

Important Note: This activity was developed for the original Green Lunchroom Challenge program, a voluntary pledge program for K-12 schools to improve the sustainability of their food service



operations. The project was coordinated by the [Illinois Sustainable Technology Center Technical Assistance Program](#) with funding from US EPA Region 5.

The following page(s) represent the content of this activity as it appeared on the original project web site, complete with available points and instructions for submitting documentation. **The project is no longer funded and as of June 2018 schools may no longer submit activity documentation to earn points and recognition as described.** The activity is presented for your information to guide your organization's sustainability efforts.

If your school or district implements the suggested activity and wishes to share its experiences, please email [Joy Scrogum](#). Your story may be incorporated into a blog post on this web site, the main ISTC site, or shared on social media to foster networking and inspiration among peer institutions.

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Establish an on-site garden to provide fresh seasonal produce on-demand

Activity Category: Food Sourcing

Activity: Establish an on-site garden to provide fresh seasonal produce on demand

Rationale: Studies have shown that school gardens can increase interest in and preference for eating fruits and vegetables among students. That's important to the overall goals preventing and reducing food waste in school food service operations because fruits and vegetable offerings make up a large portion of food wasted — for example, [a study of middle school students in Boston showed students discarded 47% of their fruit and 73% of their vegetables](#)¹. A [USDA Economic Research Service analysis of school plate waste](#)² found that salad, vegetables, and fruit were among the most wasted items.



FoodCorps service member Dennis Lackey gardening with children in Flint, MI.
Photo by Robyn Wardell. CC by 2.0
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School gardens also provide opportunities for experiential learning and host of other benefits including increased respect for nature, increased science achievement scores, and improved social skills and behavior to name a few. If you are purchasing local and/or organic produce for use in your operations, you may also realize cost savings by growing some of that produce on-site (be sure to consult the "[Food Safety Tips for School Gardens](#)" document in the Resources list below when serving garden produce to students). Additionally, having a garden will support other Challenge activities (e.g. a garden will provide a place to use compost if you choose to compost organics on-site).

Activity Description: This activity is for schools that do not have a garden (for produce, not exclusively for flowers) prior to signing up for the Challenge. Create a new space for growing produce on-site. This may take the form of traditional garden plots in the school yard, container gardening (indoor or outdoor), window boxes, or a rooftop garden. Use items from the garden in preparation of food for students. If possible, involve students in the care and maintenance of the garden as part of classroom or club activities.

Earn Challenge Points (150 points): In order to earn points for this activity, write a brief description (1-3 pages) of the garden, including when the garden was first established (it must be after the date you signed up for the Challenge to count), if students are involved and how, how produce is used in serving students, and any evidence you may have of impacts on student food consumption. Email your description, along with 1-3 photos of your garden, to Joy Scrogum at jscrogum@illinois.edu. If possible, include images that show students and staff working in the garden. Please send your photos and descriptions together in one PDF or Word document (photos don't count toward page limit of description). Your submission will be checked for completeness; you must include both the description and photos to earn points.

Resources:

-  [Food Safety Tips for School Gardens](#)
-  [Research Supporting the Benefits of School Gardens](#)
-  [School Lunch Waste Among Middle School Students: Nutrients Consumed and Costs](#)
-  [Serving School Garden Produce in the Cafeteria](#)
-  [Plate Waste in School Nutrition Programs: Final Report to Congress](#)
-  [University of Illinois Extension: Garden at School](#)
-  [Illinois Farm to School Network: School Garden Resources](#)
-  [The Edible Schoolyard Project](#)
-  [National School Garden Network](#)
-  [KidsGardening.org Garden Resources](#)
-  [How to get extra cash for your school garden](#)
-  [Carton 2 Garden Classroom Resources](#)
-  [USDA Grow It, Try It, Like It! Nutrition Education Kit Featuring MyPlate \(Resource ordering information\)](#)

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