



North Dakota Junior Master Gardener Program

ANNUAL SUMMARY 2025

NDSU

EXTENSION



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.



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



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