

connecting farms, food, & families

Farm & Food Teen Training Program Impact & Evaluation Report 2014



**Debbie Strickland,
Appalachia CARES/AmeriCorps
Member serving as the Farm and Food
Teen Training Coordinator**

Phone: 423-636-8171
www.ruralresources.net
2870 Holley Creek Road
Greeneville, TN 37745

Evaluation by Mary Snow of Rural Support Partners
Thomas Watson, Executive Director – Thomas@ruralsupportpartners.com

Executive Summary

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to help the Rural Resources Farm & Food Teen Training Program staff and stakeholders better understand: (1) The impacts of the Farm & Food Teen Training Program on participants, their families, alumni, and the larger Greene County community, (2) The level of satisfaction with the program among current participants, parents, and alumni, and (3) Ways to improve the program in the future.

WHAT WAS ACCOMPLISHED?

In 2013 and 2014, the Farm and Food Teen Training Program:

- Engaged between 36 and 40 teenagers in training related to growing and preparing healthy food.
- Engaged between 7 and 10 students in business planning and development.
- Created numerous opportunities for program participants to provide food and nutrition education to the Greene County community.

The Farm and Food Teen Training Program impacted graduates in the following ways:

- 114 teens have participated in the program to date.
- 45 teens completed all four years and officially graduated from the program.
- Of the 14 alumni who graduated before 2011, 8 were engaged in this evaluation.
 - Over half of alumni surveyed credit their participation in the program to helping guide their career path in culinary arts, organic medicine, agriculture studies, and library science.
 - Over half of alumni surveyed said the business, communication, and leadership skills they gained from the program helped them to find a job.

HOW WELL WAS IT DONE?

Program participants rated the overall Farm & Food Teen Training Program a 9.30 on a scale of 1 to 10, while program staff were rated a 9.18 using the same scale. All parents rated the program and staff a 10.

WHAT CHANGED?

For students, three major outcomes emerged from focus group conversations:

- Increased skills and knowledge related to content areas.
- Increased leadership, problem-solving, communication, and life skills.
- Awareness of career options and necessary skills.

For alumni, three major outcomes emerged from focus group conversations:

- Alumni make healthier eating and lifestyle choices because of the program.
- Alumni have stronger communication and leadership skills that helped their careers.
- The program shaped their values, attitude, and confidence.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED?

Focus group participants (students, parents, and alumni) provided the following suggestions for improvement:

- Meet more frequently (ideally meet once a week throughout the year).
- More lessons around raising and caring for livestock.
- Increase funding to ensure the program continues over the long-term.
- Increase staff support for the program.
- Engage board members to actively participate in activities on the farm and attend community events.

Rural Resources Organizational Overview

Rural Resources is a non-profit organization whose mission is to connect farms, food, and families. They do this by facilitating learning experiences in order to preserve farmland, natural resources, and sustainable agriculture practices and build a vibrant local food economy. In addition to the Farm & Food Teen Training Program, Rural Resources offers the following programs:

Online/Mobile Farmers' Market and CSA– provides neighborhoods and communities around Greeneville and Greene County with fresh, locally grown food. The Community Support Agriculture Project is a way for members of the community to invest in local farms and receive produce from the farm in exchange. Customers pay a fee and receive a weekly share of the farm's harvest. Every Thursday, the Mobile Market delivers food from the farm directly to homes, businesses and Takoma Hospital. Orders can be placed online or by phone.



Farm Day Camp – is a summertime experience for young people ages 4 to 12. Each summer multiple week-long sessions are held for different age groups that include milking cows, making butter, gardening, arts and crafts, exploring creek life, cooking, caring for chickens and goats, and having fun on the farm.

Four Seasons Grazing Club – is an educational and networking group that provides opportunities for livestock producers to visit local and regional farms to learn about innovative practices involving rotational grazing, fencing, and watering systems. Frequent topics of discussion include marketing, growing new foods and animal health.



