



North Dakota Junior Master Gardener Program

ANNUAL REPORT 2025

NDSU

EXTENSION



North Dakota Junior Master Gardener Program



ANNUAL REPORT 2025



	Page
Introduction	1
At-A-Glance	2
Summary of Projects	3
Project Reports	4
Beautification Projects	
Mountrail Pioneers Garden Day (NDSU Extension – Mountrail County) . . .	5
Parks and Petals (NDSU Extension – Richland County)	6
Sherwood Sign Beautification (NDSU Extension – Renville County)	7
Community Garden Projects	
Community Learning Garden (NDSU Extension – Kidder County)	8
On the Move with Garden Growers (NDSU Extension – Burleigh County)	9
Walsh County JMG (NDSU Extension – Walsh County)	10
Food Security Projects	
Food Pantry Garden (NDSU Extension – Dickey County)	11
Hay Creek Hunger Free Garden (NDSU Extension – Morton County)	12
Linton Community Garden (Asher’s Heart at Linton)	13
Preschool and School Garden Projects	
Building Blocks Learning Center (NDSU Extension – Bottineau County)	14
Greenhouse Project (Linton Public School)	15
Langdon Day Care Center Garden (NDSU Extension – Cavalier County)	16
On the Move with Gardening (NDSU Center for Child Development)	17
Shining Lights & Tiny Town (NDSU Extension – Traill County)	18
Special Projects	
Home Garden Variety Trials (NDSU Department of Plant Sciences)	19
Therapeutic Gardening (Dakota Boys & Girls Ranch at Minot, Bismarck, Fargo) .	20
Feedback from Project Leaders	21

Introduction

Our Greatest Resource

The children of North Dakota are more beautiful than our prairie and more precious than any other natural resource.¹

Our children in North Dakota are beautiful and precious, but they are also undernourished and inactive. Recent surveys of high school children in our state show:

- 99% do not eat the recommended amount of vegetables daily.²
- 32% are overweight or obese.
- 70% are not physically active on a daily basis.³

Poor diets and unhealthy lifestyles limit the potential of our kids. Let's lend them a hand — and a garden trowel.

Our Response

Gardening programs can help. Children who grow their own food are more likely to eat vegetables and have healthy eating habits throughout their lives.⁴

Gardening programs can sharpen skills in science, raise awareness of the environment, build self-esteem, and help youth learn to work together.⁴

The North Dakota Junior Master Gardener Program provides resources to support projects that contribute to healthy diets and strong communities.

The following is our annual report for 2025. A description of gardening activities and their impacts on youth and their communities are presented for all 16 projects.



The North Dakota Junior Master Gardener Program provides hands-on activities that lead to healthy kids and strong communities.

North Dakota State University is dedicated to helping children enjoy healthy, active lives.

¹ Paraphrased with local emphasis from a quote by Danny Kaye, humanist and entertainer.

² Lange, S.J., L.V. Moore, D.M. Harris, C.L. Merlo, S.L. Lee, Z. Demissie, and D.A. Galuska. 2021. Percentage of Adolescents Meeting Federal Fruit and Vegetable Intake Recommendations — Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System, United States, 2017. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 2021; 70:69–74.

³ Centers for Disease Control. 2021. Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System results for 2021. North Dakota data. Accessed online.

⁴ Univ. of Colorado at Denver and Health Sciences Center. 2009. Benefits of gardening for children.

At-A-Glance

The North Dakota Junior Master Gardener Program provides **hands-on activities** that lead to **healthy kids** and **strong communities**.



North Dakota State University

NDSU Extension awarded funds to 16 projects for gardening supplies. Funds for each project ranged from \$285 to \$500. NDSU Extension provided educational support to all projects and led 13 of them. Eight of the projects would not have been started without JMG funds.



Partners

New partnerships were forged and existing partnerships were strengthened. Over 60 local businesses and organizations worked with NDSU Extension in these projects. Support came in the form of human resources, access to land and water, plants, tools, fertilizer, transportation, classroom space and food.



Impacts on Youth

Approximately 785 children (580 young children and 205 teens) participated in JMG activities. Project leaders reported that youth developed skills in gardening and enjoyed the physical activity. Children learned how to eat a healthy diet and gained experiences in helping others through public service.



