



6 Special Projects

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Slow Food USA®

Introduction

As a new school garden gets launched, plants and seeds get into the ground and students begin to enjoy the great, bountiful harvest, many garden leaders want to grow the success of these programs into the community and start to look around for other ways to engage the students in the garden. Or often a Slow Food chapter wants to extend their relationships to other groups in the community and needs a project that will bring together groups with similar missions around healthy foods. The goal of this chapter is to give examples of successful Special Projects from Slow Food school gardens. These projects go beyond the classic Taste Education and garden curricula. Often these projects find new and innovative ways to use the food that is produced in the school gardens to provide further educational opportunities for the students in the community. Almost always these projects result in new partnerships that increase the capacity of both groups to support school gardens and extend their reach into the community.

This chapter was not written as a “How to Do” chapter but rather to provide a brief description of the different projects. If there is a particular project that resonates with your chapter, please reach out to the Slow Food leader listed at the end of the section for further information. In some cases, the Slow Food chapter has developed a manual to support that project, and it will be available to any Slow Food chapter that requests the resource.

Find new and innovative ways to use the food that is produced in school gardens to further educational opportunities for the students in the community.



CASE STUDY

Garden to Table

SLOW FOOD CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA

Slow Food Charlotte has conducted a project where students harvest produce from school gardens to contribute to an after-school spaghetti dinner. The pesto, sauce, and salad are made from harvested produce. Students are involved from planting in the spring to getting the food to the table in the fall. All children can be involved in the process and design of the dinner. Older children can participate in cooking. Younger children can decorate tablecloths and make menus. All students help with planting and harvesting. There are opportunities to include education in the table decorations and menu creation.

Planning for a Harvest Dinner starts way back in the spring when the garden is going to be planted. It will be necessary to have a preliminary menu established so the appropriate plants and seeds will be planted to support the menu. Ideally, the produce will not be ready to be harvested until just right before the harvest dinner. But since we can't always control the growth of plants, a contingency plan should be developed in case the harvest needs to be performed earlier. In case of an early harvest, is it possible to prepare the dishes early and freeze them until the Harvest Dinner? Conversely, if the harvest is going to be late and not available for the dinner, can the menu be changed or can the produce be purchased from another local garden or farm?

There are many places where the students can be involved in the Harvest Dinner. Students can help design the menu and the food plants that will be needed to prepare the meal. As the event approaches, students can help with advertising and marketing the event. There will be a need for many volunteers, and students can reach out to their networks for family and friends that can help as volunteers. Students can also go around to local businesses to

get donations of non-food items, like tableware, centerpieces, drinks, and auction items if necessary.



Events like Harvest Dinners are ambitious to pull off and come with a set of difficulties. First, it is challenging to grow enough food in a school garden to feed a large number of guests. While it may be necessary to partner with a local farm to source all the needed food, at least the students in the school garden will be able to see how their produce was a large part of the party. Second, the produce from the garden is not going to cost you anything, but there will be expenses outside of the garden food that will require a budget. Some of these items could probably be donated, but some fundraising will be necessary to cover some of the expenses.

As always, involving children in the planning for an event will be a good learning experience for them, but it represents a challenge for the adults in charge. Patience will be required to work with the students on the event. And there will have to be enough adult volunteers to help supervise the children as well as handle some of the more heavy-lifting tasks.

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Chantilly Garden-to-Table Spaghetti Dinner Menu

Spaghetti Sauce
 Tonight's sauce was made this week by Upper EI students and parent volunteers with tomatoes, squash, zucchini, oregano, and basil from the Chantilly classroom gardens.

Salad
 The salad was prepared today by Upper EI students and volunteers with greens from our own gardens added by grown lettuce from the farmer's market.

Stale Bread
 Stale Bread from local baker, Duke's Bread.

Dipping Sauce
 This dipping sauce for your bread was made with the help of basil our classroom gardens produced this week. It contains pine nuts, but no dairy.