The Farm & Food Teen Training Program

The Farm & Food Teen Training Program expands Rural Resources' work to local at-risk teenagers. Groups of teens participate in a multi-year program involving growing vegetables and raising small livestock at the Rural Resources Farm, training with local chefs, and learning business and leadership skills by starting a food or farm-related business. Once teens receive the appropriate training, they have the opportunity to participate in an internship program. Then Rural Resources will support them in developing a food related business of their choosing. In 2013 and 2014, the following four groups of teenagers participated in the program:

- Food Commanders (Year 1)
- The Silent Farmers (Year 2)
- "THE" Group (Year 3)
- Lovers of Land – L.O.L. (Year 4)



Evaluation Framework & Methods



The 2014 evaluation was conducted with students, parents, and alumni of the Farm & Food Teen Training Program. The first evaluation took place on October 16, 2014 with eleven students and four parents. These participants represented students and parents from the four groups that are currently active in the program.

The interviewer met with four groups. The first and second group included students in their first and second year of the program. The third group included students in their third and fourth year of the program. The fourth group included parents of teens in the program. It should be noted that one parent

completed the survey and focus group questions via an online questionnaire.

The second evaluation took place on November 6, 2014 with eight alumni of the Farm & Food Teen Training Program. This group included students who graduated from the program before 2011. Five of the eight alumni met in person with the evaluator. It should be noted that three of the eight alumni completed the survey and focus group questions through an online questionnaire.

Each group completed a short survey before participating in a semi-structured focus group conversation. Focus group conversations were taped, after the interviewer explained that the tapes would be kept confidential and secured verbal permission from all participants. Participants were given the opportunity to ask questions about the purpose, instructions, and context of the evaluation. Each focus group lasted thirty minutes.

This report was created from compiled survey data and multiple reviews of the audio files. The interviewer synthesized the audio files from each conversation, highlighting themes that developed across the groups and identifying specific statements and examples provided by participants. All images in this report are used with permission from the participants.

Core Evaluation Questions

How much was accomplished?

How well was it done?

What changed?

What could be improved?

Students and Parents

How Much Was Accomplished?

In 2014, the Farm and Food Teen Training Program achieved the following:

- 40 students participated in the program. All received training and experience related to growing and preparing food.
- 10 students received business training.
- 2 students ran a local frozen pizza business.
- 2 students raised livestock and 2 students ran a rabbitry operation.
- 5 interns worked on organic vegetable farms that supported Rural Resources Community Agriculture Program. Interns also worked at Catalyst Coffee, the local hot dog stand, and with local growers.
- 10 students participated in Teen 'Chopped' Cook Off.
- 1 leadership retreat at Long View Ranch, TN

In 2013, the Farm and Food Teen Training Program achieved the following:

- 36 students participated in the program. All received training and experience related to growing and preparing food.
- 7 students received business training.
- 8 students ran a frozen casserole business and 2 students ran a rabbitry operation.
- 2 students raised livestock.
- 6 interns worked on organic vegetable farms that supported Rural Resources Community Agriculture Program and worked on a chicken farm.
- 17 students participated in Teen 'Chopped' Cook Off.
- 1 trip to Harvest Table restaurant for a farm to table experience in Abingdon, VA.

Participants have contributed to the larger community by:

- Increasing their communities food security
- Promoting healthy and fresh local food options to the wider community
- Building relationships across diverse community members

How Well Was It Done?

Eleven teens completed a short survey that assessed knowledge gained and the level at which each student will use the knowledge gained to make decisions in the future. They were asked to rate the overall program on a scale of one to ten, with one being the worst and 10 being the best. Responses ranged from 6 to 10, with an average of 9.30. Participants were then asked to rate the staff, trainers, bus drivers, farmers, and coordinators they have worked with on the same scale. Responses ranged from 5 to 10, with an average of 9.18 for the staff; 9.81 for the trainers; 9.54 for the bus drivers; 9.46 for the farmers; and 9.81 for the coordinators. All parents rated the program and staff a 10 using the same scale.

Survey Results

Students: The following data summarizes the skills and new knowledge that students said they gained from participating in the program.

