Friends of Burlington Gardens
School Community Garden
2011 Mini-grant Program

Evaluation Report

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Friends of Burlington Gardens School Community Garden Mini-grant Program
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Executive Summary

Friends of Burlington Gardens (FBG) partnered with The Vermont Community Foundation to establish the 2011 School Community Garden Mini-grant Program for Vermont schools and communities. Funding was secured by Senator Bernie Sanders through the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s National Institute of Food and Agriculture grant program.

The grant successfully met its goal to support the development of sustainable school community gardens where Vermont children, families, and community members have hands-on opportunities to grow, harvest, and eat fresh affordable produce.

Through the federal grant, a total of 40 school community gardens were awarded $1000 mini-grants by Friends of Burlington Gardens to support garden infrastructure development. The University of Vermont’s Center for Rural Studies (CRS) conducted an external evaluation of the mini-grant program through site visit observations, in-depth interviews, online surveys, and analysis of grantee data.

The following highlights represent the evaluation’s key findings:

**SITE TRANSFORMATION**
By expanding gardens, constructing raised beds, building storage sheds, improving water systems, and enhancing soil quality, 40 Vermont school community garden sites were transformed to benefit the schools and surrounding community. Students, teachers, parents, administrators, volunteers, and other community members collaborated to create educational programming and to ensure gardens were well managed and maintained during the school year and summer months.

**LIFE SKILLS**
Students learned important life skills by planting seeds and starts, preparing and tending beds, weeding, watering, and maintaining the gardens during the growing season. Students also harvested and prepared food, saved seeds, and helped prepare the gardens for winter. Older students developed leadership, management, decision-making, and problem solving skills from experiential learning. Younger students benefited from time outdoors engaged in active and kinesthetic learning through hands-on garden-based activities.
COMMUNITY BUILDING
Gardens brought community members together in a meaningful way to serve a valuable common purpose and instill a sense of shared pride. Communities were involved in kick-off events to celebrate the gardens; work days to plant, maintain, and harvest the gardens; and special events such as open houses, parent nights, and harvest dinners.

FOOD SECURITY
Gardens gave back to the community by providing fresh vegetables to children and adults who may not otherwise have access to them. Summer camp program participants, summer school students, faculty, staff, and community members harvested fresh produce from the garden. Students also harvested vegetables and herbs for their school food service programs’ cafeteria menu, as well as classroom taste testing and processing.

SCHOOL FOOD SERVICE
School community garden projects coincided with positive changes in school food service offerings and further bolstered schools’ shift in food service philosophy. Many of the schools’ food service programs are committed to increasing healthy, fresh and local food choices by incorporating garden produce into cafeteria offerings (e.g. salad bar, soups, and prepared foods).

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS
Teachers at each school community garden site integrated the garden and gardening into their lesson plans, enhancing traditional classroom-based learning. Educational activities that took place in the garden were directly tied to classroom subject areas including physical education, science, mathematics, foods, art, language arts, and technical education.

INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT
Sixty percent or more of garden sites purchased compost, garden rakes, hoes, and shovels with mini-grant funds; 40%-59% of sites purchased watering cans, top soil, watering wands, heavy duty hoses, and wheelbarrows or carts; 20%-39% of sites purchased raised bed materials, water lines, spigots, fencing, permanent sign materials, plowing and tilling, and tool storage boxes. Items most commonly donated to the garden sites were labor and equipment to plow and till the soil, compost, permanent signs for the gardens, and heavy duty hoses.
EXTENSION MASTER GARDENER COLLABORATION

Extension Master Gardener (EMG) volunteers offered technical assistance and hands-on gardening support at 33 of 40 school community gardens. EMG volunteer tasks were determined by project leaders’ assessment of their needs and level of gardening experience. EMGs helped mini-grant recipients coordinate garden designs, select and plant vegetables, and conduct soil tests. They also provided resources, guidance, and oversight while directly working with students to teach and demonstrate skills.

CLIMATE IMPACT

Rain, flooding, and weather-related soil issues were challenges for at least one third of garden sites. Volunteer coordination to involve parents and community members, organize work days, and ensure adequate coverage in the summer months also posed a challenge for a quarter of sites. Finding sufficient time to plan and establish the garden during the second half of the school year was an additional challenge that many sites worked through.

