

TOPIC: HOW DO I START A SCHOOL GARDEN AND USE ITS PRODUCE IN THE CAFETERIA?



Photograph by Morguefile

Andrew Nowak, a trained chef, with a PhD in psychology and an avid gardener, joined Slow Food Denver just as it was starting its Seed To Table School Garden program ten years ago.

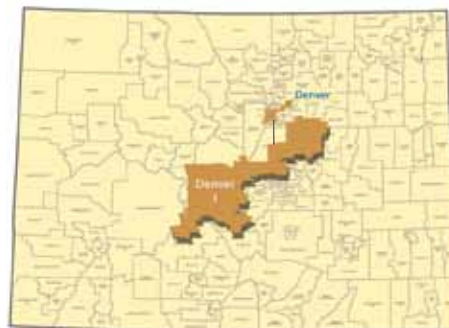
He has been the co-director of the Seed To Table program for the past 5 years. For the past two years, Slow Food Denver has been the community partner with DPS Food and Nutrition Services, teaming with Leo Lesh and his staff, to get fresh local foods into school cafeterias. Fifty DPS schools now have on-campus gardens, thanks to a broad coalition of parent and community groups, including Denver Urban Gardens and Learning Landscapes. This dynamic duo of Denver's Farm to School movement shares how they overcame resource constraints and red tape to connect a school garden program to the school cafeteria.

Who Is Involved?

Volunteer parent groups at most schools head up the garden project, a situation Andrew describes as "ideal" because the parents bring lots of enthusiasm. Slow Food Denver provides training, support and cooking classes for the garden classes. Denver Urban Gardens helps oversee many of the gardens, and Learning Landscapes, a non-profit partnership between the University of Colorado Denver's College of Architecture and Planning and Denver Public Schools,

"During the 192 days that they aren't in school, we want the parents and kids to be excited about replicating the good, nutritious food at the school. We're creating a lifestyle of loving fresh veggies, not just a new cafeteria menu."

-Leo Lesh



is working to establish a garden of some kind at every DPS elementary school. Students help with planting and harvest, and some school leaders provide paying opportunities for students to tend the garden through the summer. Andrew and Leo give schools latitude to create the system that works best for their students and community.



How Are Gardens Funded and Supported?

Denver voters approved bonds that are rehabilitating the outdoor spaces of schoolyards and many projects include gardens. In addition, local businesses (Whole Foods, Chipotle, Noodles & Co.) provide fundraising help. Some schools hold plant sales to profit from extra seedlings, and others are holding youth farmers' markets to support the garden program.

How Do You Get Garden Produce Into the Cafeterias?



Photograph by Morguefile

Getting school garden produce on the school cafeteria menu requires satisfying procurement regulations, and "we need to work to satisfy City and County rules on how to handle produce from the farm all the way to the plate of the cafeteria," said Leo. That process takes time and effort. Leo received a \$50,000 School Food FOCUS grant for an 18-month effort to change procurement processes. His comprehensive work plan included building two greenhouses (to extend the short Colorado growing season and provide science laboratory space) and challenging students from Johnson & Wales Culinary School to develop and test new recipes that utilize locally-raised beef.

Together, Leo and Andrew developed a series of protocols (available online at www.farmtoschool.org/CO/pubs.htm) for satisfying food handling rules so that any garden produce that meets these standards can be served on the cafeteria salad bar. By keeping his end goal in mind, Leo has worked in phases, and mostly from within his budget, to get CO-grown, fresh produce and CO-raised beef and milk (rBST free) into all the District's school cafeterias.

"The protocols developed with Denver County Health Department are getting a lot of attention because many people want to be involved in Farm to School," said Andrew "It's a working document and there will be changes, but it's developing in a positive direction and has been reviewed by the health department."

Any Unexpected Challenges?

Timing can be a challenge. "If something needs to be harvested but isn't in the menu until the next week, that's a problem," said Leo. "It can be difficult to get the fresh products in at the right time." Overcoming that takes time and experience to get the structure in place.

How Do You Demonstrate Program's Value?

