

Seeds to Success Youth Farmstand Program

Abstract

Seeds to Success is a year-round entrepreneurial and life skills training program that takes at-risk 14 – 18 year olds and prepares them for the workforce through classroom education and on-the-job training. The project teaches special needs youth in key local communities and provides them with opportunities to acquire workplace readiness skills by selling locally grown agricultural projects at youth-run farmstands during summer months.

The project has four key goals: provide workforce preparation to special needs teens; create retail outlets that bring affordable, nutritious foods to consumers; teach teens valuable life skills; and offer service learning, community service and economic development opportunities.

Seeds to Success project staff and special education teachers provide a variety of lessons, including basic financial management and banking procedures and nutrition in the classroom throughout the school year. Qualified, interested youth are interviewed, hired and trained to apply this knowledge at youth-run farmstands, where they experience the day-to-day operation of a retail entrepreneurial enterprise. The youth in partnership with caring adult supervisors, operate their own business. The trained staff provides learning opportunities and lead by example, but do not do any required tasks that the youth are capable of doing themselves.

1. Title of Program – ***Seeds to Success Youth Farmstand Program***

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4. Program of Distinction Category (select up to six from the list in the guidelines)

Leadership, Citizenship & Life Skills Categories – *Workforce Preparation*

Science, Engineering & Technology Literacy Categories – *Foods & Nutrition*

Healthy Lifestyles Categories – *Nutrition Education, Healthy Relationships, Good Decisions*

Youth in Governance Categories – *Community Development*

Organizational Strategies Categories – *Partnership & Grants*

5. Sources of funding that support this program

CYFAR Children, Youth & Families-at-Risk: New Communities Project

U.S. Department of Agriculture, CSREES, 2003, 2004, 2005 (pending)

New Jersey Department of Agriculture, Jersey Fresh Matched Funds Grant, 2004

Valero Refinery Benefit for Children Golf Classic, 2005

Borough of Glassboro (NJ), Neighborhood Preservation Funding Program, 2005

Glassboro (NJ) School District, 2005

6. Knowledge and Research Base

Experiential learning opportunities and assessments at the farmstands are based on the United States Department of Labor Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) Report (Kane, et al, 1990). The eight week food safety and nutrition education intervention is called *Jersey Fit*. The program is modeled after lessons in the *Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP)* curriculum developed by New Jersey EFNEP (<http://www.rutgers.njfsnep.org>).

Kids in Biz, Preparing Young People for Work (Lennon, D. & Strieter, L., 1997) is the main business basics resource. Lessons on banking procedures and money management, *FUNDamental Finance for Farmstands* (Strieter, L., 2008), Rutgers University Bulletin E320 (CD-Rom) has components from two curricula; *Financial Champions* (2002), through the 4-H Cooperative Curriculum System and the High School Financial Planning Program (2001) from the *National Endowment for Financial Education*. We revised appropriate reading levels and developed coordinating activities to accommodate the targeted special needs at-risk youth.

7. Needs Assessment

This project addresses a variety of demonstrated needs in our county: work force preparedness (particularly for special needs youth), improved nutrition/health, life skills development, service learning, and economic development through expanded markets for local farmers and availability of fresh, nutritious produce to residents.

As outlined in the 2000 Gloucester County Demographic Survey, 46% of households in Paulsboro and 38% of households in both Woodbury and Glassboro fall at or below the federal poverty level. To best serve the limited resource communities, the farmstands accept food stamps, as well as vouchers from eligible WIC (Women, Infants and Children) and (FNMP) Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program recipients. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) provides this benefit to those residents who are at greater risk of medical or nutritional deficiencies due to inadequate diets and are low income. The communities where the farmstands are located were eager to bring fresh locally grown produce to residents in the areas that farmers are not typically able to reach.

Although our county's schools provide workforce preparation to special needs students, there is a significant disparity between the number of youth who require training and the number of hands-on workplace opportunities (particularly entrepreneurial experiences) available to this population. This project improves the potential for employability of this population. Since the program began in 2003, 147 special needs teens have worked in the farmstand project. Approximately 25% of the youth have gone on to higher education and/or work in the food industry, including positions of responsibility where they handle customer service and/or money management.

8. Program Goals and Objectives

The project has four key goals:

1. Provide workforce preparation and improved self-esteem to special needs teens, and provide workplace experience to college interns.
2. Create retail outlets that promote food security and bring affordable, nutritious foods to consumers.
3. Teach valuable life skills; and offer service learning.
4. Offer economic development opportunities.