FUTURE NEEDS

Looking forward, garden coordinators seek assistance with 1) classroom and school-wide garden-based curricula development and 2) coalition building to further increase support from the school and larger community. Some useful ways to assist school community garden sites are through pre-season conferences and workshops, hands-on support from EMG volunteers, online resources, and community organizing and fundraising training.

SUSTAINABILITY

To sustain these projects, garden site coordinators have written additional grant proposals, and some are working to secure funding directly from their school’s budget. Program sites also plan to raise funds through ticketed dinners or celebrations, sales of donated or branded items, and individual donations. School community garden sites continue to rely on significant donations of time, labor, and supplies from students, teachers, community members, and local businesses.

To see photos and stories from the 40 School Community Gardens, go to http://www.burlingtongardens.org/school_community_gardens.html
THE GARDENS

All 14 Vermont counties are represented by the 40 mini-grant sites (see map at right), covering grades K-12. Most mini-grant recipients are schools; the remaining mini-grant recipients are community groups, non-profit organizations, a residential/academic treatment facility, and a municipal parks and recreation department.

39 of 40 school community gardens are located on or immediately adjacent to school grounds. One site, an allotment style school community garden, is located within ½ mile of the school.

18 of 40 garden sites are 2,500 square feet or larger in area with traditional rows and pathways. 14 of 40 garden sites are predominately timber framed raised beds totaling 640+ square feet or more. Eight of 40 garden sites included allotment style plots or beds for community use. Seven of 40 school community garden sites were newly established in 2011 with the support of mini-grant funds; the remaining sites were established one to 14 years prior.

The 40 school community garden mini-grant recipients for 2011 are:

Barre Town Middle and Elementary School
Bellows Falls Middle School
Bradford Elementary School
Brighton Elementary (Island Pond)
Cambridge Elementary School
Champlain Elementary School (Burlington)
Chester Andover Elementary School
Down To Earth Community Garden (St. Albans)
Easter Seals Independent School
Eden Central School
Fair Haven Union High School
Fairfield Outdoor Classroom
Ferrisburgh Central School
Folsom Education and Community Center
Glover Community School
Guilford Central School
Hartland Community Garden
Hunt Middle School Garden (Burlington)
Lyndon Institute
Middletown Springs Elementary School
Mill River Union School
Milton High School Student Council
Mount Abraham Union Middle/High School
Mount Anthony Union Middle/High School
North Country Union Junior High School (Derby)
Poultney Elementary School
Poultney High School
Putney Central School
Richford Elementary School
Richmond Elem & Camel’s Hump Middle School
Rutland Recreation & Parks & SUCCESS Program
South Burlington High School
State Street School (Windsor)
Stockbridge Central School
Thatcher Brook Elementary School (Waterbury)
Underhill Central School
Wallingford Elementary School
Waterford Elementary School
Waterville Elementary
Williston Central School & Allenbrook School
Introduction

Friends of Burlington Gardens (FBG) partnered with The Vermont Community Foundation to implement and administer the 2011 School Community Garden Mini-grant Program for Vermont schools and communities. The Mini-grant Program was funded through a Food Production Education grant awarded by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA). Senator Bernie Sanders was instrumental in securing the grant funding. The grant’s purpose is to support the development of sustainable school community gardens where Vermont children, families, and community members have hands on opportunities to grow, harvest, and eat fresh affordable produce. The Mini-grant Program was administered by Friends of Burlington Gardens, a non-profit organization that supports community, school and neighborhood gardening in Burlington and across Vermont. In 2011, forty Vermont school community gardens were awarded $1000 mini-grants to support garden infrastructure development. FBG contracted with the Center for Rural Studies at the University of Vermont to conduct an external evaluation of this program. This report presents the results of this evaluation.

What is a School Community Garden?