CASE STUDY

Donated Food

SLOW FOOD DENVER, COLORADO

There are many uses for the fresh produce that comes from the school gardens. While it is important that the activities have some sort of educational component, the final recipients of the food can vary widely. In Denver, Slow Food Denver is part of a coalition of anti-hunger groups that have developed a program called Produce for Pantries (P4P). These groups represent different types of gardening groups as well as faith-based groups and food banks that work to end hunger. The goal of P4P is to connect home gardens, school gardens, and community gardens with the nearest food pantry to supply excess fruits and vegetables for those in the community in need.

There were several challenges to overcome to make the fresh produce available to the pantries. The first challenge was to find a way to connect all the different gardeners to their local pantry. After several attempts of a website, a partnership was made with a state-wide hotline that connects families to resources like summer feeding sites, assistance with SNAP, and events that are supporting families struggling with hunger issues. The hotline will now accept calls from gardeners and, using a large database of pantries in the state, connect the gardener with a local pantry using their zip code. Now it is possible anywhere in the state to connect a garden with a pantry.

A second challenge was to set standards of the types and condition of food that can be donated. The program is targeting only fresh, raw, and whole produce. The literature for the program states that a gardener should “donate only items that you would be comfortable in serving to your family.” Because the recipients of donated food are considered at high risk for health problems, the P4P partners also established some basic food safety protocols for the gardeners to minimize any food risks. These protocols

are published on the website and included with any literature on the program. Many pantries are also challenged with necessary storage and refrigeration for fresh produce.

The biggest challenge now is getting the word out to as many gardeners as possible so that as much produce as possible can get to the pantries. There have been partnerships with Garden Centers of Colorado to help get the word out as well as some creative websites to inform people. Most of the recognition for the program is coming from social media and word of mouth.



<http://produceforpantries.com/>

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CASE STUDY

Restaurant Collaboration and Cooking Projects/ Events: Whole Hog Truck



SLOW FOOD BUFFALO, NEW YORK

Often connections with local restaurants can produce special events to support the educational mission or the fundraising needs of a school garden project. In Buffalo, NY, Slow Food Buffalo has produced events with several restaurants to bolster their garden program. The chef from the Whole Hog Truck took kids to a garden, harvested basil and tomatoes, and taught knife skills in the kitchen in the production of bruschetta, which was used as a snack for Back to

School Night. Trattoria Aroma, a field-to-fork restaurant that works with Oles Family Farm, took a group of kids to the farm, harvested, and delivered produce to the restaurant's chef, who came to the school kitchen the next day and did a cooking demonstration involving a pasta dish that the kids helped cook. Both events have been very successful despite the challenges of getting donated kitchen space.

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CASE STUDY

Friendship Gardens

SLOW FOOD CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA



In the summer of 2009, Slow Food Charlotte and Friendship Trays teamed up to start a garden in the empty, weedy lot behind Friendship Trays, our local Meals-on-Wheels program. We wanted to increase fresh vegetables coming into the kitchen and decrease the amount of empty #10 aluminum cans going out of the kitchen. Everyone loved our whimsical little garden, but it didn't produce nearly enough. Friendship Trays serves 700 meals every weekday, and that takes a lot of food! We needed to start more gardens.

In 2010, Slow Food Charlotte applied for and received a grant from a local organization that allowed us to hire two part-time garden coordinators. These two coordinators were tasked with growing and sustaining the garden program, now named Friendship Gardens.

As of this writing, we have over 55 active gardens and six more in development. In 2012, our volunteers logged over 12,000 hours and our gardens donated over seven tons of the freshest, healthiest, as-local-as-you-can-get food to Friendship Trays.

At Friendship Gardens, we believe everyone should have access to fresh, healthy food. Along with our garden network, we have created a handful of other programs that help us live out that belief.

