites and viruses.
- Control nesting and hiding places for rats and mice by minimizing vegetation at the edges of your fruit and vegetable garden.
- Do not feed wild animals, even birds, near your garden. Feeding or noise deterrents may help discourage other wild animals.



farm to school effort, are a part of school cafeteria and after school taste-testing and educate students in the "seed to plate" process. When students are involved in growing and harvesting of healthy vegetables, they are more likely to try and incorporate them into a healthy diet.

The following best practices brochure outlines safety guidelines for those involved with school gardens.



What's going on in NC?

Excerpts from email conversations:

- **Siler City Elementary School**

- Serves school garden produce
- Does not use chemicals
- Kids are willing to try new things because they planted it

- **Brunson Elementary School**

- “I support teaching children at school how to plant and prepare fresh, whole foods. It would be comforting if there were guidelines for doing this safely. ”

- **South Fork Elementary**

- “I'm not sure what the restrictions are about serving food grown in the school garden [cafeterias], but I have grown peas and lettuce in the garden ...Students were amazed and delighted to eat their own produce. ”



What's going on in NC?

Excerpts from email conversations:

- Cherokee Central Schools

- “I support school gardens, salad bars, and any thing to increase fruit and vegetable consumption. The biggest concern is the students' safety, hygiene and sanitation of the gardeners, water supply, fertilizer, and harvesting procedures, etc. ...we could use produce on the salad bar, but also for cooking demos. I believe that kids would be more inclined to eat fruits/vegetables if they put the work into cultivating them.”

- Advocates for Health in Action (supporter of school gardens)

- “Children are allowed a taste of what is grown, but the gardens are able to donate the food to organizations such as the Inter-Faith Food Shuttle for hunger relief. The gardens in Wake County use great food safety practices similar to GAP. Since the hunger relief organizations are feeding the same kids as the schools, is there a way we could allow kids to eat the produce in school?”



Questions/Comments

Thank you.

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