School community gardens integrate aspects of school and community gardens rather than separating the two garden types. School community gardens are generally located on or within walking distance of school grounds. The garden site can be a cultivated plot with beds, rows and pathways; a collection of raised bed gardens; or an allotment style community garden with beds and plots for community and school use. A school community garden relies on partnerships between the school and community to enhance educational programming and to ensure that the garden is well managed and maintained during the school year and summer months.

![Richmond Elementary School & Camel’s Hump Middle School](image)

![Williston Central School](image)
Evaluation Methodology

In-depth Interviews with Garden Coordinators

In-depth interviews were conducted in person or by phone with seven garden coordinators representing (See map at right):

- Richmond Elementary School & Camel’s Hump Middle School
- Milton High School
- Barre Town Middle & Elementary School
- Mount Abraham Union Middle & High School
- Williston Central School & Allenbrook Elementary School
- St. Albans City Elementary School
- Richford Elementary School

The interview protocol was developed by the evaluator and FBG staff and included 13 open-ended items on the following topics: participants involved; activities completed; type and use of foods grown; impact of the garden on participants, including knowledge and skills gained; food service and teacher involvement; strengths, opportunities and challenges of the project; other funds and resources; and plans for sustaining the garden. Interviews lasted 35 to 45 minutes. Field notes were recorded on paper or typed into a computer.

Site Visit Observations

Garden site visits were conducted by the evaluator over a three week timeframe from the end of September 2011 to the beginning of October 2011. Observation of student garden activity took place at five of the seven school community gardens.

- Mount Abraham Middle and High School
- Barre Town Middle & Elementary School
- Milton High School
- Richmond Elementary School & Camel’s Hump Middle School
- Williston Central School & Allenbrook Elementary School

Garden activities were observed and documented by the evaluator for 30 to 60 minutes in duration using a paper checklist observation tool developed by the evaluator and FBG staff. Items evaluated included a description of the garden site; number and type of participants involved during the observation; structure and types of activities (i.e. educational or physical) that took place; use of gardening tools; and the major outcomes of activities, including level of participant engagement and learning demonstrated. Nine items captured quantitative measures, such as the number of people active in the garden during the observation and the type of participants, cross-referenced by the type of activities they completed. All quantitative items included space for the evaluator to note comments that further explained findings. Two items were open-ended questions about the type of tools used by participants (during the observation) and major outcomes of those activities.

Survey to Evaluate the Grant Process
In October 2011, the evaluator emailed the 40 mini-grant recipients a link to an eight-item, online survey intended to gather their feedback on the mini-grant process. Five items asked respondents to rate aspects of the mini-grant process (i.e. application, reimbursement, reporting, etc.) on a four-point scale from Poor to Excellent. Two additional items asked respondents to rate the helpfulness of 1) communication with FBG staff, and 2) working with their Extension Master Gardener volunteer using a three-point scale of Not helpful, Somewhat helpful or Very helpful. All rating questions included space for open-response comments. Finally, respondents were provided space for any additional comments or feedback regarding the grant process not covered in the survey questions. The survey took respondents approximately 10 minutes to complete. Twenty five of 40 mini-grant recipients completed the survey for a response rate of 63%.

**Progress and Final Grant Reporting Forms**

Mini-grant recipients were required to complete an Interim Progress Report and a Final Report through online survey forms developed by FBG staff. In May 2011, individual mail-merged emails containing a link to the 10-item Survey Monkey Interim Progress Report form were sent to all 40 mini-grant recipients. Follow-up reminders were emailed as needed to ensure a 100% completion rate. In late June 2011, mini-grant recipients were emailed the link to a 25-item Survey Monkey Final Report form, which also achieved a 100% completion rate.
Mini-grant Recipients

This section of the report describes the school community gardens awarded mini-grants (See Appendix A for timeline and description of the granting process). FBG received applications from 90 garden groups for the competitive mini-grant program. 40 garden sites, shown in the map below, were awarded mini-grants in 2011.