- All 11 students said they had learned about growing vegetables, preparing meals with fresh fruits and vegetables, and influenced the way their family buys, prepares, and cooks meals.
- All 11 students said they learned about being a good leader and made new friends.
- 10 students said they taught other people things they learned and learned about working as a team.
- 10 students said they learned about making good decisions about what they eat and prepare meals at home with fresh fruits and vegetables.
- 9 students said they learned communication skills, conflict resolution skills, and thought about what they might want to do after high school.
- 8 students said they learned about raising and caring for livestock.
- 8 students said they learned skills that will help them get a job someday.
- 6 students said they learned about making good decisions about how to spend their time.
- 5 students said they learned basic business skills like budgeting, record keeping and managing money.

Data Deviation: Much of the difference in the responses can be attributed to the structure of the program: students are involved in more activities as they progress through each year. In general, first and second year students reported involvement in 14 out of 17 activities, and third and fourth year students reported involvement in 16 out of 17 activities.

Parents: The following data summarizes the skills and new knowledge that parents said their teens gained from participating in the program.

- All parents said their students learned about growing vegetables, preparing meals with fresh fruits and vegetables, raising & caring for livestock, and influenced the way their family buys, prepares, and cooks.
- All parents said their teen learned about being a good leader, made new friends, taught other people things they learned, and learned about working as a team.
- All parents said their teen learned about making good decisions about what they eat and prepare meals at home with fresh fruits and vegetables.
- All parents said their teen learned valuable social and communication skills and make good decisions about how they spend their time.
- 3 parents said their teen learned skills that will help them get a job someday and thought about what they might want to do after high school.
- 2 parents said their teens learned basic business skills like budgeting, record keeping & managing money.

Data Deviation: As previously stated, much of the difference in the responses can be attributed to the structure of the program: students are involved in more activities as they progress through each year. In general, parents of first and second year students reported involvement in 13 out of 16 activities, and third and fourth year parents reported involvement in 16 out of 16 activities.

What Changed?

During the focus group conversations, participants were asked about what they felt they had learned from participating in the Farm & Food Training Program, what had changed at home, and how the program had impacted the larger community. When their responses were synthesized, the following themes emerged:

- I. Increased skills and knowledge related to content areas
- II. Increased leadership, problem-solving, communication, and life skills
- III. Awareness of career options and necessary skills.

I. Increased Skills and Knowledge Related to Content Areas

One part of the mission of Rural Resources is to facilitate learning experiences that connect farms, food, and families. Participants in the Farm and Food Teen Training program shared their learning around how to grow, cook, preserve, and promote healthy local foods. Teens talked about the new skills they learned related to soil conservation, raising and caring for livestock, cooking with local ingredients, and food preservation.

Soil Conservation: Teens shared that they learned to compost and cultivate the soil using sustainable and environmentally friendly farming practices. One student shared how he influenced his family to stop using chemicals in their garden because it could “kill off nutrients” or “make it [food] bad.”

Raising and Caring for Livestock: Teens reflected on how much they enjoyed raising and taking care of the chickens, pigs, cows, and rabbits on the farm. One teen proudly shared, “I can tell someone if they are doing something wrong, like if you catch somebody shaking rabbit pens, then you need to tell them not to do that because they could be pregnant.”

Cooking with Local Ingredients: Teens described how they cook more at home using local vegetables and fresh herbs and spices they grow themselves. They also commented on the value of using local products. “If you use local food it is more fresh than store bought food.” Others agreed, “Sometimes I get local products and store products and compare them. You can really taste the difference.”

Food Preservation: Teens shared that they learned traditional methods to dry, can, and preserve items like chickens, pickles, peppers, herbs, sauerkraut, and apple butter. Many of the teens said that they were excited to learn this process because their grandparents used canning techniques and they wanted to continue this tradition with their own families. Teens also described how the food preservation training helped them to better utilize existing natural resources at home. One student said, “I have an apple tree in my backyard and I didn’t know what to do with all these apples. It’s nice to know what to do with what you have.”