Seeds to Success, an entrepreneurial and life skills training program, prepares at-risk 14-18 year olds for the workforce. Through classroom education during the school year and on-the-job training, these teens are better able to take charge of their futures and become active, contributing members of the workforce and their communities. More specifically, the program objectives are to teach special needs youth how to select and prepare locally grown fruits and vegetables for use in meal preparation, how to handle money and banking procedures and provide them with opportunities to acquire workforce readiness and business skills by selling produce at a youth-run farmstand during summer months.

Students are recruited to take advantage of the summer long work experience and are encouraged to continue their work with *Seeds to Success* year to year to promote skill learning and reinforcement, as well as continued growth in self-confidence.

9. Target Audience

Seeds to Success reaches out to three target audiences with a variety of documented benefits: Youth involved in the project are “at-risk,” due to family situations, behavioral problems or low academic achievement records; they are classified as special needs and have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). *Seeds to Success* prepares at-risk youth for the workforce and a productive future through classroom and on-the-job-training. During the school year, youth participate in nutrition and money management education. During the summer, youth apply this knowledge at three youth farmstands, where they experience the many aspects of a retail enterprise.

During the first five years of the project, eight farmers were able to expand their markets by selling over \$67,000 of produce to the farmstands during a two-month period each summer. While there is a need, economic restraints, marketing conditions and lack of trained, affordable manpower available to operate and staff farmstands in new communities limit the ability of local farmers to expand retail markets. *Seeds to Success* helps overcome these barriers.

When farmers deliver produce, they interact with youth and adult employees to teach about produce quality, pricing and farming practices. This experience enriches their knowledge of and appreciation for agriculture. Youth share this information with customers and even the media, further increasing awareness of agriculture, food and farming.

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Our target communities are considered “at-risk.” At least 38% of the residents have incomes below poverty level. These communities were anxious to bring farm stands/markets to their residents as part of downtown revitalization projects and saw *Seeds to Success* as a logical “fit” into these efforts.

Seeds to Success offers convenient access to fresh produce that, otherwise, would not be available. Research shows that such access improves diet quality and can reduce chronic disease risk. *Seeds to Success* accepts food stamps and Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) vouchers, which supplement the diets of those who are most at risk for health problems due to under-nutrition.

10. Type of Program

Seeds to Success Youth Farmstand Program, an entrepreneurial and life skills training program, prepares at-risk 14-18 year olds for the workforce. This 4-H special interest program gives youth valuable life skills transferable to their future employment.

11. Delivery Methods

Through classroom education during the school year and on-the-job training, youth in the program are better able to take charge of their futures and become active, contributing members of the workforce and their communities. The program staff teaches special needs youth how to select and prepare locally grown fruits and vegetables for use in meal preparation, how to handle money, banking procedures and other financial aspects of operating a farmstand, as well as to provide them opportunities to acquire workforce readiness and business skills by selling produce at a youth-run farmstand during summer months. Students are recruited to take advantage of the summer-long work experience and are encouraged to continue their work with *Seeds to Success* year to year, helpful in longitudinal assessment.

12. Curricula and/or Educational Materials

The work-site and in-school components require different but correlated resources. For pre-season and work site training, as well as the summer farmstand operation, the organization, policies and procedures are based on the Youth Farmstand Project Manual (1994) developed for the New Brunswick Urban Ecology Program sponsored by Rutgers University. Extensive revisions and updates were made to address the needs of the current program.

We developed and implemented a (youth) *Employee Manual* to give the youth appropriate guidelines and a reference tools. This manual is divided into the following:

1. Job Descriptions
2. Code of Conduct
3. Dress Code/Appearance
4. What to Bring to Work (or Not!)
5. The Six Pillars of Character (and how they relate to work in the farmstand)
6. Farmstand Glossary
7. Farmstand Terms and Weight Comparison

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8. Youth Farmstand Work Contract

FUNDamental Finance for Farmstands is a 4-lesson series targeted to special needs and/or at-risk 14 – 18 year olds in preparation for work in a farmstand and to help them become successful money managers. The 39 page curriculum is used in the in-school component of the program to introduce basic banking procedures and forms, the concept of working with currency in a retail environment, and helps students analyze their own finances.

13. Teamwork and Collaboration

Seeds to Success integrates three departments in Cooperative Extension: Agriculture and Resource Management, 4-H Youth Development and Family and Community Health Sciences.

