

# **Creating Youth Leaders Using Sustainable Urban Agricultural Practices**

## **Focus Group Evaluation Report**

**For**

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**By**

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## Program

Creating Youth Leaders Using Sustainable Urban Agricultural Practices was developed as a summer program to train high school students to teach younger children about urban agriculture. It was created through a partnership between the Felege Hiywot Center of Indianapolis (<https://fhcenter.org/>), the Marion County SWCD, and Purdue Extension. SARE funding is supporting the development and delivery of this new program.

The objectives of this program were to:

- Train high school students (AKA Center students) about agriculture, livestock, soil health, and the management practices for urban farming and raising backyard chickens.
- Train high school students to teach, mentor, and communicate about urban farming and raising backyard chickens with younger children ages 8-13.
- Give high school students experiences teaching and mentoring younger children ages 8-13 about agriculture, livestock and poultry, and soil health via management practices for urban farming and raising backyard chickens.
- Teach high school students about program evaluation, how to analyze data, and share results via posters and verbal presentations.
- Teach children, ages 8–13 about practices for urban farming and raising backyard chickens.

The delivery of the program was delayed and adapted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some instruction sessions and meetings were changed to virtual participation as appropriate for social distancing requirements.

Aster Bekele, Director of the Felege Hiywot Center, coordinated the program and community locations and oversaw the program. Sierra Nuckols, with the Felege Hiywot Center, was an onsite facilitator who participated with and encouraged interactions of the high school students.

The training started with instruction on soil management and urban agriculture, then the Learn, Grow, Eat, Go! Junior Master Gardener curriculum (<https://jmgkids.us/lgeg/>) was delivered. This instruction was led by Kevin Allison from the Marion County SWCD, and by Alex Pettigrew and Nathan Shoaf with Purdue Extension.

Six high school students participated. After completing the program, they were organized into pairs who worked together to team-teach at community locations for 1) children in kindergarten and first grade, 2) children in grades 2 and 3, and 3) children in grades 4 to 6.

## Formative Evaluation Method

On July 16, 2020, a focus group via ZOOM was conducted with all five collaborating instructors to gather input to identify and discuss how things have gone for this new program, look for suggestions on improvement, and to see what information could help for future training plans.

Huetteman and Sewell led the focus group, posed the questions to the participants, and documented notes of their responses.

There were four sets of questions:

- 1) How did the training of these students go? What went well?
- 2) Tell us about the timing of the training. Was the length of the training time appropriate to your expected learning objectives or outcomes for the students?
- 3) Did you have any “aha moments” — for you as the instructors, or that you observed in the students?
- 4) What are your suggestions for next time? How might you alter this for next summer or other similar training programs in the future?

## Results

### What went well

Focus group participants stated overwhelmingly that the program went well. Things shared that went well included:

- 1) many comments and compliments were given about the instructors.
- 2) responses about how the information was organized and the instructors worked together in their unique roles showed that the curriculum structure was good.
- 3) how the students were open, willing to give feedback, and make suggestions. They asked great questions. They shared positive experiences.
- 4) How the delays and changes to an online delivery could have been barriers, but the instructors and students adapted well and helped make it work (Table 1).

Table 1. Common themes and responses on what went well about the program

Common Themes	Responses
Staff worked well	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A great learning process for me as an instructor.</li><li>• Alex did a wonderful job setting up the structure of the program.</li><li>• Alex is a board member at Felege and it is great now that she is leading this new program.</li><li>• Appreciated the help of Sierra throughout when she would keep the discussion going, by prompting students about what to ask, showing Alex how to answer the student questions, and helping Nathan facilitate dialogue.</li><li>• Both Alex and Sierra doing very well.</li><li>• Center Director, Aster, stated that this was the first time they were doing programming this way at Felege Hiywot. She was hands-off in this project. But Alex was there and Sierra was facilitating the program and students.</li><li>• Enjoyed working with Kevin and Nathan.</li><li>• Great job from Alex in this new program.</li><li>• Kevin presented in a way that made sense to what the students were doing.</li></ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Kevin shared his PowerPoints ahead of time with Nathan and this helped to avoid duplication of topic areas and led to the collaboration of information presented.</li> <li>Continue to work together</li> <li>The environment that Alex created for the students is important to curriculum development.</li> <li>The level of involvement and approach Alex brings to this program is important. Hope Purdue Extension can have people involved in urban agriculture who can bring this to new programs across the state.</li> </ul>
Good program structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Alex led the program and shared the structure which was consistent with the layout of the program book. This showed what was important and helped to organize information into four categories for the students.</li> <li>The collaboration of the instructors who presented on soil health and the follow-up discussion was a good approach to learning. Nathan and Kevin presented different information to compliment the other as they had three hours to present their two topics. Nathan did a high-level introduction about urban agriculture. Kevin covered the specifics of soil, delivered virtually, using PowerPoint slides which helped give structure to the presentation and increased his level of comfort in presenting. Having the second “follow-up” session in person was a great opportunity for students to ask questions about soil, and to dig more deeply into the topics.</li> <li>The training helped staff and students to be prepared for the teaching and activities in the community. Having practice sessions with students to prepare for their teaching with the children was very helpful. Then, to see the students in action, teaching the children, and how they put their practice to work was very effective and inspiring.</li> <li>Very organized, very nice. Heard about the program later, very proud of students.</li> </ul>
The students were open, asked questions, and shared feedback.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aster would hear all about the program from the students. She was very proud of the students, and of Alex, who is also a board member, for coming to the Center and doing this program.</li> <li>The students had great interactions with Kevin in the follow-up session, dialogue, and questions about soil.</li> <li>The students were willing to give feedback and make suggestions. Alex liked that the students gave their feedback throughout the process.</li> </ul>
All were flexible and adapted to the changing situation of Covid-19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Considering technology limitations, some issues with sound, the instruction had to be delivered via Zoom, and instructors worried about it. But it went well.</li> <li>Due to the pandemic, had to delay the program, and had to deliver some of the program via technology.</li> <li>Via Zoom or in person, having Sierra there in person to help prompt discussion or let instructors know if students were nervous, or needed to talk louder, etc. was beneficial. All things considered in adapting to Zoom, it became a solid dialogue about soil. Fears of students not engaging did not happen.</li> </ul>