Through HomeGrown, our partnership with Habitat for Humanity Charlotte, Habitat homeowners are given a garden and support in the form of a garden mentor, access to our monthly workshops, and the promise that HomeGrown volunteers will return to replant one more season.

The Friendship Gardens Mobile Market was launched to break down barriers to access to fresh vegetables for those residing in food deserts. Each week we set up a farm stand at the bus station in downtown Charlotte and sell vegetables for nonprofit

prices. We happily accept cash, credit cards, and EBT/SNAP benefits.

Backyard Friendship Gardens is a community of backyard gardeners who plant a little extra each season to donate to Friendship Trays. With our vegetable growing powers combined, we can ensure that Friendship Trays recipients are served the very best food that there is: fresh, healthy, and delicious food grown with love in our own backyards.



Learn more about Friendship Gardens on our website

www.friendship-gardens.org

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CASE STUDY



School Trip to the Farm

SLOW FOOD NEW YORK, NEW YORK

Once a relationship between your students and the school garden is established, an invaluable way to further the understanding of where good food is coming from and how it is fairly produced is to organize students field trips to nearby farms.

Every spring, science teacher Sara from Essex Street Academy in New York City, one of the schools our Slow Food NYC chapter supports, travels with a group of students to Hawthorne Valley Farms, a 400-acre biodynamic farm in Upstate New York. At the farm, about 20 tenth graders spend two days working and participating in all aspects of the farm's life and activities. At Hawthorne Valley Farm, the students enjoy farm-based learning activities, including harvesting, cheese making, sap collecting, baking, cooking, and fermentation. While working together, kids learn about the interdependency between different natural productions and the urban and rural worlds. Students bond through sharing and learning in an out-of-the classroom environment, the conviviality of preparing meals together, and the exposure to

farmers' real lives and their vocational work are some of the many added values of bringing your students to a farm.

The students start preparing for the trip early in the school year through lessons that relate to every core aspect of the academic curriculum and that can be applied to their future farm experience. If possible, an in-person exchange between the students and the farm's staff will help familiarize students with the people they will be working with.

If you don't have relationships with farms already, an easy way to start one is to visit your local farmers' market. Introduce yourself and your students and support the vendors by doing your food shopping there.

One of the challenges of organizing a farm trip is covering transportation cost. Three quarters of Sara's budget for the trip covers the bus rental fare. Depending on the number of kids, less expensive solutions can be considered, such as parents/teachers carpooling or renting a less expensive minivan.

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CHECKLIST FOR A FARM FIELD TRIP

1

If bus transportation is needed, contact a rental company and determine the cost. Check whether your school budget can afford the cost. Students usually pay a nominal amount to participate, but you should have other sources of funding to cover the trip.

2

Carefully consider your students' age and group size to make sure the farm offers enough age-appropriate activities and enough staff to assist your group. Draw a timetable for the day and plan a realistic schedule for the day, then share it with the farm staff.

3

Obtain school and parents' permission slips, inquire about any food intolerance/allergy and special needs students might have, and check your school's liability policy for field trips.

4

Start preparing your group in advance about what to expect during your visit; also set expectations for students' behavior—they should be aware of the farmers' hard work and avoid disrupting it in any way.

5

Make sure you will have enough adults on the trip; contact parents and/or school staff to sign up volunteers.

A Slow Food chapter can support farm field trips by fundraising for the money to pay for the bus, to bring supplies to the farm or to recruit a chef for a food demonstration.



CASE STUDY

Garden to Cafeteria Program

SLOW FOOD DENVER, COLORADO

Andrew Nowak of Slow Food Denver was thrilled to get a call one day from Leo Lesh, Director of Food and Nutrition Services for Denver Public Schools (DPS). Leo was asking how they could get some of the produce grown in the school gardens into the cafeteria. DPS had just invested in salad bars for every school, and it seemed logical that some of that fresh produce growing in the gardens should land on the salad bars. That call was something Andrew had dreamed about but never really expected to get!