Food Security

JMG projects assisted in the production and donation of an estimated 21,200 pounds of fresh vegetables. The produce went to food banks, churches, family shelters, elderly, sick and other needy families. Students grew and donated produce for their school lunch programs. A community garden was established.



Beauty

JMG kids cared for flower gardens at schools, libraries, day care centers, parks, government buildings and along city streets. Gardens were planted to attract colorful butterflies, hummingbirds and bees. Bouquets of flowers were donated to senior care centers.



Special Projects

JMG kids constructed raised beds at libraries, parks, schools and a vacant lot. At-risk youth learned how to grow their own gardens. Children conducted research to identify superior vegetable and flower varieties. JMG activities supported pollinator gardens, sensory gardens and a summer reading program.

For more information, go to www.ndsu.edu/agriculture/extension/programs/junior-master-gardener/.

Summary of Projects

PROJECT	COUNTY	HIGHLIGHTS
Beautification Projects		
Mountrail Pioneers Garden Day Parks and Petals Sherwood Sign Beautification	Mountrail Richland Renville	Beautified a park and grew vegetables for the community. Cared for flower beds in a park and along Main Street. Grew flowers at a sign that welcomes visitors to town.
Community Garden Projects		
Community Learning Garden On the Move with Garden Growers Walsh County JMG	Kidder Burleigh Walsh	Learned about gardening, composting and pollinators. Developed gardening skills, read stories and made crafts. Developed gardening skills and donated produce.
Food Security Projects		
Food Pantry Garden Hay Creek Hunger Free Garden Linton Community Garden	Dickey Morton Emmons	Built and grew a salsa garden; donated the harvest. Grew 3,740 pounds of potatoes for shelters and pantries. Established a garden to grow food for needy families.
Preschool and School Garden Projects		
Building Blocks Learning Center Greenhouse Project Langdon Day Care Center Garden Shining Lights & Tiny Town	Bottineau Emmons Cavalier Traill	Enjoyed hands-on experiences in gardening and nutrition. Learned how to grow plants in a classroom greenhouse. Grew vegetables for themselves and learned of nutrition. Learned how to grow veggies and where food comes from.
Special Projects		
Home Garden Variety Trials Therapeutic Gardening	State Burleigh	Evaluated promising vegetable and flower varieties. Learned about gardening; enjoyed its therapeutic benefits.





Project Reports



Mountrail Pioneers Garden Day

Mountrail Pioneers 4-H Club of NDSU Extension – Mountrail County

Project Activities

Thirty youth of the Mountrail Pioneers 4-H Club planted vegetables and herbs in a community garden at Makoti City Park. The children also planted flowers in flower beds and planters in the park. An apple tree was planted.

The youth maintained the gardens during summer and donated a portion of the harvest to the food pantry.

Impacts on the Youth

This project taught the children about gardening, how plants grow, and where their food comes from. The youth loved watching the gardens grow. Vegetables harvested from the garden provided the youth with healthy food.

The kids learned to volunteer and be active in their community. This service project boosted their self-confidence and gave them a sense of accomplishment and pride in their work. The project promoted physical activity.

Impacts on the Community

Members of the community were invited to harvest the vegetables in the community garden. Makoti is a rural community that does not have a grocery store. This garden provided a source of produce that may be hard to come by for the elderly, apartment dwellers and low-income families.

This park is basically maintained by volunteers, and the town appreciates the youth adding beauty to it.

Partners

Makoti Park Board and Phil Lowe's Garden Center in Minot.



The Mountrail Pioneers 4-H Club beautified their local park. They grew vegetable gardens for town residents to harvest from.

The children enjoyed beautifying their park and growing vegetables for their community.



This project fostered:

- Gardening skills
- Physical activity
- Healthy diets
- Food security
- Beautification
- Community partnerships
- Community service

Contact

Laura Fransen
Mountrail Pioneers
4-H Club
140 Rose St.
Makoti, ND 58756
(701) 898-8400
laurajfransen@gmail.com

Parks and Petals

Prairie Clovers 4-H Club of NDSU Extension – Richland County

Project Activities

Parks and Petals is a 4-H-led project that supports the existing flower planting program in Lidgerwood. While the city already maintains some flower beds, many of their workers are elderly volunteers.

