

High School Students Grow Fresh Produce at School

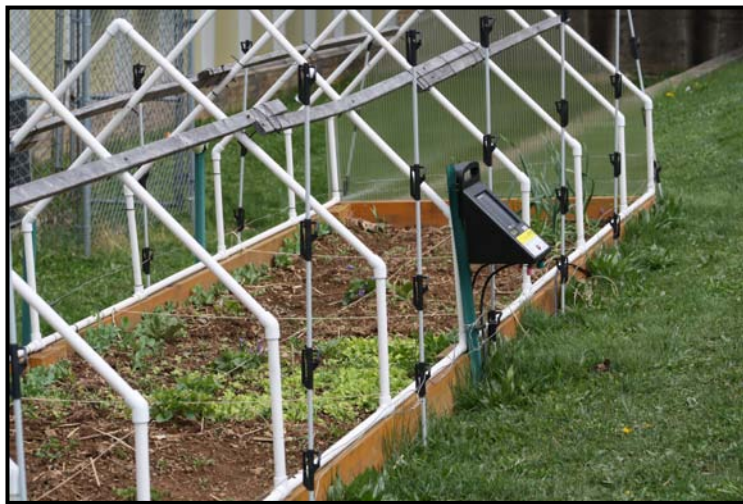
Trinity High School Junior, Michelle Delaney, wasn't always a fan of snap peas. In fact, she didn't enjoy tomatoes, peppers or onions either. But her involvement in the nrg Powered by Choice campaign and the student-run garden at Trinity High School in Cumberland County has changed her impression.

"It's fun to try new foods that I helped grow," commented Delaney, during a recent interview about her school's involvement in the nrg Powered by Choice campaign – a teen-led movement that encourages youth to eat healthy and be active.



Through the campaign, which was developed by the Center for Nutrition and Activity Promotion at Penn State Hershey Children's Hospital with funding from the Highmark Foundation's Healthy High 5 initiative, middle and high school students across the commonwealth are helping to make changes to their school environments that provide healthier options. For students at Trinity High School, their healthy change resulted in a student-run garden.

Led by Family and Consumer Science Teacher, Sue Aigeldinger and Environmental Science Teacher, Steve Gotwols, the student garden is a great opportunity to combine nutrition science and biology and help youth expand their food choices by having a better understanding of sustainability and locally grown produce.



The student garden at Trinity High School.

Through the teacher's joint efforts, students' plant, tend, and produce a garden that is used for cooking, baking and tasting. With the use of a cold frame, students are able to enjoy freshly grown produce year round. The harvest from last summer's garden was used for a fresh salad feast where students were given the opportunity to prepare a salad and add toppings such as blue cheese and raisins; however, salad dressing was not permitted.

"We encouraged students to pay attention to the flavor of the vegetables," remarked Gotwols. "We wanted them to truly taste the naturally sweet flavors of the produce without introducing any vinegars, oils, or salad dressings."

As a registered dietitian, Aigeldinger finds her participation in the student run garden both inspiring and fun. "The garden helps introduce students to vegetables and

produce in a non-threatening way," commented Aigeldinger. "Through this experience, I strongly believe we're helping students improve their overall eating behaviors."

Produce from the student garden is used in Aigeldinger's classes for taste testing and cooking. The students are even taking the garden full circle by using any scraps from cooking for compost to later fertilize the garden.

In his Environment Science Class, Gotwols' emphasizes the student run garden by incorporating lessons on sustainability and the origin of foods. "Seniors in my class are very surprised to learn that most of the fruits and vegetables we eat travel nearly 1,500 miles before they reach our tables," said Gotwols. "Encouraging students to eat locally grown, natural foods is best demonstrated through the student garden."

This spring, students are planting lettuce, snap peas, and broccoli. Students in Aigeldinger's family and consumer science class are once again anticipating the harvest, so they can use the produce in their foods class.

For students like Delaney, and a dozen or so others, their involvement in the student-run garden has inspired them to begin gardens at home as well. "My grandparents garden, and I've talked to my mom about starting a garden of our own," commented Delaney.

Until then, she plans on continuing to incorporate vegetables into different foods to get the most out of her meals.

The student run garden at Trinity High School has been labeled a success. "Not only are we helping students adopt healthier eating habits, but we've been able to inspire students who learn best through the hands-on nature of the class and are excited to see the fruits of their labor through the garden."

With an ultimate goal of providing the school's food service division with fresh produce year-round, Trinity High School has just placed an order for fruit trees through Penn State Cooperative Extension and is writing for a grant to fund the construction of a green house, further expanding the crops students are able to produce year round.

Through Aigeldinger, Trinity High School became involved in the nrg Powered by Choice campaign. Approximately 35 students per year are involved in the campaign through Aigeldinger's Family and Consumer Science class.



Rainwater is collected and used by students to water the garden.

To date, more than 5,400 teens across the state are involved in the nrg Powered by Choice campaign. From student run gardens, to after-school hip-hop classes, and healthy mentoring programs, teens are stepping up and taking action to reverse the childhood obesity epidemic. If you're interested in learning more about the nrg Powered by Choice campaign and how you can involve teens in this effort, please visit www.poweredbychoice.org.



The nrg Powered by Choice campaign is funded by Highmark Healthy High 5, a children's health promotion initiative of the Highmark Foundation, created to change behavior in young people ages 6-18 and improve eating habits and physical activity. For more information, visit www.highmarkhealthyhigh5.org.