Business Management: Teens in their third and fourth year have started their own farm-based businesses. Students learned how to conduct market research in their communities, develop a business plan, market their product, and manage complex budgets. Members of this group described their vision to develop a business model that offers healthier options for the community and benefits the environment. One student plans to sell fresh wraps at local festivals, while another student plans to sell gourmet pizzas.

II. Increased Leadership, Problem-Solving, Communication, and Life Skills

At Rural Resources, every teen is treated as a trusted partner on the farm, given substantial responsibilities, and paid for their hard work. This atmosphere of trust, mutual respect, and accountability fosters an environment where teens' leadership skills flourish. Students spoke with pride about their growth into good leaders. "A leader has to take his time and pay attention to everybody around him, so that he knows what to do, so that people do the right thing," said one of the younger teens.

Several students shared how the program's leadership retreats helped them to listen to diverse ideas, problem solve, manage conflicts, and work well as a team to meet a common goal. Teens participated in small group exercises at the ranch that taught them how to work through differences and support each other as a team. "They teach you that if you have differences, you are going to talk through it, work together, and not give up." One teen referred to a situation where everyone was talking at once and no one was listening. "Once everyone stopped talking, we were able to share ideas one at a time, figure out the best way forward, and try the idea."

Many participants emphasized how these new skills helped improve their life for the better. For example, one teen shared a personal story about her life before joining the program. "I was hopeless before Rural Resources, I didn't know what to do, but this program gave me the structure I needed to be successful." She shared that it was helpful to socialize with teens her own age that are going through the same struggles and watch them grow. She said that watching other people grow influenced her to grow too. Now, she has more self-esteem, more confidence, feels healthier and makes better decisions in her daily life.

III. Awareness of Career Options and Necessary Skills

Residents of Greene County are less likely to have graduated high school or have earned a Bachelor's degree than the average American. The Farm and Food Teen Training Program, however, helps teens build the skills they need to be successful in school and encourages students to think about their future after high school. Participants said the program helped build their confidence and supported them as they uncovered new skills and explored career options. Teens were motivated as they talked about their ambitions to go to college, own their own business, pursue a career as a fundraiser, become a chef, and practice veterinarian medicine. One teen reflected, "You learn a lot about yourself that you didn't know. I've realized I'm good at fundraising and that's a skill I've gotten from Rural Resources." Another teen just enrolled in culinary school and credits this decision to her time in the program. "If it wasn't for Rural Resources, I wouldn't know what to do after high school. I wouldn't know how much I love cooking! I'd like to start a family business with what I've learned from here."

Impact on Families and the Community

Students were proud of how their participation in the program benefited their families and the wider community. Many students shared that the program increased their family's food security. For example, students used the knowledge they gained from the program to help their families install raised beds to grow vegetables and build hoop houses to grow strawberries. Students said that their families eat healthier and cook with more local fresh ingredients. "My mom use to always buy from the frozen food aisle and now we cook from scratch." The program also gives a financial boost to their families. Students said they use their paychecks to do more activities and support their family's income. Many students commented that it was nice just to have something to do outside of the house. For example, one student said that she spends more time outside and less time playing video games because of the program.

Impacts on Families and the Community

- Increases families food security
- Promotes healthier lifestyles for teens, families, and the wider community
- Builds relationships across diverse community members

Students shared how excited they were to expose the Greene County community to healthier eating options. They regularly cater church events, sell fresh vegetables at the local Farmer's Market, and conduct cooking demonstrations at community events. Students also participate in the annual Teen 'Chopped' Cook Off, based off the television show, where teens work as a team to prepare a plated meal with secret ingredients for judges. This competition is a way for teens to celebrate what they've learned with the wider community. Another benefit of the program is that it builds relationships across diverse community members. Students emphasized how much they enjoyed working alongside of teens from different cultures and backgrounds.

Parents also shared their enthusiasm for the program, the staff, and ways their families have been impacted. They said their teenagers love to share what they are learning and have become more responsible in their daily routines and motivated to do more for their community. Parents also expressed gratitude for the program teaching their teenagers how to grow, cook, and preserve food as well as develop leadership and life skills. "We are extremely thankful for this program. They [teenagers] will benefit for the rest of their lives from the skills they learned."