Fourteen youth of the Prairie Clovers 4-H Club planted and cared for flowers in the public park and along Main Street. Activities included soil preparation, planting, watering and other seasonal maintenance.

Impacts on the Youth

The children in this project saw the direct results of their efforts. This built confidence and a sense of accomplishment among the youth. Working together encouraged cooperation, while spending time outdoors promoted physical activity and a connection to nature.

Youth learned gardening skills, leadership, respect and pride for their small community.

Impacts on the Community

This project added beauty to the community. The project supported the local American Legion, whose members are aging and no longer able to manage all aspects of park maintenance.

The improved appearance of the park created a more welcoming space for community members to enjoy.

Partners

Lidgerwood American Legion Post, Prairie Blossoms Greenhouse and Lidgerwood Parks and Recreation.



Youth in the Prairie Clovers 4-H Club planted and cared for flowers in Lidgerwood. This work beautified the community and supported the work of elderly volunteers.

This project gave youth an opportunity to give back, learn teamwork and support older residents.



This project fostered:

- Gardening skills
- Physical activity
- Beautification
- Community partnerships
- Community service

Contact

Nicole Podliska
Prairie Clovers 4-H Club
15295 County Road 16
Lidgerwood, ND 58053
(218) 849-8845
nicole.podliska@ndscs.edu

Sherwood Sign Beautification

Mouse River Stars 4-H Club of NDSU Extension – Renville County

Project Activities

The Mouse River Stars 4-H Club planted and maintained flowers at the sign that welcomes travelers to Sherwood. Seventeen children helped in caring for the flowers throughout the summer.

Impacts on the Youth

Children gained skills in gardening. They learned the values of teamwork, caring for your community and taking responsibility. The youth gained a sense of pride for their work.

Impacts on the Community

The flower bed welcomed visitors to Sherwood. The beauty of the flower bed showed the people of Sherwood their youth were invested in their community.

Partners

The City of Sherwood and Thrivent Financial Services.



The youth of the Mouse River 4-H Club planted and maintained flowers at the welcome sign to Sherwood.

The children learned the values of teamwork, caring for your community and taking responsibility.

This project fostered:

- Gardening skills
- Physical activity
- Beautification
- Community partnerships
- Community service

Contact

Justine Hanson
Mouse River Stars
4-H Club
5013 91st St. NW
Tolley, ND 58787
(701) 240-7536
justinehanson90@gmail.com

Community Learning Garden

NDSU Extension – Kidder County

Project Activities

Numerous educational activities were conducted at the community learning garden located at the Kidder County Public Library. This included hands-on gardening lessons for children from local day care centers, school groups and a summer reading program. A total of 30 children participated.

Children in the summer reading program planted the gardens. There was a special *Dig It, Eat It* class provided for older youth to learn about harvesting and using vegetables. Another special class involved using flower petals for creating works of art.

Impacts on the Youth

Children learned about growing plants, harvesting and preserving vegetables, composting and pollinators. They enjoyed samples of produce grown in the garden.

Impacts on the Community

The community garden serves as a safe haven for bees, butterflies and other essential pollinators. Twenty pounds of produce was donated to the local senior center and participating day care centers.

Partners

Kidder County Public Library, Kidder County Soil Conservation, Steele Senior Center and local day care centers.



Youth learned about gardening at the community learning garden located at the Kidder County Public Library.

Children learned about growing plants, harvesting and preserving vegetables, composting and pollinators.

This project fostered:

- Gardening skills
- Physical activity
- Healthy diets
- Food security
- Beautification
- Community partnerships
- Community service

Contact

Monica Fitterer
NDSU Extension
120 E Broadway
Steele, ND 58482
(701) 475-2672
monica.fitterer@
ndsu.edu

On the Move with Garden Growers

NDSU Extension – Burleigh County

Project Activities

Four children and three adults participated in a series of gardening classes held weekly during summer at the NDSU Extension – Burleigh County office.