While the garden programs are generating lots of interest and enthusiasm, Andrew and Leo are working on ways to quantify success. "Together with UCD and DUG, we're trying to make formal connections between the school gardens and the science curriculum," said Andrew. "We're working on a grant to train classroom teachers to use the school gardens in their science laboratories." Success could lead the District to provide funding of the school garden programs like music, art, and physical education classes.

"They (district officials) are very concerned about test scores, and we need to convince them that this food program will really affect those scores," said Leo. "We need to show the ways in which good nutrition in the cafeteria affects academic achievement." ■

Learn More

DPS protocol for Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment

http://www.gardenabcs.com/uploads/Garden_Protocol_-_Denver_Public_Schools.pdf

Learning Landscapes

www.learninglandscapes.org

Denver Urban Gardens

<http://dug.org/>

Slow Food Denver

www.slowfooddenver.org

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Models & Resources

FTS & School Gardening: A Resource List for Educators

USDA Food & Nutrition Information Center, July 2010

<http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/pubs/bibs/gen/farmentoschool.pdf>

This publication is a collection of resources on the topic of Farm to School and School Gardening for educators. It is comprised of information available on the World Wide Web, educational materials and contact information of related organizations.

How to Grow a School Garden

School Garden Weekly

<http://schoolgardenweekly.com/>

This Web site features videos about school gardens and gardening to watch online for free, as well as a list of helpful resources and recent news relating to school gardens.

Student Gardens and Food Service

Bon Appetit

http://www.bamco.com/uploads/documents/student_garden_guide_final_-_food_service.pdf

Bon Appetit Management Company has developed a guide “Student Gardens and Food Service” that walks you through each stage, from planning, growing, and promoting it. Includes a list of additional resources.

Getting Started: A Guide for Creating School Gardens as Outdoor Classrooms

Center for Ecoliteracy (and Life Lab Science Program), 2007 3rd ed.

<http://www.lifelab.org/pdfs/GettingStarted.pdf>

This booklet will help you with everything from outdoor classroom design and site selection, to strategies for gardening with students, to creating community support that will sustain your school garden program.

Garden Based Learning that Promotes a Sustainable Future

Life Lab Science Program

<http://dcfarmtoschool.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/DC-Farm-to-School-Toolkit.pdf>

Life Lab Science Program is a 501 (c)(3) nonprofit organization and has been working in the field of science and environmental education since 1979. With our award winning curricula and programs, the organization helps schools develop gardens where children can create “living laboratories” for the study of the natural world. Since developing the first Life Lab school garden in Santa Cruz in 1978, Life Lab has worked with over 1,400 schools across the United States training tens of thousands educators.

School Gardens Q&As

USDA Food & Nutrition Information Center, 2009

http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Governance/Policy-Memos/2009/SP_32-2009_os.pdf

In this memo, USDA recently clarified that school food service funds may be used to purchase seeds, gardening tools, fertilizer, etc for school gardens. Such funds may also be devoted to starting and maintaining gardens on school property and schools are allowed to purchase produce from the gardens, even if the garden is managed and maintained by another school organization



Photograph by Morguetille

Alliance for a Healthier Generation's How to Start a School Garden Toolkit

<http://www.healthiergeneration.org/schools.aspx?id=5513>

Five Steps to Food Safe School Gardening

University of Connecticut: College of Agriculture and Natural Resources

<http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/LIB/sde/pdf/DEPS/Nutrition/OPmemos/10/5stepsOM1010.pdf>

Quick and easy-to-read guide for food safety in school gardens.

Gardens for Learning: Creating and Sustaining Your School Garden

California School Garden Network, 2007

<http://www.csgn.org/page.php?id=36>

Comprehensive guidebook that provides a strong foundation to support the growing school garden movement. It was developed by a team of experienced garden educators, nutritionists, state officials, and other garden experts. This guidebook is a must-have resource for anyone looking to enhance learning through the use of gardens in schools and other community settings.

Denver Public School's Garden to Cafeteria Program

Denver Public Schools Food and Nutrition Services, 2010

http://www.gardenabcs.com/uploads/Garden_Protocol_-_Denver_Public_Schools.pdf

Quick and easy-to-read guide for food safety in school gardens.