Table 1 Location of Mini-grant Sites by County

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>% of state population</th>
<th># Mini-grants</th>
<th>Percent of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Addison</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bennington</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caledonia</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chittenden</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essex</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franklin</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Isle</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lamoille</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orleans</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rutland</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windham</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windsor</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Counties and Grade Levels Reached

Table 1 indicates all 14 counties in Vermont were represented by mini-grant awardees. Mini-grant recipients also served multiple school grade levels, including:

- 68% of recipients (27 sites) Kindergarten
- 70% of recipients (28 sites) Elementary School
- 53% of recipients (21 sites) Middle School
- 23% of recipients (9 sites) High School

Type of Groups Receiving Mini-grants

Thirty-three mini-grant recipients (78% of total) are public schools. One mini-grant recipient is an independent school which accepts public school students. Five mini-grant recipients (12.5% of total) are community groups working directly with public schools. One mini-grant recipient is a community-based non-profit organization working with a public school. One mini-grant applicant is a municipal parks and recreation department working with a public school-based alternative education program.
Affiliation of Principal Mini-grant Contacts

Each mini-grant group has a designated contact person with whom FBG staff communicated. The contact person is often affiliated with the school in multiple ways. A summary of the relationship types checked by the contact persons are listed below in descending order. (Note: Data reflects the percentage of the 40 mini-grant recipients who have each affiliation.)

- Resident of town where school is located (48%, 19)
- Volunteer from a community group (40%, 16)
- Teacher at school (35%, 14)
- Parent of students (30%, 12)
- Other school staff (28%, 11)
- Resident of town neighboring where school is located (25%, 10)
- Non-profit staff (15%, 6)
- Extension Master Gardener, intern or graduate of program (10%, 4)
- School administrator (5%, 2)
- School board member (5%, 2)
- Farm-to-School coordinator/committee member (5%, 2)
- Gardener at local company (3%, 1)
- School gardener (grounds person?) (3%, 1)
- Municipal staff (3%, 1)

30% or 12 contact persons started working with the school community garden in 2011. 45% or 18 contact persons had worked with the garden for one to two growing seasons. 25% or 10 contact persons had worked with the garden for three or more growing seasons.

Farm-to-School Coordinator at Camel’s Hump Middle School (left)
Teacher/Garden Coordinator, Extension Master Gardeners and students at Milton High School (right)
Description of School Community Garden Sites

30% of the sites (12) were new school community gardens developed in 2011 (See Figure 1). 35% of the sites (14) were established between one and three years prior to mini-grant receipt. 20% of the sites (8) were established four to six years prior, and 15% of the sites (6) were established seven to 14 years prior. On average, the garden sites were established three years prior to receipt of the mini-grant.

![Figure 1](image)

**Figure 1 Number of years school community gardens had been established**

The vast majority of gardens (98%, 39) were located on school grounds or adjacent land, while one of the 40 garden sites was located within a half mile of the school on land owned by a town, city, or tax exempt organization. Characteristics of gardens included:

- 2,500 or more square feet ($ft^2$) with mainly rows, non-framed beds and pathways (45%, 18)
- Primarily framed raised beds totaling 640 $ft^2$ or more of planted area (25%, 14)
- Allotment style garden with beds/plots used for school and individual gardening (20%, 8)

![Students use tools to cultivate and harvest beds at Williston Central School](image)
Rows of non-framed garden beds at Mt. Abraham Union Middle & High School

Timber framed raised beds at Barre Town Middle & Elementary School
Mini-grant applicants described their proposed garden projects in various ways:

“With funding from the [mini-]grant, the students [will] be able to design and create a garden sign this year and help improve the soil quality, which is clay. The garden is visible from the classrooms, cafeteria, library, and the principal's office. Access to water [is] from a rain barrel that was donated by a Green Mountain Farm-to-School staff member.”

- Brighton Elementary School

“When developing our new garden beds, we anticipate needing to buy additional compost and top soil, since the existing soil is quite compacted and gravelly.”

- Bradford Elementary School

“[We have] plans to expand the garden to [a] 50 x 50 [plot] to allow more school groups and classes to be more involved in the garden. The garden sits in full sun. The clay and rocky soil has been improved, but it needs more amendments to make it rich and productive. There is an outside water source attached to [an adjacent town] building that is available for us to fill watering cans. The garden has a student painted garden sign, a tool shed, and two cedar trellises.”

