

Illinois Students Show Garden PRIDE

Project Title: PRIDE Garden (Positive, Respectful, Impressive, Disciplined, Educated)

Coordinator: Monica Pierce

Location: Freeport High School, Freeport, Illinois

SARE Grant: \$1,997

Duration: 2013-2014

To read the full project report, go to www.sare.org/projects and search for project number YENC13-065.



Freeport High School students learned about sustainable vegetable production and marketing through their SARE supported PRIDE Garden. Photo by Monica Pierce.

At an Illinois high school where the team mascot is a pretzel, you might expect to find a bunch of good-natured Midwesterners. And while that may be true, the students, teachers, and volunteers at Freeport High School in Freeport, Illinois are anything but lighthearted when it comes to growing and selling food from their student-run garden, which they named PRIDE (Positive, Respectful, Impressive, Disciplined, Educated).

Freeport High School FFA adviser and agriculture teacher Monica Pierce was hired as the agriculture instructor at Freeport three years ago. Having recently completed her Master's degree thesis research on the effects that urban youth gardening programs can have on urban youth, she was aware that youth

gardening programs can positively influence youth's leadership skills, preference of eating fruits and vegetables, and skills and knowledge related to agriculture. She was excited to bring that type of program to Freeport High School. In 2013, Pierce received a \$1,997 NCR-SARE

Youth Educator grant to establish a student farm and community supported agriculture operation (CSA) to educate Freeport High School students about sustainable vegetable production, as well as sustainable marketing options for small farm businesses. Pierce hoped that the garden would provide practical applications for the theoretical concepts taught in the classroom, and so far she has been pleased with the results of Freeport's PRIDE Garden and community supported agriculture (CSA) program.

"Prior to this grant, I was working as a classroom agriculture teacher," explained Pierce. "We would talk about sustainable agriculture in the classroom setting, but students were not able to engage in hands-on sustainable agricultural production. With the garden, the students have experience to build knowledge on."

According to Pierce, the number of Freeport High School students enrolled in agricultural courses and the number of students engaged in the garden has steadily increased since the program started. In the first year, 21 students were enrolled in agriculture courses, for the second year, that number

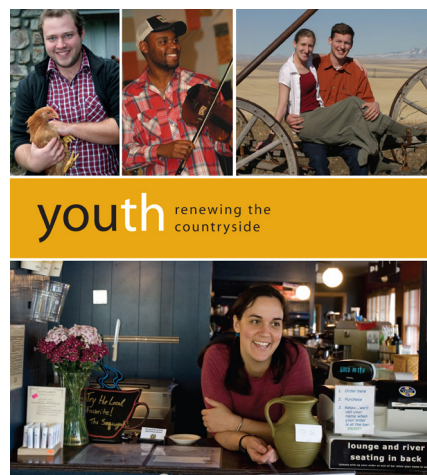
increased to 50, and for the third year, that number increased to 65. Likewise, during the first year, 4 students worked in the garden during the summer, for the second year 8 students worked in the garden, and during the 2015 growing season, they had 12 students in the garden. Not only are the students engaged, but they take ownership and pride in their work in the garden and the CSA, according to Pierce.

Students learn about all three pillars of sustainability (social, financial, and environmental) through the program. The program strives to be economically sustainable using produce sales and the CSA to cover the operating costs of the farm, and the program works toward environmental sustainability as they manage the farm using sustainable practices such as crop rotation, organic fertilization, and composting. PRIDE staff and volunteers work to make the program socially sustainable by helping students enjoy the work and build friendships across racial lines.

“The most impressive result of this project is how proud the students are of the garden,”

said Pierce. “We always take a minute at the end of our work day to admire our work for that day. This pride fuels purpose into our work. The more that they learn about the crops and how to take care of them, the more excited they are to tell people about it, and the more they want to make sure that it is being cared for properly.”

Looking forward, Pierce is excited about opportunities for collaboration with other area youth programs including a child welfare institution providing residential housing to female youth in need of psychological treatment, and as a volunteer site with the Department of Corrections for teens to engage in community service as part of their correction plan. Pierce expressed hopefulness about the future program and gratitude for the grants and donations they have received, including their SARE grant. “All of this excitement, for some, comes from an experience that these you might not have had without the support of SARE,” said a grateful Pierce. “This pride and excitement may have been left untapped, but luckily, because of your support, we have been able to tap these results out of our wonderful students.”



Youth Renewing the Countryside profiles 50 inspiring young people—one from every state—who are revitalizing rural America with new enterprises. Read the book for free online at www.sare.org/Youth-Renewing-the-Countryside

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