

Victory Gardens: Significance to 4-H, Cooperative Extension, and Agricultural Education

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Introduction

“Food Will Win the War and Write the Peace” (Schaub, 1914b). During countless wars of the past, our nation and others have faced food insecurity. Because of the demand for war industry operations, the supply of essential staple food items in households significantly decreased leaving the government to ration foods such as sugar, milk, cheese, eggs, coffee, meat, and canned goods (Reinhardt, n.d.) and encouraged citizens to grow War Gardens and thus the term Victory Gardens was coined (Miller, 2003).

Conceptual Framework

This study was conducted from a historical perspective. Historical analysis brings forth the importance of an era in history and signifies events from which we can learn from today (Rury, 2006) by systematically and objectively identifying, evaluating, and interpreting evidence from which people can learn about the past (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 2002). The purpose of this study was to document the collaboration victory gardens brought to 4-H, Cooperative Extension, and Agriculture Education. Specific objectives of the study were:

1. Describe how World War I and World War II food shortages and initiatives impacted 4-H members, Cooperative Extension, and Agricultural Education.
2. Identify the contributions that 4-H members, Cooperative Extension Agents, and Agriculture Educators had on the success of victory gardens.

Methodology

Historical research methods were used to guide the objectives of this study. The researcher used primary sources of information whenever possible (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 2002). These primary sources included documents such as diaries, manuscripts, and data collected by state and federal agencies related to agricultural education or historical information for the United States. The researcher also used secondary sources that included data from published newspaper articles and information provided by institutions in the agriculture education and cooperative extension fields. Secondary sources were prepared for comparison against primary sources only to understand their accuracy. Internal criticism strictly looked at accuracy while external criticism strictly looked for authenticity in all research done for this project. The researcher accessed a majority of the historical publications and documents through the NC State University Special Collections Research Center (NC State University Libraries, 2018). RESEARCH PRIORITY 6: Vibrant, Resilient Communities as defined in the AAAE Research Agenda is applicable (Graham, Arnold & Jayaratne, 2016). This research priority certainly pertains to resilient community volunteers of all ages engaged in a common effort to support and sustain each other and their homeland.

Findings

Weeks before the United States entered World War I, Charles Lathrop Pack organized the National War Garden Commission in March of 1917 because the United States was experiencing the burden of feeding millions of starving Europeans who were on the battlefield (Schumm, 2014a). The purpose of the Commission was to encourage Americans to contribute to the war effort by planting, fertilizing, harvesting, and storing their own fruits and vegetables in order for more food to be exported to our allies (Schumm, 2014a). More than 15,000 children joined clubs organized by the Extension Service and became an army of food producers while “gardens

sprang up everywhere as if by magic - in the backyards, by the railroad tracks, in the cotton patches and in the new ground” (Kilgore, 1917). In 1914, a procedure was written for 4-H Victory Garden Programs instructing every club in North Carolina to participate (Schaub, 1914b).

Because our nation was experiencing exigencies during World War I, the government began looking into enlisting children into the army, not to be in battle, but to fight the war against food shortages. “Every boy and girl should be a producer. The growing of plants and animals should become an integral part of the school program. Such is the aim of the U.S. School Garden Army” (Hayden-Smith, 2006, p. 2). By July of 1918, 1,500,000 boys and girls responded to President Woodrow Wilson and enlisted in the United States School Garden Army. 20,000 acres were converted to gardens and 50,000 teachers were involved (Francis, 1919). During this increase in agriculturally focused school gardens, extension agents were in high demand and between June of 1917 and 1918, the number of extension agents in the U.S. went from 2,200 to 6,000 and the USDA requested their time be spent instructing teachers and students to grow gardens (Hayden-Smith, 2006; Francis 1919). During World War II in 1942, 4-H began a few new programs to entice farm boys or girls with a competition to win \$1- \$250 through the “Food for Victory” program which offered war bonds or stamps for participating in the “Food for Freedom” extension program (Historical State Timelines, n.d.).

Conclusions

The war effort increased the visibility and underscored a purpose for agriculture education. Specifically, the need to educate people to help feed our nation. Professors authored multiple books which became readily available for the use of instructing students about their gardens. America stepped up by participating in the war effort and victory gardens cultivated a new sense of patriotism in citizens that united them like never before. Just like agriculture education today focuses on producing well-rounded and informed citizens, the school gardens did as well. “1.5 million children were given something to do last summer which helped carry the burden of their country in the struggle for freedom, something that helped build character and something that appealed to and developed their patriotism” (Francis, 1919, p. 3).

Implications/Recommendations/Impact on Profession

The public’s newfound interest in “fresh and local” has sparked a huge fire within consumers to be nearest to what they purchase at a market or grocery chain (Edin & Shaefer 2016). This new wave of foodies gives Extension and 4-H a great avenue to break into unreached communities and start helping consumers understand the basics of growing and preserving food.

Each agriculture education course in North Carolina is taught beginning with the history of the FFA and the researcher suggests that victory gardens and the hard work that FFA members contributed to “winning the war” be emphasized in linkage with the “living to serve” character showcased in the FFA motto (Wolf & Connors, 2009; National FFA Organization, 2018). To further this study, the researcher suggests that possibilities of “current day victory gardens” be explored in an effort to supplement governmental food programs such as SNAP, WIC, and EBT (Edin & Shaefer, 2016). The researcher suggests informal and formal agriculture educators could encourage students to engage in present-day victory gardens as an innovative way to emerge solutions to agricultural issues, such as a “victory garden for bees” (Weidenhammer, 2016).

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