Since the beginning of the project, over 76 government, community and school-based partners have come together to make this project a success. Partners support the project in a variety of ways. Some recruit and job coach youth: Special Services School District and three school districts. Others help with marketing and public relations projects: school boards, civic groups, United Way, houses of worship, Head Start, childcare centers and community centers in three municipalities. Some donate time to support farmstand operations: County Highway and Building/Grounds Departments, municipal police, libraries, school support staff. Others donate food and supplies to keep the kids comfortable during summer heat: local businesses, school foodservices, fire departments. Some promote *Seeds to Success* to their clients: WIC, Office on Aging, Food Stamp Office. Others help increase our revenue by purchasing produce for their clientele: Department of Corrections, County-operated nursing home, Paulsboro summer nutrition program, ARC and Girl Scouts summer camps.

14. Program Evaluation

a. Methods

The following assessment tools are used to document program outcomes for the *Seeds to Success* Youth Farmstand Program.

- ***Farmstand Skillathon:*** Youth participate in two skillathons over the course of each farmstand season. The first is held on the final day of farmstand training. The second is held the final day of the Farmstand summer program. The purpose of the assessment is to identify any improvement in skills youth demonstrate that may be attributable to project participation. Six key skills are observed:
 1. produce identification
 2. use of cash register
 3. proper bagging of produce
 4. use of the scale
 5. knowledge of terms used in buying produce
 6. making correct change
- ***Customer Survey:*** Assesses customer attitudes and perceptions of the Youth Farmstands, and is administered by youth as part of customer service training.

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- **WIC & Senior Voucher Survey:** Assesses WIC and Senior FMNP voucher use and is administered by youth as part of customer service training. Customers that use WIC or Senior FMNP Vouchers should be asked to complete this survey *and* the Customer Survey. Youth are encouraged to work diligently to collect *at least* 10 surveys per day.
- **Employee Daily Journal Form:** As part of their work responsibilities, each youth, in his/her own words answers questions, such as:
 - What was the best part of your job today?
 - Did you have any problems today? If so, what were they and how did you fix them?
 - What did you learn today? How will you use what you learned?
 - Is there anything else you want to say about your day?
- **SCANS Skills & Competencies:** The SCANS Skills & Competencies instructor checklist assesses whether the Youth Farmstand experience increases youth workplace competencies specified in the SCANS report. Supervisors use this checklist to rate youth as “needs improvement,” “shows improvement,” “satisfactory,” “outstanding” or “not applicable” in the areas of “utilizing resources,” “working with others,” “using information,” “understanding systems” and “working with technology.” In addition, supervisors can add comments to expand upon their observations.

The checklist is completed by *each* supervisor for *each* youth two times during the summer: during the first full work week in July and the second time during the final work week in August. Youth are *not* be informed about this assessment in order to decrease “performance” or “test” anxiety. The nature of this assessment requires that youth be identified by name in order to compare each individual’s progress.

Rating	Criteria
Outstanding	Demonstrates skill (attribute) with <i>no</i> reminders. Helps other youth acquire skill.
Satisfactory	Demonstrates skill most of the time. Rarely needs reminders.
Shows Improvement	Demonstrates skill or attribute with some reminders.
Needs Improvement	Needs more practice or constant reminders.
Not Applicable	Skill not observed or not required.

b. Process Evaluation

During the farmstand seasons, 146 youth were employed for 2 months each summer and up to 12 hours per week. They also participated in educational sessions, helping them to better transition from school to the workplace.

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To measure workforce preparedness skills, we used the *SCANS* (US Department of Labor Secretary's Commission on Achieving the Necessary Skills) *Skills and Competencies* checklist, designed to assess youth's workplace abilities. *SCANS* surveys are completed during the first and last weeks of farmstand season. A majority of youth have demonstrated significant *SCANS* improvement in: self-esteem, sociability, self-management, integrity and honesty, utilizing resources, politeness to customers, working well with supervisors and peers, identifying produce, correctly making change, collecting and organizing materials for tasks, understanding inventory and pricing, handling produce and reading scales accurately.

We have documented improved life skills in the areas of nutrition, food safety and money management. *Healthy Lifestyle Program*: 1,275 youth enrolled in an annual 8-week program called *Jersey Fit*. Pre-post tests assessed changes in nutrition knowledge and practices. As a result of the program youth were able to: identify healthier foods by comparing food labels; identify locally grown produce; apply USDA recommendations to use color as a guide to increase variety and nutrient content in the diet; and practice safe food handling. As a result of this program, a majority of youth indicated that they do something new or different; plan to use or share what they learned; are more interested in nutrition; and will change the way they think, act or behave.

