



HARVEST AT ST. FRANCIS INDIAN SCHOOL, GOODTHINKING 4 ALL OUR RELATIONS

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Dakota Rural Action is a grassroots, family agriculture and conservation group that organizes South Dakotans to protect our family farmers and ranchers, natural resources and unique way of life.

SUCCESS STORIES



Growing a School Garden

By Holly Tilton Byrne and Laura Marsh, Dakota Rural Action

Why Start a Garden?

"School gardens are a growing initiative to help children understand where their food comes from and how their food choices impact their bodies, the environment, and their communities at large."¹

School gardens are a versatile, invaluable tool that can be incorporated into any classroom for any age and come in all shapes and sizes – indoor, outdoor, containers, vertical gardens, orchards, aquaponics systems and more. Science, math, literature, language, health and nutrition courses can benefit from the hands-on activities and living laboratory a garden can provide.

School Gardens in South Dakota

South Dakotans are proud of their agricultural background, and school gardens provide the perfect setting to allow the next generation of South Dakotans to connect with that tradition.

For the last six years, Dakota Rural Action has been the State Lead Organization for the National Farm to School Network and has

surveyed the state's Food Service Directors about their Farm to School activities. In 2016, 18% of 125 reporting districts have a school garden. According to the USDA, more than 7,000 schools nationwide have a garden.²

Steps for Success: Planning Ahead!

Before the actual garden work begins, it is important to plan to ensure the longevity and effectiveness of the project.

- Identify your garden allies: parents, the Food Service Director, administration, teachers, community members, and especially students. Create a committee of invested individuals to reflect the needs of your school and community.
- Define the garden's purpose, and allow that vision to guide the rest of the steps of your project. Is it primarily for education or food production?
- How will the garden be integrated into the classroom?

The Garden: START SMALL.

Dream big, but identify manageable, incremental pieces that will build support for your garden from other teachers and the community. Ideally, begin planning in the fall or winter so that when spring arrives you are ready to implement your plan.

Wagner Community School

Students in Wagner have access to three indoor aquaponics systems, an outdoor garden plot, and a geodesic greenhouse dome. Their project, under the direction of one high school science teacher, began as an afterschool program and has expanded over several years. Students built, maintain, and test the systems.



Red Cloud Indian School

Classes of all ages participate in Red Cloud's school garden – even the first and second graders created these crop markers, including their Lakota names. The school employs a garden coordinator to guide students through garden activities.

Questions to Consider:

What will you grow?

Fruits and vegetables, flowers, herbs, native or medicinal plants, perennials? A pumpkin patch or salsa garden? All the above? Use your identified purpose to choose where to start.

Where will it grow?

Is there a suitable place on school grounds with water and plenty of soil? Work with grounds staff to identify an outcome that's best.

How will it grow?

Raised beds? Greenhouse? High tunnel? Vertical structures or a few containers? Accessibility for all students as well as the crops' maturity when planning.

Who will grow it?

Identify the leaders who help maintain the garden. Should there be a Garden 101 Training for faculty? Is there an after-school program or summer school that could help when school is out?

Do you need season extension equipment for the fall and spring? Or does starting indoors to avoid seasonal considerations altogether make sense to begin with?

What supplies and materials do you need?

How will you enforce food safety practices in the garden?

As always, safety is of the utmost importance in a school setting. What training will teachers, students, and community members need to keep everyone safe? What local, and federal policies apply to your garden?

GET STARTED!

It's impossible to plan for everything, and you'll make a few mistakes. But the only way to learn is to try it out. Be sure to evaluate your project at the end of each season to continue to improve. And remember:

Have Fun!



Looking for in-depth information on any of these topics? Please contact the DRA office for more information.

Here are some recommended tools and resources for more in-depth information to get started:

- National Farm to School Network: farmtoschool.org
- USDA Farm to School: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool/farm-school-resources>
- The Collective School Garden Network: <http://www.csgn.org/>
- The Whole Kids Foundation: <https://www.wholekidsfoundation.org/resources/school-garden-resources/>

NATIONAL FARM to SCHOOL MONTH



October is National Farm to School Month! Find out more about how to promote your garden project, and all your Farm to School initiatives at farmtoschool.org/our-work/farm-to-school-month

