

Engaging Student Leaders to Teach TWIGS Lessons in the Garden and Lead Garden Tours



Youth leaders sharing how to care for their solar powered hydroponic garden. Photo: UCCE

The Need

Over the course of the pandemic, evidence has shown that COVID-19 is much less likely to spread in an outdoor setting so offering lessons in the garden or outdoor classroom can be a great way to continue to provide nutrition education in school settings. Additionally, studies have shown that school gardens support student health through increased physical activity, increased consumption of healthy foods, and decreased body mass index. School gardens are also associated with positive emotions and social interactions and may support student mental health.



Youth leaders teaching TWIGS lesson "Plants We Eat" to a class. Photo: UCCE

The Work

In FFY22, UCCE partnered with teachers and students at Hapgood Elementary to provide garden enhanced nutrition education to 211 students in grades TK-6. Using the TWIGS curriculum, UCCE educators trained 26 fifth and sixth-grade leadership students to deliver lessons and garden tours. Student garden leaders gained experience and expertise related to their school fruit tree orchard, composting systems, and hydroponic gardens on their campus. Youth garden leaders engaged in peer-peer teaching and provided garden tours to students, classroom teachers, family members and community partners including the Lompoc Mayor. Additionally, eight leaders were invited to present their work at the California Agriculture in the Classroom conference.



Young students exploring a worm bin during a student led guided tour. Photo: UCCE

The Impact

Youth garden leaders completed a retrospective survey at the end of the school year (n=26). For healthy behaviors, students agreed or strongly agreed, due to their participation: I wash my hands frequently (100%) and my family has prepared healthier foods (88%).

For leadership skills, improvement was observed in all areas assessed including ability to work as a team member, speak before a group, and teach others..

For program support, youth agreed or strongly agreed:: There were dedicated adults who supported me as a youth leader (100%), and the program made sure I had everything I needed to be successful as a youth leader (100%).

"I am so impressed with the students and the garden at Hapgood! Their passion for growing food was evident as the young scholars taught us about composting and what each part of the plant contributes to in its growth. I want to thank the UC CalFresh Education Program, all the parents and volunteers as well as the staff at Hapgood for supporting such an awesome learning experience in how our food grows." - Lompoc Mayor, Jenelle Osborne



Third graders discovering a lacewing among a branch full of aphids during a TWIGS "Pest or Pal" lesson. Photo: UCCE

The Future

Due to the success of the program and support from school and city leaders, new students are currently being trained to run the garden program at Hapgood. They will do weekly garden maintenance and caring for the hydroponic towers. They will also be trained in delivering lessons and giving garden tours to classes school wide.

"We had a very knowledgeable young lady share valuable information with us and explained thoroughly when students asked questions." - Hapgood Teacher



Proclamation presented to Hapgood Garden Leaders by Lompoc Mayor. Photo: UCCE