

Local Food Projects

CHATHAM COUNTY, NC



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Needs Addressed:

- Create a community-driven food initiative.
- Make healthy, locally grown food affordable and accessible in Siler City.

Project/Process:

Because the SAGE Academy students haven't performed well in other schools, SAGE reorganizes the daily schedule to include "SAGE time" in the middle of the day which opened the door for a garden club. Leaders assisted the students in acquiring materials for creating raised beds. Gardens were planted and the students began to experience the growth processes complete with successes and failures. The garden became a focus of attention among some members of the broader community. At least 30 volunteers have been involved in hands-on work in the garden including Saturday workdays. Others such as the local farm supply or teachers have donated tools and materials. And Chatham County Center of Cooperative Extension included the SAGE gardens as a stop on their annual Farm & Industry Tour. Approximately 65 tour participants listened, watched, and asked questions of the students who reported their experiences in planning, planting, tending, and harvesting from the gardens. It gave the students experience in public speaking, the opportunity to reflect on how their comments were perceived by others, and the implied respect of others listening and paying attention to them. Work and learning continue as students find first a need then a solution. When a water hose was chopped up in mowing, the students decided that the irrigation lines needed to go underground and made it happen. They are currently learning about the impact of cold on plants and the value of season extension strategies. SAGE was one of five schools in the state selected to pilot the program "High School – Cook Smart / Eat Smart", a culinary program provided through a grant with the Department of Agriculture.



Partnerships:

- [SAGE Academy](#)
- [Bountiful Backyards](#)
- Two local farmers
- Three extension agents
- Soil and water specialist
- Local artist

Lessons Learned:

- Think big but start small
- Trust the students to problem solve
- Who shows up is who is needed

Results:

- Anecdotal reports that most faculty and many students stop by the gardens to sample something.
- Students were encouraged to take produce home.
- An estimated ten families received fresh produce often.
- As many as twenty to thirty families experiencing at least some results from the harvest.
- The garden stimulated discussions at home.

Next Steps:

- Integrate the garden into a culinary arts program.
- Reach out via student families to the greater community.
- Get families involved.