

Case Study: Project EAT!

Who:

Project EAT is a program put on by the Alameda County Office of Education in California. Alameda County is near San Francisco in northern California. Project EAT teaches youth in elementary school about healthy eating and gardening. It also has internships for middle and high school students. In these positions, older kids learn about health, nutrition, and food systems while leading others. At San Lorenzo High School in San Lorenzo, California, Project EAT interns are also responsible for the community farm at the school.

The Battle:

For a long time, Project EAT interns were the only people who worked on the community farm at San Lorenzo High School. Compared to many other produce farms, the community farm is pretty small, but working at the community farm is not a small job. The school's farm is organic, which means they do not use chemicals or technology that could harm the land and living things there. Work on an organic farm can include moving heavy dirt, watering, putting up fences, collecting ripe produce, and more. The hardest part of farming organically is working in bad weather conditions. A lot of people really like to garden, but farmers have to work even when it is hot and dry or cold and rainy. Before long, interns at San Lorenzo High School felt exhausted from working on the farm. They wanted to share the work, and the benefits of organic farming, like being active outside and learning about fresh fruits and vegetables with others.

Raise Awareness and Engage Others:

Project EAT interns decided to work in pairs to share information about their farm with the whole community. Each intern pair was responsible for communicating with a group of people. The groups of people they talked to were other gardens and farms near San Lorenzo, school district and high school staff, and all the students at the school.



Project EAT! Youth interns on Kale Yeah! Day.

Make Your Plan:

First, Project EAT interns gathered comments from community members about the school farm. They created two different surveys in Google Forms. One was for the students and community members. The other was for other farms and gardens in San Lorenzo. Finally, interns emailed school and district staff. After doing the survey, the group planned to explore the data they collected from the surveys and talk more with people who had special interest in the farm.

Using what they learned from the surveys, Project EAT interns planned to build a greenhouse and host Kale Yeah! Day. The interns believed that, with a greenhouse, they could grow more plants, farm during winter months, and start their own seeds. The interns planned Kale Yeah! Day, a day to celebrate healthy and environmentally-friendly food at San Lorenzo High School. On this day, Project EAT interns could tell more students about the school community farm and healthy eating.

Implement Your Plan:

One problem came up when the interns surveyed students and staff. The interns found out that many people did not know about the garden or Project EAT internships. That meant they did not want to participate in the survey or talk with the interns. To solve this problem, the students changed the survey questions so people could fill it out even if they did not know about the community farm.

The interns surveyed students and farms and gardens near San Lorenzo. Using survey data, interns learned what made community farming successful for Twin Rivers Farm. They also got 75 students to fill out the survey. The data told them that, while not many students knew about the farm, most supported having a garden at school. Two Project EAT interns met with the school principal and school district staff. During these meetings, the interns learned about school garden rules and the history of the community farm at the school.

The interns built the greenhouse and hosted Kale Yeah! Day. At lunch on the day of Kale Yeah!, interns and students from other clubs set up booths. They talked about healthy and environmentally-friendly living.

Evaluate Your Plan:

One of the Project EAT interns' goals was to share information about the community farm, healthy eating and environmentally-friendly farming with the students. They were successful in meeting this goal. Lots of students responded to the survey, and on Kale Yeah! Day, members of a club that partnered with the interns collected 300 student signatures in support of more local produce in school lunches. Then, a small learning community at San Lorenzo High School, "Green Engineering and Technology" (GET) helped the Project EAT interns. GET decided that all new members had to volunteer in the garden. GET volunteers would be a steady source of help from other students!

Another goal was to find ways to reduce waste on the farm. The addition of the greenhouse to the community farm will help meet this goal.

Finally, Project EAT interns hoped their efforts would help make the community healthier. The interns used information from surveys and meetings to talk with Nutrition Services staff

members at school about including more local fruits and vegetables in school meals, including those grown in the garden.

Most importantly, Project EAT interns observed that their work was not finished even though they had implemented all of their planned actions. The interns decided it was important to continue their research and action to tackle other issues and grow the garden more.

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Extension

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