

Growing Project Bears Fruit At Boys And Girls Club

NEWARK, Del. — The straw-covered paths between garden rows are dry and dusty, and the plants small for August.

Four kids huddle around the watermelon plant they have adopted as Jay Windsor, extension agent for horticulture at the University of Delaware, (UD) says, "There are no blossoms on this plant. Why not?"

A 10-year-old boy replies, "No water. We need rain."

"Right," Windsor confirms.

Just four weeks ago this exchange could not have taken place, since the 9 to 12-year-olds involved in the Thurman Adams and Ed Ralph Agricultural Education Project knew very little about growing plants. And this is in an area well known for its agriculture — Sussex County, Delaware.

The 80 kids involved in the project, a joint effort between the Boys and Girls Club of Sussex in Georgetown and UD's College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, attend the club's summer enrichment program. The garden is behind the building that houses the youth center.

"In June before we started in the garden, I asked these kids where sweet corn comes from, and they answered, 'a can' or

"the supermarket," said Mark Isaacs, director of the UD Research and Education Center in Georgetown. "But because of what we are doing here, these youngsters will go away at the end of summer with a better appreciation of where their food comes from as well as the time and work involved in growing it."

Isaacs believes in this project, which is named in honor of Adams, a current state senator, and Ralph, a former secretary of agriculture, because of their contribution to agriculture in the First State.

The idea originally was that of John Hollis, a Sussex County farmer who was instrumental in establishing the Boys and Girls Club in Georgetown. He approached Isaacs about handling the agricultural education project, which is in its second year. And Isaacs has plenty of volunteers.

In addition to Windsor, there is Brian Hearn, a college student who helped Isaacs with the growing project last summer, and tilled and planted this garden in May. Another contributor to the success of the project is Extension Master Composer

George Sparrow.

"Plants have to go in before the kids are out of school, so we start the garden," said Isaacs.

The project, which began in mid-June, ended the third week in August, with lessons presented once a week. The first part of each lesson took place in the classroom and lasted 15 to 20 minutes. First Isaacs took the kids through a review of the last week's information; then he introduced a new topic. This lesson was photosynthesis and chlorophyll. The first week was devoted to soil, mulch and compost; the second week, Isaacs discussed water and germination.

The remainder of each class was spent in the garden, where, using a yardstick, the youngsters measured the growth of their plants. A group of four kids adopted one plant each of lima beans, sweet corn, squash and watermelon. Orange stakes beside each plant indicated which group is responsible for which plants.

The kids recorded date and measurements — both height and width — in a notebook. Eventually, they will plot the

plants' growth over the nine weeks. Now that the growing part of the project is complete, the youngsters will input their data into a computer at the Boys and Girls Club. This fall, learning about spreadsheets and graphing results will be the second phase of the project.

The adopt-a-plant idea was Windsor's.

"It gives the kids ownership, and they stay interested," he said. "It hasn't been a good growing season, but that's the reality of farming and the kids will learn from this experience, too."

Before they returned to school, the novice gardeners harvested and ate their bounty, which Isaac said the kids "take pride in and get real satisfac-

tion" from eating something they have grown. They also participated in a final bowl-type contest. In this way the 20 teams showed how much they learned.

"It's a great time. The kids have fun competing in the bowl," said Isaacs. "Last year, I was amazed at how much they had retained over the course of the summer."

Next year, said Isaacs, he and his team will start again, teaching a whole new group of youngsters about agriculture.

"It's important that they understand just how their food is grown," he said. "These kids know firsthand because they have done it. They won't soon forget."

Mifflin County 4-H

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Brethren Sunday School class. Becky once served as cook for the Head Start program and continues to work with Head Start as a substitute.

"It was nice being able to work with older kids," Becky said of the Junior Leaders. "It was a learning experience. I want to tell the kids to keep up the good work. It can change their future."

Several 4-H leaders spoke at the banquet. They will be attending the Northeast Regional Leaders Forum in Maine this month. JoAnn Lindsey, Elsie Shaffer, and Elaine Wagner spoke of their previous trips and encouraged

leaders to attend leaders conferences.

"I thought all 4-H clubs were like our clubs," Wagner said. "But so many counties handle things differently. There are counties that have tumbling clubs and clover bud clubs. I encourage all of you to go to the leaders forums."

Members of the 4-H Junior Leaders planned the banquet, which was free to leaders and presented certificates and pins to leaders for their years of service. Receiving pins were Rosalie Baumgardner and John Shaffer (one year), Beth Rearick (five years), Darv Yoder (10 years), Tim and Vale Fisher (15 years), and Helen Krick (30 years)



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