With the go-ahead from Leo, Andrew began thinking about what process they would have to go through to accomplish this task. Food safety for children is paramount, so Andrew started looking at the USDA regulations regarding safe handling of foods. These guidelines are intended for large farming operations, so Andrew began paring away at the regs to get to those that would apply to school gardens feeding their own schools. After many meetings with DPS and with Denver Department of Environmental Health, a pilot Garden to Cafeteria project was announced.

Key to the success of the pilot would be incenting gardens to grow food for the cafeteria, instead of, or in addition to, their own programs. DPS sweetened the deal by offering to pay wholesale prices to the gardens for produce grown and delivered to the school cafeteria staff. (Another key component of this project was a willingness by DPS to train their staff to handle fresh produce.) Garden to Cafeteria pilot schools took the bait and started growing things that would create cash: cucumbers, tomatoes, and melons are tricky to grow at altitude, but they are heavy and bring in the greatest amount of revenue. Plus, kids love them since they are not just tasty but familiar.

Produce is identified on the salad bars as having come from the garden, and it is well received by the students. The garden programs benefit, and as their balances grow, they have learned to grow even more of the produce that DPS is eager to buy. The program has been so well received that DPS is now rolling it out to all school gardens willing to participate and taking over from Slow Food Denver the administration of the program. Success!

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CASE STUDY

Youth Farmers' Market

SLOW FOOD DENVER, COLORADO

Slow Food Denver and its partner, Denver Urban Gardens (DUG), developed a farmers' market model on school grounds using fresh produce from school gardens and local farms. The Youth Farmers' Markets (YFM) provides educational opportunities by reinforcing traditional academics such as math and science and building life skills such as customer service, conflict resolution, and entrepreneurship. The model also supports nutrition education training so that families can see the advantages of eating the fresh produce in their daily meals. Finally, YFMs support community-building as the markets become a gathering place for a school community and support the nutritional needs of that community.

A basic YFM is an after-school event run by older students and supported by adult volunteers. Typically held on a Thursday or Friday afternoon, the YFM team starts to set up the market an hour before school ends. A group of students harvest fresh produce from the garden under the supervision of adult volunteers while a second group sets up a farm stand on several tables and under a pop-up tent. The produce is displayed with signage indicating the source of the fresh fruits and vegetables and the price. Market setups can include wicker baskets or metal tubs, or simply being spread out on a table. A simple cash box allows for students to accept cash and return change. Once the bell rings, families gather at the market and students work one-on-one to sell the produce.

To increase the range of produce items being sold at the markets, Slow Food Denver and DUG developed a distribution system in which a rental truck was driven to nearby farms on Thursday morning to pick up cases of fresh produce items that are



difficult to grow at school, such as corn, watermelon, broccoli, peaches, and apples. Individual markets placed their orders earlier in the week for this produce and are able to pick it up at a central cooler that DUG operates. Schools pay the wholesale price for the produce and can mark it up to make a profit for the garden program.

The YFM model has been very successful in getting fresh produce into neighborhoods that have limited grocery stores and in raising money for the school garden program. Slow Food Denver has been successful with two Specialty Crops Grants from the CO Department of Agriculture to support YFMs in food desert areas and promotions in these neighborhoods to increase the purchasing of the fresh produce. In addition, across an 8-week season, YFMs can earn anywhere from \$200-\$3,000 for the garden program to be used to buy supplies for the next season.

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CASE STUDY

YFM/GTC Conference

SLOW FOOD DENVER, COLORADO

Slow Food Denver and its partner, Denver Urban Gardens (DUG), have been collaborating for over eight years on the Youth Farmers' Market model and for three years on the Garden to Cafeteria program. Both projects have provided students with garden-related activities that extend into the community and cafeteria. In addition, both programs provide the garden with an opportunity to raise some funds to become more independent from typical fundraising efforts. For the most part, participating schools came from the Denver Metro area, yet there was great interest in both of these programs throughout the state.