Program Staff

Students shared words of praise about the program staff. "The staff is the best ever. They are like second parents," one student exclaimed. Many students said they appreciate that Ms. Debbie, the Appalachia CARES/AmeriCorps Member serving as the Farm and Food Teen Training Coordinator, never loses her temper and encourages them to do better. "She is really comforting. She is a good problem-solver. Everyone feels safe and comfortable with her. She is very inspiring." Students also appreciated learning from Chef Mary, Melissa, Paul, Karen, Katy, Teddy, and Eva. Parents added to the acclaim, saying, "They are all sweet, nice, courteous, and nonjudgmental. I think that is what helps the kids excel the most, because there is nobody looking at them funny." It was clear that parents have a great deal of trust and respect for Ms. Debbie. One parent said, "Ms. Debbie will make sure they come home in one piece every day. She will also look into our concerns and talk openly about anything." Another said, "I love that Ms. Debbie is so dedicated and understands how to work with my special needs child."

What Could Be Improved?

In the focus groups, it was clear that both students and parents desired more time to spend on the farm and more opportunities for the students to learn and share their knowledge. Students also requested to attend more leadership retreats and field trips throughout the year. Participants provided the following suggestions for improving the Farm & Food Teen Training Program:

- Meet more frequently (ideally meet once a week throughout the year)
- Develop a sustainable source of funding to ensure the program continues over the long-term.
- Increase staff support for the program. Parents recommended hiring an assistant to support Ms. Debbie to manage and coordinate the program.
- Engage board members to actively participate in activities on the farm and attend community events.

Alumni

SHAPING FUTURE RURAL COMMUNITY LEADERS



“This [opportunity] has greatly helped my family and our own food security. Through our raised-bed we were able to grow our own tomatoes and have those all summer. I am much more secure in my ability to provide for myself...”

Rhianna Campbell experienced significant growth in self-confidence, leadership, and public speaking. She developed a resume that helped her obtain a job as a Library Assistant. She shared that the program helped, “develop the sort of ideals that are important to me and to get out and help my community, thus shaping the person I am today.” She also described how the program made her more aware of local issues within the food and farm industry. “That is something I am fortunate to know about.”

BUILDING A HEALTHIER COMMUNITY



“Rural resources helped me so much! [I] can’t wait to pass the knowledge down to my family and friends. Since I have learned to grow and prepare my own food, I have lost 50lbs in one year!

Kendall Chandler experienced a significant growth in her self-esteem and got over her fear of public speaking. Her experience has inspired her to pursue organic medicine and improve her own health by choosing fresh garden grown foods. She says, “[This opportunity] gave me a boost of confidence and a sense of pride!”

How Much Was Accomplished

The Farm and Food Teen Training Program impacted graduates in the following ways:

- 114 teens have participated in the program to date.
- 45 teens completed all four years and officially graduated from the program.
- Of the 14 alumni who graduated before 2011, 8 were engaged in this evaluation.
 - Over half of alumni surveyed credit their participation in the program to helping guide their career path in culinary arts, organic medicine, agriculture studies, and library science.
 - Over half of alumni surveyed said the business, communication, and leadership skills they gained from the program helped them to find a job.

How Well Was It Done?

To date, forty-five students have participated in the Farm and Food Teen Training program. Since 2011, fourteen teens have graduated from the program. Eight alumni who graduated from the program before 2011 completed a short survey about the long-term impacts of the Farm & Food Training Program. Participating alumni represented the groups “Mission Kitchen” and “Soul Food Café.”

The survey questions were divided into three parts. Part one assessed how involved they are in growing, preparing, and purchasing local food in their adult lives. Part two assessed how the program impacted their decision-making and leadership skills. And part three assessed how the program impacted their career path.

Survey Results

The following data summarizes the number of alumni who grow, prepare, and purchase fresh local fruits and vegetables because of participating in the program.