Each session began with gardening activities such as watering and weeding. Once done, youth were provided a gardening lesson followed by reading garden stories and making garden crafts. At the end of each session, the youth and adults gathered together to learn about a specific fruit/vegetable and eat a sample.

Impacts on the Youth

The children loved exploring the garden with the adults and sharing garden stories. The group was multi-cultural and the children learned about gardening in different countries.

The children learned about different plants and gained skills in gardening. The youth enjoyed eating samples of fruits and vegetables and were encouraged to eat a healthy diet.

Impacts on the Community

The program brought together people of different ages and cultures. They learned together, grew together and made friendships. Fifteen pounds of produce was donated to the AgeWell Senior Center in Bismarck.

Partners

MAC'S Hardware and the AgeWell Senior Center.



Youth and adults in Bismarck learned about gardening and made friendships.

The program brought together people of different ages and cultures.



This project fostered:

- Gardening skills
- Physical activity
- Healthy diets
- Food security
- Beautification
- Community partnerships
- Community service

Contact

Shelly Kuntz
NDSU Extension
3715 E Bismarck
Expressway
Bismarck, ND
58501
(701) 221-6865
shelly.kuntz.1@
ndsu.edu

Walsh County JMG Program

NDSU Extension – Walsh County

Project Activities

The NDSU Extension – Walsh County hosted a series of gardening classes for youth during summer. Eighteen children attended the classes. The youth learned about all phases of gardening. The children enjoyed hands-on experiences in sowing seeds, watering, weeding and harvesting.

Impacts on the Youth

This program taught children how food is grown. Besides the activities at the Extension office, each child was given a container garden they could use to grow food at their homes.

The children learned the value of supporting needy families in their community through the donation of healthy food.

Impacts on the Community

The program’s garden was accessible to anyone in the community to harvest.

During class time alone, 330 pounds of produce was harvested and donated to the local high school and two local food pantries.

Partners

Walsh County Food Pantry in Grafton, Park River Area Food Pantry and Park River Area High School.



Youth in Walsh County developed skills in gardening through a series of hands-on gardening lessons.

The children enjoyed hands-on experiences in sowing seeds, watering, weeding and harvesting.



This project fostered:

- Gardening skills
- Physical activity
- Healthy diets
- Food security
- Beautification
- Community partnerships
- Community service

Contact

Bailey Schroeder
NDSU Extension
101 County Road
12B
Park River, ND
58270
(701) 284-6624
bailey.schroeder@
ndsu.edu

Food Pantry Garden

NDSU Extension – Dickey County

Project Activities

Youth designed and grew a raised-bed garden that contained salsa ingredients such as tomatoes, peppers, onions, cilantro and garlic. Approximately 25 pounds of produce were donated to the local food pantry.

Impacts on the Youth

Children were provided a hands-on learning experience that connected personal growth with community service. All youth developed practical gardening skills, learned about plant growth and food safety, and gained a better understanding of where food comes from. Older youth took on leadership roles by helping plan the garden, guiding younger participants, and modeling proper planting, care, and food safety practices.

The children developed a sense of responsibility, empathy and civic engagement by its donation efforts.

Impacts on the Community

This project made a difference in the community by increasing access to fresh produce through donations to the food pantry.

The project strengthened connections between youth, NDSU Extension, the food pantry and other community partners. The garden also increased awareness of local food systems, healthy eating, and service within the community.

Partners

4-H Ambassadors and the local food pantry.



Youth in Dickey County planted a salsa garden and donated the harvest to a local food pantry.

The children developed life skills in gardening and teamwork while making a meaningful community impact.



This project fostered:

- Gardening skills
- Physical activity
- Healthy diets
- Food security
- Community partnerships
- Community service

Contact

Breana Kiser
NDSU Extension
309 Second St. N
Ellendale, ND
58436
(701) 349-8323
breana.s.kiser.3@
ndsu.edu

Hay Creek Hunger Free Garden

Hay Creek Kids 4-H Club of NDSU Extension – Morton County

Project Activities

The Hunger Free Garden Project was started by the North Dakota Department of Agriculture as a way to supply fresh vegetables to food pantries. For the past 16 years, the Hay Creek Kids 4-H Club has provided fresh food to needy families while teaching youth how to grow vegetables.