## Timing

When asked about the timing of the program, focus group participants shared that the timing was just right. There were adaptations made due to the pandemic, and the approach of the instructors was to be flexible, and this helped keep the time of instruction to a comfortable and effective amount (Table 2).

Table 2. Comments about the timing of the program

Comments on Timing
Good timing and the training went well. The community center was not ready to go due to the Covid-19 pandemic. When we did the program, the training was not overdone and not too short, with our community partners and with us at the Center. The students were ready.
The timing was good, there was one hour for the soil presentation, and if that had been longer, it would have gotten monotonous. A week later for the follow-up session, we had a chance to meet in person with the students to discuss for another hour. It was a great discussion. The students asked 40 minutes of questions. Together, these two parts made just the right amount of time.
The timing was just right. The program fits perfectly into our schedule. When we had extra to fit in, we were able to do that and it worked well. The program flexibility was great.

The timing was perfect with all things considered for teaching at the community location. The instructors were able to prepare the students and get them ready to teach the children. Allowing for flexibility in the program helped.

The timing worked really well. Will try to keep in communication through calls and email. I am eager to participate in person in the coming weeks.

## “Aha” moments

Focus group participants were asked if they experienced any “aha” moments during the program. Responses shared were about 1) how the students shared their input and how they adapted the lessons to the age of the children, 2) the Junior Master Gardener curriculum materials are based on Texas and need to have an Indiana focus, 3) the connections between the curriculum materials and science, among the instructors, and with the inclusion of critical thinking for students, and 4) the realization of the difference in learning about urban agriculture and conventional agriculture (Table 3).

Table 3. Common themes and responses about “aha” moments during the program

Common Themes	Responses
Students gave input and adapted lessons to improve flow and to the age of the children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Most recently there was an activity during a practice session involving a sombrero. It made sense when I did this as the instructor. I taught them the acronym before. Yet, it seemed better that we should share the acronym after teaching it. During the practice session for the sombrero, as we were talking through the delivery, the students altered timing to make it flow better.</li> <li>The student project was supposed to be the same and appeared to focus on children in grades 4 and older. But when the students were split into groups, and then came back together, I was totally blown away. The students teaching 4-8 graders led the instruction, but those students teaching the Kindergarteners told us they had to change the teaching for younger kids to understand. The students adapted their presentations to the development level of the children. They took the theme of the lesson and made fit the age group.</li> <li>I loved seeing the growth of the students, to see them building confidence, and to see them teaching. The students had to improvise a lot, especially with the younger kids, and they did great. When we had the real talk afterward, the students shared how they changed things. Compared to our practice session when the students were nervous, when they taught the kids, it was amazing.</li> <li>The students surprised me. When they were student trainers, they impressed me. They felt ownership in the program.</li> </ul>
Curriculum and instructor connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Working with Aster and connecting science with the Learn Grow Eat Go! curriculum. Thinking about how we can incorporate into training and use in the classroom.</li> <li>Enjoyed Nathan and Kevin on heavier science topics and would like to continue to work on this.</li> <li>Sierra and Alex were guiding the students but let them think critically. Questions coming from the students were good, insightful, and showed they were thinking critically.</li> </ul>
Curriculum information needed to be specific to Indiana	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In the train the trainer session for Learn, Grow, Eat, Go! much of the information applied to Texas, but not to Indiana and the Midwest. Next time need to adapt the presentation to include Midwest details, more focused on Indiana in the future.</li> <li>Suggested improvement for the next training is to have more local examples.</li> </ul>
Learning urban agriculture is different from conventional agriculture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Educating about Urban Agriculture and soil, seeing different ways of learning than in Agronomy classes. People learn about urban agriculture much differently than what is typically shared about conventional farming via Purdue programs. The learning is not linear but more dependent on student interest in topics. The students are creating their foundation and creating information pieces in their order.</li> <li>How the students launched into questions was very unpredictable. Student questions of Kevin - about crops, PH, and soil health, but information backed into soil chemistry. Student discussion questions were about specific crops. Then questions were asked about compost and were not prompted at all. I was surprised by the diversity of questions and how the student questions built off each other. It was a very welcoming environment for the students to learn.</li> </ul>

