

# impact

University of Idaho Extension programs that are making a difference in Idaho.

## Students experience “garden to table” at Salmon School Garden

### AT A GLANCE

Youth experience how things grow at the Salmon School Garden and learn produce does not “just appear” at the grocery store.

### The Situation

The Salmon School Garden started in 2014 by a group of enthusiastic volunteers who had a vision for students to learn where their food comes from by growing vegetables through hands-on experiential learning. They received a USDA Farm to Table grant. The committee identified property next to the high school for the garden and leased the ground on a year by year basis. The committee built straw bale raised beds, a low hoop house, a tool shed and hired a garden manager with educational responsibilities.

Fast forward to 2017. The garden and its educational programming were successful, but the volunteers’ worried each spring about not having a place for the garden. Committee members sought advice from Lemhi Regional Land Trust (LRLT) on purchasing the leased property. During this same time, land trust board members attended a workshop on ambassador lands and community conservation with the vision of connecting more people to the land and nature. That workshop combined with the land trust receiving an estate gift from Fran Tonsmeire, one of their founding members, led LRLT to ultimately purchase the garden property. This gave the garden a permanent home



Students build “lasagna beds” at Salmon School Garden.

while supporting LRLT’s goal of keeping kids connected to the land and their agricultural heritage.

### Our Response

In 2018, the Farm to School grant was completed and the decision was made to not apply for the second phase of the grant. Without the large grant, funds were not available to continue to employ a full-time garden manager/educational director. Grants were received for infrastructure and garden supplies, but none for staff wages. Members of the committee chose to fill the educational role by teaching workshops in the garden through volunteering or in-kind support of their employers. The goal was to develop sustainable and repeatable educational programs that could be continued regardless of people serving on the committee.

Pioneer Elementary fifth grade classes had been doing their own garden program focusing on raising pumpkins. They started the plants in their classroom and then planted them in the pumpkin patch on school property before school was out. Then the incoming fifth grade class would harvest and sell the pumpkins in October of the next school year. The success of the fifth grade project led us to adopt a similar model for kindergarten through fourth grade classes. Each grade at Pioneer Elementary would have its own focus.

Programming for upper grades and outlying schools is different each year. This is primarily due to multiple grades attending at the same time. In 2019, Leadore School kindergarten-5th grades students attended a one-day workshop that included: tools of the garden, insects and spiders, parts of a plant, garden jobs and planting strawberries. The students also had the opportunity to cook and taste garden pizzas and hummus. FernWaters Charter School students learned about lasagna bed gardening by helping prepare the beds for the pumpkin patch. Salmon Middle School 7th-8th graders attended workshops on soil polymers, adaptation, and planted the three sisters garden which included corn, beans and squash. Lemhi Valley Social Services (LVSS) has also utilized the garden for one-on-one counseling, life skills training and individual activities. Each time LVSS comes with a client, they have a quiet discussion and then do “an act of service” either weeding, harvesting or watering. Salmon High School agricultural classes and environmental science classes utilize the garden on a regular basis. These teachers do their own programming in the garden. The agricultural classes have been instrumental in building new raised beds, amending the soil and laying down weed barrier.

### Program Outcomes

The committee continues working to refine and improve educational experiences for the youth. Committee members are “adopting” grades and outlying schools to ensure programming continues. Repeatable

programs are being developed for 2020. Additionally, there are plans to develop partnerships with other groups where excess produce can be donated to those in need.

Teachers made the following comments on their students’ experiences:

- My students have benefited greatly from their garden lessons. It is important for them to have a part in the entire process-planting to harvesting. The lessons have been well planned and filled with important content which correlates with our science standards. It is an excellent resource for other science lessons also (insects/pollinators). Along with important contents my students love visiting it! – Second grade teacher
- What the garden offers my students is connection. A sense of place and an opportunity to connect to each other and their community in ways which is hard to replicate in a traditional classroom setting. For example, when we moved the pumpkin patch from the Pioneer Elementary over to the Salmon School Garden last spring, and remodeled the bed space, my students were tasked with the design and rebuilding of the pumpkin patch tunnels. In a traditional classroom, this would have all been just theory. Pencils, paper, calculators and design work. That’s it. However, in the garden, they went beyond sketching out a hypothetical design. They were able to then put their design into action. They physically rebuilt the tunnels, helped install critical garden infrastructure, and took total responsibility for creating space for other students to use in the years to come. Teamwork, respect for the land, respect for each other. The garden offered a direct connection between theory and reality. The impact this type of engagement has on our youth ripples out into the community in more ways than we can ever know. – High school agriculture teacher

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

Shannon Williams, Extension Educator • University of Idaho Extension, Lemhi County • 208-742-1696 • shannonw@uidaho.edu

25-20-swiliams-salmon-garden • 9/20