A team of 11 kids was involved in all phases of production this year. This included sowing, weeding, irrigating, harvesting and bagging the potatoes.

Impacts on the Youth

The children wanted an opportunity to give back to their community. They were excited to grow and deliver the potatoes to pantries.

The youth learned how to grow vegetables, which is a skill that will benefit them their entire lives. At the same time, they saw the tremendous value of their work to the community when they dropped off the produce to the shelters and pantries.

Impacts on the Community

Approximately 3,740 pounds of potatoes were grown and donated to food pantries this year. Over a 16-year span, this club has grown and donated over 56,900 pounds of produce.

Food pantries were extremely grateful for this produce. Needy families were lining up for the potatoes when the project delivered the harvest.

Partners

Local food pantries and shelters.



The Hay Creek Kids 4-H Club grew and donated 3,740 pounds of potatoes to local food pantries and shelters.

This program provided fresh food to needy families while teaching youth how to grow vegetables.

This project fostered:

- Gardening skills
- Physical activity
- Healthy diets
- Food security
- Community partnerships
- Community service

Contact

Jeff Ellingson
Hay Creek Kids
4-H Club
11405 26th St. NE
Bismarck, ND
58503
(701) 202-6896
jellingson@
abmnow.com

Linton Community Garden

Asher's Heart, Linton

Project Activities

A community garden was started in Linton to grow vegetables for the local food pantry. The town allowed the project to use an unused piece of land. A group of six children participated in the program.

Impacts on the Youth

The youth learned how to grow food. This included taking care of soil, sowing seeds, controlling weeds and harvesting the produce. The project provided an opportunity for youth to serve the needy in their community.

Impacts on the Community

Needy families in the community were able to access fresh produce from the local food pantry. Fifteen pounds of produce was grown and donated.

Partners

NDSU Extension 4-H members, all of whom are part of Linton Public School.



Youth in Emmons County learned how to grow vegetables. The harvested produce was donated to a local food pantry.

The project provided an opportunity for youth to serve the needy in their community.

This project fostered:

- Gardening skills
- Physical activity
- Healthy diets
- Food security
- Beautification
- Community partnerships
- Community service

Contact

Emma Sorrels
Asher's Heart
200 E Elm Ave.
Linton, ND 58552
(701) 321-0735
emma.leier@gmail.com

Building Blocks Learning Center

NDSU Extension – Bottineau County

Project Activities

Thirty-three preschool youth grew vegetables, herbs and flowers at the Building Blocks Learning Center. The *On the Move to Gardening Fun* curriculum of NDSU Extension was used to provide youth with lessons on gardening and nutrition.

This curriculum included information on different kinds of gardens, wildlife in the garden, seeds, roots, stems, leaves, flowers and fruits. Lessons included hands-on activities, taste tests and sensory activities.

The youth compared vegetable and flower varieties by participating in the North Dakota Home Garden Variety Trials.

Impacts on the Youth

The youth in this project increased their knowledge of gardening basics, plants and the food cycle. The youth learned about healthy eating. They had an opportunity to eat fruits, vegetables and herbs, and they experienced different types of gardens.

Through the variety trial program, the youth got a “taste” of research. Their skills in science and math were enhanced.

Impacts on the Community

The raised beds and pots added beauty to the community.

Partners

Building Blocks Learning Center.



Youth developed skills in gardening and learned about nutrition.



Preschool youth at the Building Blocks Learning Center enjoyed hands-on experiences in growing a garden and eating healthy foods.



This project fostered:

- Gardening skills
- Physical activity
- Healthy diets
- Beautification
- Community partnerships

Contact

Erin Berentson
NDSU Extension
314 Fifth St. W,
Suite 3
Bottineau, ND,
58318
(701) 228-2253
erin.berentson@
ndsu.edu

Greenhouse Project

Linton Public School

Project Activities

A 6th-grade science class at Linton Public School are learning how to grow vegetables, flowers and herbs in an indoor greenhouse. This is the second group of plants grown by the class.

A system of automatic timers is used to provide the proper amounts of light, water and fertilizer to the plants. Unfortunately, the automatic system failed during fall break, and the first group of plants died.

