

Third Grade Field Day

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director

Introduction

The McNay Research Farm in southern Iowa has been underutilized by the public as a source of information, especially in the area of horticulture and youth education. In addition, there was an increasing need area wide for elementary education in the subject of diversity. An initial brainstorming session with McNay staff and local Master Gardeners looked at these issues and developed a plan for four ethnic gardens.

The purpose of the project was to: 1) Develop and foster an awareness of cultural differences in foods within our country, 2) Create an understanding of farming practices in the areas of horticulture, crops, and livestock production, and 3) Increase the level of knowledge in respect to the food guide pyramid.

Methods

Throughout the summer, extension staff, McNay staff, and volunteers planted, weeded, harvested, and preserved vegetables from the Latin American and French gardens as well as from the crazy and unusual vegetable garden. Dried flower arrangements were made and herbs were dried from the flower and herb garden. Six field days were held in September 2000. The initial field day was for adults. Over 80 participants viewed the ongoing crop research as well as the demonstration gardens. A free dinner followed the tours with samples of ethnic foods prepared using vegetables from the garden. The following five field days served 400 third grade students from 10 area schools. Each classroom toured the livestock facilities (beef) and the garden. In addition, youth prepared an ethnic lunch, learned about co-products from livestock, and learned about food safety.

Results and Discussion

Classroom teachers were sent an evaluation two weeks after their visit. When asked if there was evidence that participants increased their level of knowledge and understanding, changed their attitudes, or improved their skills the teachers replied, "Several students had never been around live animals on a farm setting before and had no idea about the care that was required. Many students commented that you would have to know a lot to take care of animals and plants on the farm. The introduction of the different types of foods increased their awareness of cultural differences, and they were surprised at how good the food tasted."

"They [students] became aware of other cultural foods, other than the same old things at home. They were pleased when something was mentioned that they knew about so that they could contribute their comments."

"The kids learned about something that many of them will be doing as adults. They had experiences that they don't or won't get at home."

"...Nothing compares to [Iowa State University's] technology and knowledge."

All teachers wanted the field days repeated with a few minor changes.