

GRuB of Olympia

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by Tiffany Venters of Salkam

Where Does Your Food Come From? Do You Know?

Does it come in a box from a store? Maybe in a box shipped by an online company and delivered to your door?

The real answer may be harder for youth to discover now, compared to 100 years ago. Although we can buy all of our groceries at a store today, it wasn't always this way. In fact, a growing number of families each year are reverting to how we once lived. They are reconnecting to their land, to their selves, to their communities and to their food. How are they accomplishing this?

The simple answer — gardening. One such organization leading the march is called GRuB (Garden Raised Bounty), out of Olympia. GRuB is a non-profit organization that creates real change in communities by empowering youth and growing healthy foods.

Their mission is:

- To inspire positive personal and community change by bringing people together around food and agriculture.
- To partner with youth and people with low incomes to create empowering individual and community food solutions.
- To offer tools and trainings to help build a just and sustainable food system in Thurston and Mason Counties.

One of GRuB's programs is called Cultivating Youth

- Employment Program. The program's main goals are:**
- To prevent teenagers from dropping out of school
 - To improve their food quality
 - To bring significant positive change to their lives.

So, How Do They Do All This?

The Cultivating Youth Employment Program teaches students how to care for soil, sow seeds, maintain gardens, harvest and sell healthy home-grown vegetables and flowers.

On the GRuB 2-acre farm, the students produce enough food to bring home to their families, to share with local food banks, to sell at their farm-stand and to operate a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture). CSA customers pay up-front for a season's worth of farm-fresh weekly produce deliveries.

Food Isn't the Only Healthy Outcome

GRuB volunteers also teach students skills in how to use farm-grown produce in homemade meals so they can make healthy meals for their families. Participating students become more connected to their peers. They learn how to speak publicly and talk to others about their personal stories and successes. They become engaged with their communities and provide assistance to their families.

Who knew that working with dirt could cultivate such a significant change in so many lives?



In fact, the program has had so much success in helping prevent teens from dropping out, schools are beginning to follow in their footsteps. Known as the GRuB School Model, area schools have begun their own alternative education, drop-out prevention and employment program via sustainable agricultural practices. These programs teach local teenagers through community and land-based projects, striving to break the cycle of hunger, inequality, oppression and poverty.

Additional Organizations Growing Too

Other organizations that have adopted the GRuB model are known as Pollination Projects. Organizations build their own on-site gardening programs and are giving their local low-income teens and families the opportunity for personal development, community development and food security. One such pollinated organization, Cultivating Youth, is in Centralia, and run by the Salvation Army.

Farming in Your Own Back Yard

That's not all GRuB has done. Since 1993, GRuB has helped the community build over 2,600 backyard farms! Students and volunteers build gardens for community members and teach them how to grow and maintain healthy harvests. This allows families to grow, on average, \$550 worth of vegetables in their backyards, reducing the strain of high food costs.

For more information on GRuB, how to donate, arrange a farm visit or volunteer, visit www.goodgrub.org.

The GRuB Farm allows drop-in farm tours on Wednesday afternoons during the growing season, or a school visit can be arranged by calling.

Contact GRuB if you have a group that would like to get dirty and volunteer at the farm.

If you would like to help, an easy way is to donate items from their wish list. Harvest knives, non-GMO chicken feed, Atlas brand gloves, sturdy picnic tables and benches, recycled-content office paper, healthy snacks for volunteers and SPF 30 sunscreen are only a few of their needed supplies.



Tiffany loves to spend time with her family and friends. She is learning Tai Kwon Do with her daughters, enjoys writing for SWW Family Magazine and loves the great outdoors.