Impacts on the Youth

The 24 youth in the class are actively invested into their indoor garden. They began by researching how to grow plants indoors. This was followed by sowing seeds and monitoring plant growth.

Even though the initial planting failed, the kids are now excited about replanting. Many of the children expressed their plans for growing a garden at their home next summer.

Impacts on the Community

In the new planting, the students are growing vegetable plants for the elderly and flower plants for the city parks.

Partners

None.



Youth from Linton Public School are learning how to grow plants indoors.

The students are learning how to grow vegetables, flowers and herbs in an indoor greenhouse.



This project fostered:

- Gardening skills
- Physical activity
- Healthy diets
- Food security
- Beautification

Contact

Denise Pfeifer
Linton Public
School
101 NE Third
Street
Linton, ND 58552
(701) 254-4173
Denise.Pfeifer@
k12.nd.us

Langdon Day Care Center Garden

NDSU Extension – Cavalier County

Project Activities

Youth from the Langdon Day Care Center grew a garden at the Langdon Research Extension Center. Six children met weekly from June through mid-August to tend the garden. Youth sowed seeds in pots and grew them at home.

Additional activities at the Center included lessons on sun safety, container gardening and nutrition.

Impacts on the Youth

Through hands-on gardening, children strengthened physical skills such as coordination and responsibility while gaining a sense of accomplishment from nurturing a living plant.

Emotionally, caring for a garden built patience, confidence and pride as they watched their efforts turn into visible results.

Intellectually, youth developed problem-solving skills and an understanding of plant life cycles, environmental stewardship and healthy food systems.

Socially, the program encouraged teamwork, communication and leadership.

Impacts on the Community

Healthy, confident and informed youth play a vital role in building resilient families and thriving communities.

Partners

NDSU Langdon Research Extension Center, Langdon Day Care Center and Cavalier County Public Transportation.



Youth from the Langdon Day Care Center have grown a garden at the NDSU Langdon Research Extension Center for many years.

Youth developed skills in gardening while gaining a sense of accomplishment.

This project fostered:

- Gardening skills
- Physical activity
- Healthy diets
- Beautification
- Community partnerships

Contact

Lahni Stachler
NDSU Extension
901 Third St., Suite
7
Langdon, ND
58249
(701) 256-2560
lahni.stachler@
nds.u.edu

On the Move with Gardening

NDSU Center for Child Development

Project Activities

A curriculum on gardening was taught to 60 preschoolers at the NDSU Center for Child Development. Classes promoted healthy diets and developed skills in gardening and math.

The children planted, watered, weeded and harvested vegetables. They prepared and tasted nutritious foods such as salsa, zucchini bread, cantaloupe, sweet potatoes, peas, lettuce and tomatoes.

Impacts on the Youth

The children explored, discovered and increased their awareness of science and nature through gardening. The children tasted new vegetables at lunch and snack times. These hands-on experiences may encourage the children to continue eating a wide variety of vegetables at home.

Parents stated this gardening program is a strength of the Center for Child Development. The families and teachers look forward to gardening with the children each year.

Impacts on the Community

Seventy-five pounds of produce was shared with parents.

Partners

NDSU Dietetics, Facilities Management, Horticulture and Plant Pathology staff and/or students, Walmart and Baker Garden & Gift.



Children at the NDSU Center for Child Development Community Child Care Center learned how to grow and enjoy eating vegetables.

The children enjoyed growing and eating lots of colorful vegetables.

This project fostered:

- Gardening skills
- Physical activity
- Healthy diets
- Beautification
- Community partnerships
- Community service

Contact

Debra Habedank
Center for Child
Development
Room 261, EML
Hall, NDSU
Fargo, ND 58108
(701) 231-8281
debra.habedank@
ndsu.edu

Shining Lights & Tiny Town

NDSU Extension – Traill County

Project Activities

NDSU Extension conducted a series of classes on gardening for youth at a day care center in Hillsboro. A total of six classes were provided every other week during summer.

Impacts on the Youth

Twenty-eight children learned basic gardening skills, the basic life cycle of plants, and where their fruits and vegetables come from. Basic gardening skills were taught using hands-on lessons with youth growing plants in container gardens.

