

Kids Grow Food

ITHACA, N.Y. — In this shrink-wrapped, vacuum-packed, pre-cooked world, Cornell University is striving to keep a strong agricultural connection active in the minds of 21st century children. The university's Agriculture in the Classroom program has developed the New York "Kids Growing Foods" school-garden program. This spring, grants are being awarded to 34 elementary schools in the state to establish or maintain these gardens.

"We're teaching children that food grows from the ground, it just doesn't come from a grocery store," said Margaret Barker, a program coordinator. "New York state is encouraging teachers to be more hands-on, and there's nothing more hands-on than a garden. Building a garden is a real-life experience."

The New York Kids Growing Food program sprouted from a 1997 antitrust case settlement between the New York state attorney general's office and a

pesticide manufacturer. Settlement terms permitted then-Attorney General Dennis Vacco to apportion proceeds for New York's agricultural community, thus providing \$130,000 for the program's first two years.

Since then, more than 100 New York elementary schools have received grants to develop gardens. Additionally, all garden project teachers have received professional development training, and the program has awarded scholarships to three teachers to attend Food and

Fiber Across the Curriculum, an agriculture education summer course at Cornell.

In return, the schools have agreed to plant 60 percent of their gardens with edible fruits and vegetables, to develop a plan for summer maintenance, to publicize their gardens within their community, and to prepare a report on their garden experience. They also pledge not to use pesticides.

Reports from grant recipients show that the gardens touch more than the students, the

teachers, and the parents. Farmers, local agricultural businesses, and community volunteers have lent their expertise to help these gardens grow. During the 1998 and 1999 school years, about 25,000 New York elementary school students have sown the seeds of gardening success. This year, about 8,700 more students will participate across the state.

"Kids are extremely excited, they're just really into it," Foster said.



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