In 2012, Slow Food Denver and DUG received some funding from the 1772 Foundation to support a full-day conference to show other schools and districts how the two programs can support garden programs in their area. The funding allowed for the rental of a large hall on the grounds of a county fairgrounds, materials to share with the participants, and the service of a local lunch to all participants. In total, over 120 people attended, representing over 26 school districts from Colorado and Wyoming.

The conference was split into two half-days. In the morning, we discussed the development of the Garden to Cafeteria program, highlighting the partnership between Denver Public Schools Food and Nutrition Department, Denver Department of Environmental Health, and Slow Food Denver. The key point of the story was the development of the GTC protocols that allowed students to harvest and sell fresh garden produce to the school cafeteria.

After a great lunch from a local chef, the afternoon was spent on how to set up a Youth Farmers' Market program in a district. While there are many moving pieces to a YFM project, the goal of the conference was to break the process down to doable

pieces so as not to overwhelm a new site to get started. There was a sample market stand set up in the conference hall, and there were several YFM leaders who shared their successes with the crowd.

The impact of the conference was seen following the session. The GTC protocols have now become a template for districts and county health departments across the state to use to develop their own protocols that best fit their community. At least three other districts have already started GTC programs with the hope that many more districts will follow. The YFM program has also expanded to new sites in the state and is taking on issues such as SNAP benefits and food desert communities. Slow Food Denver and DUG have also teamed together to produce a YFM Manual that shares all the Best Practices that have been developed through the partnership over eight years.

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CASE STUDY

Greenmarket Bucks

SLOW FOOD NEW YORK, NEW YORK

The Greenmarket Bucks is a three-year collaboration between Greenmarket (<http://www.grownyc.org/greenmarket>) and Slow Food New York City. Lower, middle, and high-school students from all over the city receive educational tours of the Green Markets, primarily at the flagship market at Union Square in Manhattan. Kids from schools with a 75% free lunch participation rate each receive a \$2 “Greenmarket Bucks” coupon that can be redeemed for fresh fruits and vegetables offered by farmers participating in the market. Kids

can enjoy their purchases at the market, take them home, or collaborate on a class meal back at school, depending on the accompanying teacher’s plan. The Slow Food NYC contribution of \$2,500/year provides 1,250 coupons. Slow Food NYC was the first and remains a primary funder of the program.

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CASE STUDY

Classroom Kitchen Carts



SLOW FOOD CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA

Not every school has a kitchen classroom, and not every lesson related to the garden can or should happen in the garden.

Children often start seeds in the classroom and then plant those seeds in their school garden. Some schools have compost for garden waste, as well. Being able to eat what they grow gives the school children a strong sense of connection to the garden, and it has the potential to teach them math and logic skills, nutrition and health, and history and local culture, as well as foster creativity as they think about and explore different flavor combinations. In an effort to provide the opportunity to enjoy and learn about food in the classroom, the garden leaders and parents at Shamrock Elementary School came up with a classroom kitchen cart that could be taken to any classroom in the school for demonstrations.

The Slow Food Charlotte volunteers who created and kept the Shamrock Gardens Elementary gardens for the first couple of years wanted to make sure that the students were not just planting and harvesting produce but that they were also able to share their produce as a group. The cooking/tasting portion of the garden program is important in that the students get to feel a sense of community while working together to prepare their food as well as sitting together to enjoy tasting it. This part of the program also allows the students to experience the preparation of food and is transferable to their home lives (bringing home recipes, talking about food with their families, etc.). In order to accomplish the cooking/tasting portion of the garden program, we had to find a way to bring the kitchen to the classroom due to lack of space and equipment. In 2011, a few of our Shamrock parents made the kitchen cart

their priority and were able to get all of the items donated through friends and family. Since then, the cart has been a treasured part of our program—the appearance of the cart in any classroom creates excitement in students and teachers alike!