The program inspired many of the kids to want to grow vegetables at their homes.

Impacts on the Community

As a community that has strong agriculture ties, it is important for youth to understand and appreciate where their food comes from.

Fifteen pounds of vegetables were harvested and fed to the children at the day care center.

Partners

Shining Lights Children's Program.



Youth at a day care center in Traill County learned the basics of gardening and how their food is grown.

The children learned where their fruits and vegetables come from.



This project fostered:

- Gardening skills
- Physical activity
- Healthy diets
- Food security
- Community partnerships

Contact

Jill Murphy
NDSU Extension
114 West
Caledonia Ave.
Hillsboro, ND
58045
(701) 636-5665
jill.murphy.1@
ndsu.edu

Home Garden Variety Trials

NDSU Department of Plant Sciences

Project Activities

Children throughout North Dakota evaluated promising varieties of vegetables and flowers in their backyards. A team of over 450 children participated in a total of 51 different trials. Each trial consisted of a comparison of two varieties of a crop. Examples of crops included green bean, pickling cucumber, red lettuce, giant pumpkin, watermelon and red zinnia.

Youth evaluated the varieties for germination, plant health, earliness, yield and quality. Trials were supervised by parents and teachers.

Impacts on the Youth

A survey of parents and teachers showed that 96% of youth in this project improved their diets, 91% increased their levels of physical activity and 80% developed skills in science and math by conducting these experiments.

Impacts on the Community

The use of superior varieties will lead to higher yields, healthier diets and reductions in the use of pesticides. Thousands of gardeners will learn of the results of these trials and make informed choices when selecting varieties to plant in 2026.

Over 16,400 pounds of fresh produce was shared with others in their communities.

Partners

Numerous food banks, churches, schools and garden centers across North Dakota.



Youth in North Dakota evaluated promising varieties of vegetables and flowers for yield and food/ornamental quality.

The youth enjoyed healthier diets and more physical activity. Many of the children enhanced their skills in math and science.

This project fostered:

- Gardening skills
- Physical activity
- Healthy diets
- Food security
- Beautification
- Community partnerships
- Community service

Contact

Tom Kalb
NDSU Extension
2005 N. Kavaney
Dr.
Bismarck, ND
58501
(701) 877-2585
tom.kalb@
ndsu.edu

Therapeutic Gardening

Dakota Boys & Girls Ranch at Minot, Bismarck and Fargo

Project Activities

The primary goal of Dakota Boys & Girls Ranch is to develop practical life skills while simultaneously providing a therapeutic option for youth to channel their energies.

A garden program was conducted at each campus (Minot, Bismarck and Fargo). These garden programs offered education, experience and therapeutic time in its gardens and green spaces.

A total of 38 youth in 2025 cared for plants in greenhouses and garden plots. Classes were conducted on food preparation and safety.

Impacts on the Youth

In the short term, this program provided a positive and calm environment for children to flourish while instilling qualities of self-confidence, accomplishment and pride as they watch their gardens thrive.

In the long term, the program empowered youth with a valuable lifelong skill in gardening. This skill may provide them with better health and financial benefits in the future.

Impacts on the Community

Over 500 pounds of produce was shared. Vegetables were donated to a local soup kitchen.

The skills developed in these youth will follow them back to their home communities and empower them to grow and share food with others.

Partners

NDSU Extension – Burleigh County, local churches and Plant Perfect.



Produce grown by youth at Dakota Boys & Girls Ranch was shared at a soup kitchen.

The youth developed life skills in growing food while enjoying the therapeutic benefits of gardening.

This project fostered:

- Gardening skills
- Physical activity
- Healthy diets
- Food security
- Beautification
- Community partnerships
- Community service

Contact

Talbott Pollert
Dakota Boys &
Girls Ranch
1227 N 35th St.
Bismarck, ND
58501
(701) 224-1789
t.pollert@
dakotaranch.org

Feedback from Project Leaders

Several project leaders shared personal comments in reports. In many cases, these were expressions of gratitude. Here is a sampling of comments:

“It has been an honor and pleasure to work in partnership with you over the years. I wish you the very best and THANK YOU for helping young children, their parents and programs receive these grant funds!”

