Creating Youth Gardens to Curb Childhood Obesity

This project promoted youth gardens as a viable strategy to increase access to and consumption of fruits and vegetables.

►Description: The Got Dirt? Garden Initiative designed a process to establish youth gardens at elementary schools and childcare centers throughout Wisconsin.

►Relevance: Nutrition research supports the role of increased fruit and vegetable consumption for prevention of cancer, heart disease and obesity.

►Partnerships: Brown County UW-Extension, the Wisconsin Department of Health Services and the UW Pediatric Fitness Clinic helped develop this initiative. Support from other community partners increased buy-in from schools, childcare and after-school sites.

►Results: Workshops conducted by Wisconsin Master Gardener Volunteers and others trained over 1,000 youth educators and online surveys documented the establishment of 122 youth gardens throughout the state. This intervention focused on improving the school environment to facilitate change. Garden tool kits and manuals were developed to assist youth educators in starting gardens.

Analysis of 30 gardening (intervention) sites and 30 control sites indicated that youth in the intervention group were significantly more willing to try new fruit at home, to choose fruit as a snack instead of chips or candy and to choose vegetables as a snack instead of chips or candy. The control group showed no statistically significant changes.

This project proved to be an important backdrop for communities applying for grants through the Transform Wisconsin Fund and also served as the impetus for a WPP implementation grant to cultivate childhood wellness through gardening.