## Suggestions

Focus group participants shared ideas they had about the future and how the program might be made available and lead to other opportunities for students:

- 1) This is an example program and future and further opportunities could be made available for these students to take part in other Purdue Extension programs, and this program could be made available for other teachers and students at the center
- 2) Delivery via technology and in-person may need to be reviewed and considered
- 3) For next year, this is a great plan, we would like to keep it going, keep the students involved, and make a few program improvements
- 4) There is a need for more practical experiences in the program, students need to get in the garden (Table 4).

Table 4. Common themes and responses with suggestions for the program

Common Themes	Responses
An example program and further opportunities for students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Now that Alex is familiar with this program model, maybe she could use this experience in other Purdue Extension training programs.</li> <li>For the Felege Hiywot students, would they be able to other places with Alex, be a live example of this program.</li> <li>Could we use this program as a live example for other programs/training? Students could present at the Indiana Small Farm Conference and do Junior Master Gardner trainings, potentially with trips to West Lafayette. Would need to be ready to do virtual delivery for Junior Master Gardner and potentially to children in grades K – 8. Alex is working on getting the students to speak at the Indiana Small Farm Conference. Master Gardeners may be difficult as it is in many different locations. But we could let Purdue Extension know that we have students we could bring who can help teach.</li> <li>Bring these students to other programs, not sure regarding the grant, but would like to expand to other students to be examples from their neighborhoods. Students are always impressed when they come from their neighborhoods.</li> <li>Indiana Small Farm Conference will be virtual in 2021. Planning underway now.</li> <li>Junior Master Gardener is online. Could take it to the community sites or make available to homeschool students who are looking for online options.</li> <li>Alex is interested in doing the train the trainer program with teachers and other Felege Hiywot students.</li> </ul>
Delivery via technology and in-person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The virtual experience may be a barrier to the program after the students completed their teaching of the children in the community.</li> <li>We had to use Zoom for speakers at the end. Had some technical difficulty with the sound.</li> <li>Hopefully, we won't have to do Zoom for the ongoing activities.</li> <li>Instructors and students did a great job with preparation and remaining flexible while adapting delivery via technology and to the audience.</li> </ul>
Next year – Great plan, keep it going, keep students involved, make program improvements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The students have been trained so well. Sierra has the plan so well, just need to keep following the plan. Next year, allow the students to share their experiences. Would like to allow flexibility for students to suggest how to go ahead next year.</li> <li>Wonder if next year, we might start earlier, since the students will be helping with the training. We could give them time to make changes, prepare their presentations, and serve as trainers for peers.</li> <li>Next year, would like students to take control of the snack/supply list and make decisions about getting the items, as they know what kids like. If they are interested, they could take on this responsibility.</li> </ul>
Need for more practical experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Being in person does something different, students can be engaged. Kevin in the follow-up session, students asked more questions. How to connect students more practically to what is being taught at Martin.</li> </ul>

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|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• This program went smoothly. In-person, rather than via PowerPoint, would be better. It would be good to check out garden beds and look at the farm. Need to have that practical experience in the garden. Being able to go out to the garden may help connect discussion topics.</li><li>• Move the poultry module from being online, and address how they can be connected more practically.</li></ul> |
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## Summary and Recommendations

The first time delivering “Creating Youth Leaders Using Sustainable Urban Agricultural Practices” was a great success. The partnerships formed with the Felege Hiywot Center, SWCD, and Purdue Extension resulted in complementary roles, tasks, and resources for the program and the students.

A positive, inspiring program emerged in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic as the instructors and students were flexible and adapted to delayed and changing schedules and varied delivery from in-person to technology and back.

The instructors enjoyed working together and sharing their information, but having Sierra right there with the students, especially during the virtual delivery, was critical to helping facilitate the process, encourage interaction, questioning by students, and clarifying or correcting information/situation.

Having a science-based soil presentation alone first, then a follow-up discussion about soil was beneficial, and led to the students asking many kinds of questions. Starting discussion high level, then getting in soil specifics was a good progression. Students were able to dig into topics and did.

Instructors were impressed with and saw growth in the students going from learning to practicing, to the actual teaching of children. Aster saw students taking their understanding of children and adapting what they did and said and taught to match/fit. Students were able to express how and why they did these changes. They owned it.

All are looking forward to next year, but also other opportunities for the students in other Purdue Extension programs during the year and program involvement with other classes at the Felege Hiywot Center.

It is recommended that the Creating Youth Leaders Using Sustainable Urban Agricultural Practices program and the collaboration among the Felege Hiywot Center, the SWCD, and Purdue Extension continue to be made available and that expanded options for students be explored for further experience and activities throughout the year.