Financial Education: 637 youth enrolled in an annual 4-week *FUNDamental Finance For Farmstand* lesson series. Pre-post tests assessed improvements in money management practices, including ability to write checks, deposit slips and correctly use a check register. As a result of the program, there was a consistent improvement in the ability of youth to correctly fill out a blank check, complete a blank deposit slip and use a check register. Students increased these abilities by 20 or more points each year from 2004 through 2008.

Economic Development: To date, \$67,000 of produce was purchased from 8 local farmers/growers. Individual interviews conducted with participating farmers/growers indicated that all felt *Seeds to Success* provided an income opportunity that was previously not available to local farmers. They also reported that the youth farmstand retail enterprise was a more effective method for farmers to attract new markets for their products, compared to traditional farmers' markets. 100% of interviewed farmers identified youth farmstands as an effective mechanism for sustaining small farms and agriculture in Southern New Jersey.

c. Outcome Evaluation

Documentation showing improved workforce and life skills of youth in the project is derived from various means of assessment. The following three methods are noted and include multiple years of impact. Supervisors complete *SCANS Skills and Competencies Instructor Checklists* on youth at each farmstand. (Table 1); The *Farmstand Skillathon* (Table 2) and *FUNDamental Finance for Farmstands*, a lesson series, includes pre and post tests to determine the student's ability to complete correctly a blank bank check and deposit slip (Table 3).

d. Communication to Stakeholders

The project has an active County Council consisting of 20 influential individuals representing the entire local community who work collaboratively with us to expand and sustain

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the project. In 2005, in response to community-wide interest, we were able to add an additional farmstand. Funding was initiated totally through collaborator support. In addition to the County Council, our supporters include more than 60 collaborators and stakeholders, such as, school administrators, guidance counselors, social workers, teachers, local and state government and other agency representatives, farmers, business people and youth advocates.

We keep our stakeholders informed of program news and impacts by providing news releases, presentations, an informational exhibit board, a fact sheet and youth brochure and updates and details on both local and state websites. The county government administrators recognized *Seeds to Success*, as a significant county-wide project. We received a National Association of Counties (NACo) award as an exemplary program benefiting underserved children in 2005 and are currently featured as a Healthy Counties Database Program Highlight, *Seeds to Success Youth Farmstand Program*, June 2008, available at: http://www.naco.org/Template.cfm?Section=New_Technical_Assistance&Template=/cffiles/healthycounties/program.cfm&GetID=32

15. Evidence of Sustainability

The project is fully sustained beyond the USDA's CYFAR (Children, Youth and Families at Risk) funding for three primary reasons: Impressive sales volume: Total sales exceeded \$10,000 each year of operation. Local farmers are supportive and working to meet the demands of the new customer base; Strong community support as documented through customer surveys.

County and municipal economic development organizations joined on as stakeholders and have publicly expressed continued support in light of the economic and other positive impacts in their communities. In 2006, our county government purchased a new van for use in transporting produce to and from the farmstands and in 2008, our county partners funded a farmstand coordinator position in support of our project.

All three boroughs have initiatives in place to address neighborhood revitalization and; Food Security: WIC and Senior Farmstand Nutrition voucher program through USDA has accounted for up to 16% of total sales every year of operation.

16. Replicability

Factors validating the achievement of the farmstands' success, which can be applied to any community based project include: collaborators' buy-in. i.e., Food Stamp redemption, WIC and Senior Nutrition Vouchers; community support (commercial, political, school systems) and; public relations/marketing efforts. More than 30 television, radio and newspaper features and consistent use of the logo have helped to create a uniform image and establish a community identity.

As a result of professional presentations and outreach, 398 youth development professionals have gained knowledge about workforce preparation programs designed for special needs youth. Seventeen professionals from other states have requested additional information or

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materials and/or permission to replicate the farmstand program in other states. In 2008, plans to replicate the youth farmstand program by the *Center for Family Services* in Burlington County, New Jersey and by a University of Delaware 4-H Extension Educator are underway.

FUNDamental Finance for Farmstands is the primary educational resource used in both projects. More than 117 youth educators and other professionals from 39 states, two territories, three military installations and the *STAR Project*, a workplace readiness program in Uganda, East Africa, have previewed the *FUNDamental Finance for Farmstands* curriculum and plan to implement the lesson series in their programs.