- All 8 alumni said they prepare meals at home with fresh fruits and vegetables.
- All 8 alumni said they teach other people things that they learned.
- 6 alumni said they buy fresh local fruits and vegetables.
- 3 alumni said they grow their own food.
- Over half of alumni said they purchase local fruits and vegetables at grocery stores and farmers markets.
- Over half of alumni said they buy local fruits and vegetables on a weekly/monthly basis.
- No alumni raise and care for livestock. When asked to explain their response, over half stated that they want to raise their own livestock, but are unable to at this time.

The following data summarizes the number of alumni who said they make better decisions and have stronger leadership skills because of participating in the program.

- All 8 alumni said they work well in a team and have strong communication skills.
- 7 alumni said they see themselves as a leader with valuable leadership skills.
- 6 alumni said they make good decisions about what they eat.
- 5 alumni said they manage their finances well.

The following data summarizes the number of alumni who said the program influenced their career path and helped them develop skills they used to find a job.

- 7 alumni said the program influenced their career path.
- 5 alumni said the business skills they gained from the program helped them to find a job.

The following data summarizes alumni's current field of employment or work interest.

- 2 alumni study culinary arts, 1 alumni studies organic medicine, 1 alumni is a library assistant, 1 alumni is a stay at home mom, and 3 alumni are unemployed.

What Changed?

During the focus group conversation, alumni were asked how they use the skills, knowledge, and leadership qualities they gained from the program in their adult life and/or career. When their responses were synthesized, the following themes emerged:

- I. Alumni make healthier eating and lifestyle choices because of the program.
- II. Alumni have stronger communication and leadership skills that helped their careers.
- III. The program shaped their values, attitude, and confidence.

I. Healthier Eating and Lifestyle Choices

Many of the alumni said they eat smarter because of the program. “Rural Resources taught me how healthy food can improve my health.” They also purchase fresh fruits and vegetables from the Farmers Market and grocery stores as often as possible. One alumni said, “I changed my eating habits, I support local, it changed the way I view agriculture.” A couple of alumni are new parents and said that they plan to raise their children on organic foods. Most alumni said they still share the knowledge they gained from the program with their family and friends, by helping them plant gardens and cook healthy foods.

II. Stronger Communication and Leadership Skills

Alumni reflected on how the communication and leadership skills they gained from the program influenced their career path. Many said that before participating in the program they were shy and reserved. “It helped me to get over my fear of public speaking. It also helped me to learn how to work well with others.” One alumni shared how the program helped her to create a resume and to successfully market her skills. Since graduating from the program, many use the skills they learned in public speaking, teamwork, and communication to advance their studies and careers.

III. Better Values, Attitudes, and Confidence

Each of the alumni spoke passionately about how the program made them a better person. One alumni said, “In this town, honestly, you either go to jail or get on drugs. It keeps you occupied. Because of this program many teens are able to avoid that path.” Alumni said that because of their sense of accomplishment from completing the program, they are able to make better decisions for their future. Everyone emphasized how important it is to continue and expand the program so that more teens can benefit from this experience.

Program Staff

Many alumni shared how the staff continues to support them after they graduate from the program. “Ms. Debbie is always there to listen to me about whatever I have going on, and she has helped my family so much on a personal level, but also through the program.”

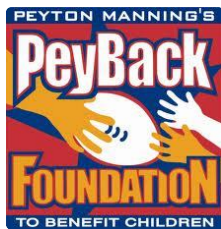
What Could Be Improved?

Alumni said they would not change anything major about the program. They did recommend more lessons around raising and caring for livestock and more meetings for teens.

Advise for Current Students from Alumni

- “Never give up. Don’t exchange what you want in the long run for what you want now.”
- “Soak in all the knowledge. These skills are so important to know! Spread what you know with your friends, family, and community! Love and baby your plants.”
- “Make sure to come to every meeting. There is something valuable to learn at every meeting and make sure to not hold a grudge. Everyday is a new day and you should give it the opportunity to be a great one.”

A Special Thank You to the Funders and Donors of the Rural Resources Farm & Food Teen Training Program



Pat and Lois Richardson

Westside Garden Club, Greeneville, TN