Debra Habedank, NDSU Center for Child Development

“Youth taking part in this program experienced growth far beyond learning how to plant seeds.”

Lahni Stachler, NDSU Extension – Cavalier County

“This program provided a community garden that was available to anyone in the community to come harvest produce if they didn’t have a garden at home but wanted fresh produce from the garden. ... We were very grateful for the opportunity to host a Junior Master Gardener Program at our office, and it is something that we’re hoping to continue.”

Bailey Schroeder, NDSU Extension – Walsh County

“Junior Master Gardener Program has help our program immensely, along with NDSU Extension Services. We hope to send our Wellness Coordinators through Master Gardener Certification to increase their knowledge and skill base in order to continue to improve and grow our program and what we are able to offer the youth we serve.”

Talbott Pollert, Dakota Boys & Girls Ranch



NDSU Extension educators played key roles in teaching youth on gardening, healthy diets and community service.

“We know that the food we donate made a very small dent in replenishing the food pantries shelves but it makes a huge impact on the kids in the club. Every year when we discuss if we should do the garden the kids talk about the process of planting, weeding, growing and delivering the potatoes. They continue to be surprised that there are actually people lined up before we get to the shelters for the potatoes that we are bringing.

“We appreciate Tom Kalb’s help with the project. He is always available to answer questions and give us feedback.”

Jeff Ellingson, Hay Creek Kids 4-H Club

“Thank you so much for the funds for the gardening project. Our community appreciates it very much. The whole community benefits from the gardening project as it provides a fresh source of produce and helps to beautify our park.”

Laura Fransen, Mountrail Pioneers 4-H Club



More Feedback from Project Leaders

“The project made a meaningful difference to our community by supporting the local [American] Legion, whose members are aging and no longer able to manage all aspects of park upkeep. ... The project highlighted the positive role of youth in our community, as our 4-H members were recognized as hardworking, responsible and willing to give back. ... We are very thankful for this project and the assistance from the NDSU Extension office. We cannot wait to continue to build on this project.”

Nicole Podliska, Prairie Clovers 4-H Club

“This project makes a difference for participating children by providing hands-on, meaningful learning experiences that connect personal growth with community service. ... The youth-led raised-bed garden provided nutritious salsa ingredients that supported families facing food insecurity while strengthening connections between youth, NDSU Extension and community partners.”

Breana Kiser, NDSU Extension – Dickey County

“Both children and adults loved working and learning together. ... Thank you for the funding and for helping us get a start to a community-involved, growing-together garden.”

Shelly Kuntz, NDSU Extension- Burleigh County

“[This project] helped create a spark about growing vegetables and other produce at home.”

Jill Murphy, NDSU Extension – Traill County

“Over 100 families write me every year about how much they love participating in our garden trials. Parents report their children are excited to watch the plants grow. They find that their children start eating more vegetables. The children develop skills in science and math as they conduct the trials. The trials are a bonding experience for parents, grandparents and the youth.”

Tom Kalb, NDSU Department of Plant Sciences



NDSU

EXTENSION

Written by Tom Kalb, Extension Horticulturist
North Dakota State University

Contact information:

Tom Kalb, Ph.D.
North Dakota State University
2005 N. Kavaney Drive, Suite A
Bismarck, ND 58501
tom.kalb@ndsu.edu

Photos were provided by project leaders and non-copyright sources. Icons and icon elements are from www.flaticon.com. For more information on the North Dakota Junior Master Gardener Program, go to <https://www.ndsu.edu/agriculture/extension/programs/junior-master-gardener/>.

January 2026

County commissions, North Dakota State University and U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperating. NDSU does not discriminate in its programs and activities on the basis of age, color, gender expression/identity, genetic information, marital status, national origin, participation in lawful off-campus activity, physical or mental disability, pregnancy, public assistance status, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, spousal relationship to current employee, or veteran status, as applicable. Direct inquiries to Vice Provost, Title IX/ADA Coordinator, Old Main 100, 701-231-7708, ndsu.eoaa@ndsu.edu. This publication will be made available in alternative formats for people with disabilities upon request, 701-231-7881.