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RECOMMENDED INVENTORY FOR CLASSROOM KITCHEN CARTS:

1 Kitchen Cart. Preferably stainless steel for durability and ease of cleaning. Butcher block countertop to stay cool with hot cooking devices on top, durability, and ability to use as extra cutting board (at least three inches x 2 inches)

1 Display mirror for kitchen cart

1-2 Large toaster-convection ovens with roasting pans (Krupps brand)

1 Extra-large electric burner (for use with sauté pans large enough for preparing food samples for a double class and/or parents and children)

1 Blender

4 Mixing bowls in various sizes, rubber grip on bottom

2 Colanders

3+ Wooden spoons (non-reactive and non-stick safe)

2-3 Tongs

3 Spatulas/rubber scrapers

2-3 Turners

1 Plastic-coated whisk

2 Vegetable peelers

1 set kitchen knives with safety guards

1 Additional paring knife

2-3 Kid-safe knives (still needs to have adult supervision)

3 Cutting boards

2 sets Measuring cups (at least 1/4, 1/3, 1/2, 1 cup sizes)

2 sets Measuring spoons (1/4, 1/2, 1 tsp, 1 Tbsp)

2-3 Frying/sauté pans with metal handles and lids

2-3 2-quart sauce pans with lids

4 Cookie sheets

2 Glass 8x8 baking pans

1-2 OXO salad spinner

1 Shaker for dressings and sauces

4 Flat pot holders

2 sets Hand mitts

10 Thin towels (for drying produce and dishes)

6 Terry towels

1 Salt and pepper mill set

1 Vinegar cruet

60 Bamboo, reusable plates (~\$1 each)

60 Fork, spoon, knife sets (~\$1.25 each)

60 Cloth napkins (purchase bolts or lengths of fabric in school colors)

Cork shelf liner

Staples:

Salt and pepper

Olive oil

Vegetable oil

Dish soap

Hand sanitizer

Apple cider vinegar

Spice blends (+dried herbs from garden)

Honey



CASE STUDY

Garden to Zoo

SLOW FOOD DENVER, COLORADO

In order to find new and creative ways to engage all students with the fresh food from the school gardens, Slow Food Denver formed a partnership with the Denver Zoo called the Garden to Zoo program. The Denver Zoo has recently gained national attention as the Greenest Zoo in the country for their efforts on waste reduction, energy savings, and local food procurement. The curators from the Denver Zoo approached Slow Food Denver with an idea that school gardens could grow fresh produce for zoo animals in exchange for educational opportunities at the zoo for the school children. After a discussion of what school gardens could grow easily, the curators decided that it would be best if the school gardens would grow fresh greens for the gorillas. Slow Food Denver liked this plan as it was always a challenge to get students to get excited about items like kale, Swiss chard, and collard greens.

For the pilot season, four school gardens grew a couple of patches of greens for the Denver Zoo. Slow Food Denver arranged for a weekly pickup from a couple of schools and delivered the fresh greens to the zoo's commissary kitchen. The greens were weighed each week at the zoo. In general, the greens were presented whole to the gorillas, but sometimes the greens were added to other food mixes for the primates.

The Educational Department of the Denver Zoo designed a program on "Colorado Food Webs" for the visiting students. Each school picked two classes (usually third or fourth grades) to go to the zoo for the educational program and a behind-the-scenes tour of the commissary kitchen. Highlights of the tour included a visit to the walk-in freezer where the students were able to see frozen mice, rabbits, and other delicacies for the zoo animals.



After the tour, the students went to the gorilla enclosure where they saw the curator feed the gorillas the greens that were harvested from the school gardens. The students were able to eat their sack lunch prepared by the school kitchen that was loaded with Colorado products and fresh produce from their school gardens. When the students realized that they were eating very similar food as the gorillas, students were heard to say, "I now like kale because I see the gorillas eating kale." The program was deemed a success as the students were motivated to eat food similar to the gorillas.

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