

# Fun With Food Summer Camp for 9-12 year olds at Central College in Pella, Iowa

## Final report for YENC17-114

Project Type: Youth Educator

Funds awarded in 2017: \$2,000.00

Projected End Date: 01/31/2019

Grant Recipient: Central College

Region: North Central

State: Iowa

Project Manager:

[Thomas Johnson](#)

Central College

## Project Information

### Summary:

In 2017, Central College hosted our second “Fun with Food” summer camp, welcoming 24 campers, ages 9-12 to learn about healthy foods. The camp introduced key concepts in sustainable agriculture, utilizing the college’s own organic garden, a field trip to a local farm pioneering sustainable practices, and a visit to our local farmer’s market. Campers harvested and purchased food throughout the week to prepare healthy, kid-friendly snacks and meals. On the final day of camp, teams of campers worked with college dining staff in a cooking competition showcasing what they had learned.

With the support of this NC-SARE Youth Educator grant, Central College was able to develop a structured curriculum for the camp’s daily garden activities. Each day included a series of hands-on, small group activities in the garden, which introduced different topics: planting and saving seeds, composting, permaculture, and harvesting. These garden activities were supplemented by on-farm demonstrations and interviews with farmers at the Pella Farmers Market. Through this mix of activities, campers developed an appreciation for the variety of strategies individual growers use in planning and managing their farms.

Midway through the week, campers participated in a role play experience based on the Oxfam hunger banquet. Each individual was assigned an identity proportionate to the range of global socio-economic classes. Many were peasants who depended on subsistence agriculture for their well-being, while a few were middle and upper-middle class residents of developed countries. Campers were divided into groups within the physical space (wealthier roles sat at a table elevated on a stage, with poorer participants seated on the floor) and were fed different meals according to their status (rice, rice & beans, or a multi-course meal).

This role play proved a powerful experience for campers for a variety of reasons. Because these young people had spent several days working outside and talking with farmers, they were aware of how challenging it is to make a living at

agriculture even in the U.S., with access to land and resources. The experience also provoked powerful conversation among campers because they come from a range of socio-economic classes and racial-ethnic backgrounds. The role play highlighted differences that felt close to home, in particular for a few rural white campers in the group and a few urban Latino campers, each with personal experiences of food insecurity. The role play challenged young people to talk about sustainable agriculture not only in terms of growing practices or technical methods, but in human terms, sensitive to the systemic challenges of hunger, poverty and social inequality (gender, race, nationality, etc.).

Participants in the camp completed a pre/post assessment of both fruit and vegetable consumption and nutrition literacy. Results of the questionnaire showed a high level of nutrition literacy even before the camp, with little change during the week. Campers reported their typical diet was well below the recommended amount of fruits and vegetables, with a high percentage of calories coming from refined grains and processed foods. Young people's unhealthy diets are not primarily due to lack of nutritional information, and their diets are unlikely to change through increased nutritional knowledge alone. During the week, campers had significantly increased access to fresh fruits and vegetables, which they helped grow, harvest, purchase, and prepare.

The pre/post data confirms a key conclusion from the project: direct engagement with healthy food is an important strategy for transforming individual diets and local food systems. When young people have access to healthy food and the opportunity to be part of a shared experience preparing healthy snacks and meals, they are far more likely to eat a healthy diet. While we do not have reliable data on long term changes to campers' diets, we have heard anecdotal evidence from parents and school teachers about individual children who are more motivated to have a role in planning and preparing their meals, even months after the camp. Having been exposed to new foods and flavors from around the world, parents and teachers report an increased willingness to try new foods.

#### Project Objectives:

The only modifications to the initial proposal were in our outreach:

We have not successfully published an academic journal article about the camp, though we still hope to do so.

We have not yet linked the kids' summer camp with the Pella senior living center. Dr. Shuger Fox continues to work with seniors in her research on nutrition and life expectancy, and we still see an opportunity for connecting across generations in activities and conversations about food. When our new garden kitchen classroom is completed in fall of 2018, we will have facilities well suited for events bringing together seniors and young people, sharing lessons on canning, cooking, and more.

## Educational & Outreach Activities

- 1** On-farm demonstrations
- 2** Published press articles, newsletters
- 2** Webinars / talks / presentations

## **PARTICIPATION SUMMARY:**

**15** Farmers/ranchers

**24** Youth

**3** Parents

**36** Educators

### Education/outreach description:

Fun with Food Camp visited Van Dyke Farm for a demonstration of sustainable agriculture practices. Ward Van Dyke introduced campers to the variety of vegetables he grows, both in the field and in his high tunnel. He showcased a new weed control he is testing, rolling down cover crop to form a thick layer of mulch prior to planting annual vegetables. Ward answered campers' questions about the joys and challenges of farming, the skills and training he values most, and the opportunities he sees for young farmers today. In addition to this on-farm field trip, campers also visited the Pella Farmers Market, where they interviewed 14 additional farmers with similar questions.

The Fun with Food Camp was featured in multiple publications, including the Pella Chronicle and Central College's Sustainability Student Blog.

Central College led two workshops to introduce the summer camp model to educators from other colleges and universities. Dr. Brian Campbell, Dr. Sara Shuger Fox, and students Holly McKinney and Emily Opsal led sessions at a national conference (the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education, October 16, 2017, in San Antonio, TX) and a regional conference (the Upper Midwest Association for Campus Sustainability, September 29, 2017, in Pella, IA). Between these two outreach events, 36 educators were introduced to the camp, each receiving resources to develop sustainable agriculture focused camps in their context.

## Learning Outcomes

**24** Youth reporting change in knowledge, attitudes, skills and/or awareness

## Project Outcomes

**1** Grant received that built upon this project

Increased organizational support to explore and teach sustainable ag:

Yes

Explanation for change in organizational support to explore and teach sustainable ag:

One key outcome from this project was to increase support for expanded facilities to support sustainable food and agriculture education for Central College and the surrounding community. In 2017, Central secured funding from the Wellmark Foundation and from individual donors to proceed with construction of a garden

kitchen classroom. This facility will house the Fun with Food summer camp in future years and will provide space for other campus and community programs focused on food production, preservation, and preparation.

## Information Products

- [Fun with Food in the Garden](#) (Course or Curriculum)
- [Fun with Food Recipe Book](#) (Course or Curriculum)

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the view of the U.S. Department of Agriculture or SARE.



Sustainable Agriculture  
Research & Education [US Department of Agriculture](#)



This site is maintained by SARE Outreach for the SARE program and is based upon work supported by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture, under award No. 2019-38640-29881. SARE Outreach operates under cooperative agreements with the University of Maryland to develop and disseminate information about sustainable agriculture. [USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.](#)