

SUCCESS STORY

4-H Urban Agriculture Club at Fern Creek High School

Bethany Pratt, 4-H Youth Development Agent
Jefferson County Cooperative Extension Service

The Horticulture Agent and 4-H Assistant in Jefferson County have partnered with the English and Urban Agriculture teacher at Fern Creek High School to further the in-class learning with an after school 4-H club. The overarching goal of the Urban Agriculture Campus at Fern Creek High school is to immerse students in the food system through hands-on participation in all aspects of agriculture on their urban farm campus.

Fern Creek High School has a total student body of 1,443 students, 53% of whom qualify for the free or reduced lunch program. During the school day, three teachers regularly engage students in the urban farm space as a supplement to their classroom activities. On an average day, 10% of the school will visit the urban farm accompanied by one of the instructors. The urban agriculture campus began in 2009 with a Food Literature class and served as a collaborative learning space for two English Teachers and one Biology teacher. The program took a hiatus during the 2016-2017 academic year with the departure of the lead teacher, who directed site maintenance. A new English teacher, hired in the summer of 2017, has reinvigorated the program because of his background in commercial organic vegetable farming. During the summer of 2017, the new English Teacher, as well as the 4-H Assistant and Horticulture Agent developed ideas to integrate the 4-H program into the urban agriculture campus so that interested students could spend after school time continuing to engage in the entire system of food production.

The first club meeting was on September 14th and had an attendance of five students. In the month that followed, the regular club attendance tripled and now regularly engages fifteen students during the hour-and-a-half club meeting time. More students plan to join the 4-H club once their sports season has finished. All fifteen of the current participants are new to 4-H, and only three of them have agricultural experience outside of the school.

Because the site was not used during the 2016-2017 academic year, much of this year's 4-H club, to date, has revolved around teaching plant identification and plant health as tools students can use while cleaning up the garden area. The club has already utilized the expertise of Dr. Emily Pfeufer, Extension Associate for Plant Pathology at UK, to help identify and control plant disease, and plans to bring in a fruit tree specialist next to guide the rehabilitation of the apple trees. Even in the midst of site clean up, many successes have already occurred. Students have grown and consumed their first salad, using a Kentucky Proud Fall Harvest Salad recipe as their inspiration. They have developed a school-year-centric planting plan using resources available from UK's Horticulture Department.

Growing and eating a salad is the first step in what we plan to be a robust year-round urban agriculture program that engages students in all aspects of agriculture from farm-to-fork, using seasoned extension techniques to grow food in the winter, and Kentucky Proud Recipes and the support of SNAP to teach the value of cooking and eating the harvest.



University of Kentucky
College of Agriculture,
Food and Environment
Cooperative Extension Service