Rationale and Importance of Program

Seeds to Success is a recognized workforce preparation program by several local, regional and national organizations, including the National Collaboration of Youth as one of ten documented programs in the Compendium, *Making a Difference in the Lives of Youth*. In April of 2008, CYFernet highlighted our program and can be seen at

http://www.cyfernet.org/state_spotlight/04-08.html

More than fifteen of the farmstand youth have participated in state and national conferences and summits giving them public speaking experience and improved self-confidence. But, more important than all of the above, is that the project has helped foster citizenship, workplace readiness, improved self-esteem and personal development in every youth involved with the *Seeds to Success* Youth Farmstand Program.

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Table 1: *The SCANS Skills and Competencies Instructor Checklist*

Youth demonstrated statistically significant improvement at $p = <.05$. The very great majority achieved significance at $p = <.001$ in the following categories (summary of 92 youth in 3 years.):

Competency	Skill	Rate – Significance		
		2007	2006	2005
Personal Qualities				
Self-Esteem	Believes in own self-worth	.000	.000	.000
	Has knowledge of own skills & abilities	.000	.000	.000
	Is aware of his/her impact on others	.000	.000	.001
Sociability	Relates well to others	.001	.000	.000
	Responds appropriately as situation requires	.021	.000	.000
	Takes an interest in what others say and do	.001	.000	.000
Self-Management	Assumes responsibility for own actions	.002	.000	.000
	Sets well-defined, realistic personal goals	.000	.000	.000
Integrity & Honesty	Can be trusted	.000	.000	.000
	Bases decisions on values and goals	.000	.000	.000
	Chooses ethical course of action	.003	.000	.000
Utilizes Resources	Displays produce appropriately	.004	.000	.000
	Follows directions	.002	.000	.014
Working with others				
Polite to Customers: Handles difficult customers	Listens to customers with concern	.000	.000	.000
	Does not react negatively (or over-react)	.000	.001	.000
	Asks supervisor for help when needed	.034	.000	.000
Works well with supervisor and peers	Works to resolve conflicts	.000	.000	.000
	Shows respect for others' opinions	.032	.000	.000
	Helps others with tasks	.001	.000	.000
	Mentors other workers	.001	.000	.000
	Directs co-workers in a professional manner	.030	.000	.000
Using Information				
Identifies produce	Identifies produce correctly	.000	.000	.000
	Identifies over-ripe and spoiled produce	.000	.000	.000
	Identifies Jersey Fresh (grown in NJ) produce	.000	.000	.000
Makes correct change	Change up to a \$20 bill	.038	.000	.000
Collects and organizes material needed for tasks.	Balances cash drawer	.001	.000	.000
	Fills out bank deposit slips	.001	.000	.000
Familiar with information	Refers to Employee Manual	.000	.000	.218
Understanding Systems				
Understands Inventory and Pricing	Prices produce correctly	.000	.000	.559
Working with Technology				
Handles produce properly Reads scales accurately	Uses safe handling procedures	.014	.000	.000
	Sprays greens when needed	.018	.000	.000
	Weighs produce with accuracy of ¼ pound	.001	.000	.000
Applied technology	Performs basic math functions accurately	.017	.000	.014
	Sorts money into correct compartments	.013	.000	.061
	Rings up purchases accurately	.002	.000	.001

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Table 2: Skillathon Results

Total scores demonstrated a statistically significant gain in skills from the pre-test to the post-test ($p = .05$ or less) in the overall report each year from 2004 - 2007.

The results are detailed below:

- 2007 = .027 (26 youth)
- 2006 = .010 (32 youth)
- 2005 = .021 (34 youth)
- 2004 = .014 (28 youth)

Table 3: *FUNDamental Finance for Farmstands*

Through the four week series, *FUNDamental Finance for Farmstands*, 637 special needs teens in four high schools learned personal financial skills, cash register operations and basic banking procedures. Pre-Post tests were used to measure the increase in ability to correctly complete a bank check, prepare a deposit slip, and record a check register. The following shows overall annual initial (pre-test) results and follow-up data for special needs students since 2004:

Year	Number of Students		Pre-Test Scores	Post-Test Score	Pre-Post Score Difference
	Pre	Post	%	%	
2008*	194	175	25.1%	65.4%	40.3
2007*	118	102	41.3%	61.4%	20.1
2006	133	118	51.0%	72.6%	21.6
2005	93	91	47.3%	71.2%	23.9
2004	68	42	38.5%	66.5%	28.0

* Includes additional data on completion of a check register.

References

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