- Cambridge Elementary School
“Our garden started out as a 75 foot strip of land between the cafeteria windows and the sidewalk where we proudly grew popcorn, beans, cucumbers and a variety of vegetables and annuals. The second year we added another 30 feet and had a fantastic crop of sun gold tomatoes, broccoli, cauliflower, onions, peppers, squash, herbs and lots of flowers. We planted the area like it was a giant flower box edged in granite.”

-Bellows Falls Middle School

“A student-constructed rustic fence made from cut saplings and twine surrounds 2,500 square feet of garden space. The fence serves as a visual boundary and provides a climbing or staking structure for plants. Ten beds of various shapes and sizes, with pathways in between, are laid out in the image of a box kite. Visitors enter the garden through an arched sapling arbor and pass under our garden’s sign. There are plant markers painted by the students identifying vegetables and flowers in English and Spanish.”

- Chester-Andover Elementary School

Changes (from Original Proposal) Made to Proposed Garden

As part of their Interim Progress Report, mini-grant recipients were asked to indicate changes that occurred in their school community garden site from what they originally proposed in their application. Table 2 shows that almost half of grant sites did not make significant changes from their proposal. Changes made were fairly minor and most were perceived by garden coordinators as an improvement to initial plans. The three most common changes were: additional beds planted; size of the garden plot increased; and source of water for the garden better situated for use. Two respondents experienced perceived setbacks with low participation from the school and/or community and a slower than expected development process.

Table 2 Changes from original proposal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of change</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planted additional beds</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased size of garden plot</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved water source</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changed shape of garden</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received more participation than expected</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Added fencing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planted additional crops</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changed storage space for tools</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received less participation than expected</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mulched paths with wood chips</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchased equipment that was more useful</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced a slower process than expected</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Items Used for the Garden

Table 3 displays infrastructure items used by garden sites and how they were obtained or if they were/were not essential. Items are ranked in descending order by the percentage of mini-grant recipients who purchased the item with mini-grant funds. Sixty percent or more of garden sites purchased compost, garden rakes, hoes, and shovels with mini-grant funds; 40%-59% of sites purchased watering cans, top soil, watering wands, heavy duty hose, and wheelbarrows or carts; 20% - 39% of sites purchased raised bed materials, waterlines, spigots, fencing, permanent sign materials, plowing and tilling, and tool storage boxes. Items most commonly donated to the garden sites were labor and equipment to plow and till the soil, compost, permanent signs for the gardens, and heavy duty hoses. About a third of gardens (30%-38%) already possessed a permanent garden sign, together with tools and infrastructure such as garden shovels, a water line and spigot, watering cans and tool storage boxes, prior to receipt of the mini-grant. Finally, a third to half of garden sites did not perceive heavy duty fencing, raised bed materials, and a watering wand as essential items for their garden project.

Table 3 Status of items used by garden sites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Purchased with Mini-grant funds</th>
<th>Item donated</th>
<th>Already had item</th>
<th>Item not essential</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Compost</td>
<td>70% (28)</td>
<td>25% (10)</td>
<td>6% (3)</td>
<td>3% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garden rake</td>
<td>63% (25)</td>
<td>10% (4)</td>
<td>3% (1)</td>
<td>3% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garden hoe</td>
<td>63% (25)</td>
<td>8% (3)</td>
<td>25% (10)</td>
<td>3% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garden shovel</td>
<td>60% (24)</td>
<td>8% (3)</td>
<td>33% (13)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wheelbarrow or cart</td>
<td>58% (23)</td>
<td>8% (3)</td>
<td>23% (9)</td>
<td>5% (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy duty hose</td>
<td>58% (23)</td>
<td>15% (6)</td>
<td>18% (7)</td>
<td>5% (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watering wand</td>
<td>50% (20)</td>
<td>8% (3)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>33% (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top soil</td>
<td>45% (18)</td>
<td>13% (5)</td>
<td>20% (8)</td>
<td>18% (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watering can</td>
<td>43% (17)</td>
<td>13% (5)</td>
<td>30% (12)</td>
<td>10% (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water line/spigot</td>
<td>38% (15)</td>
<td>5% (2)</td>
<td>33% (13)</td>
<td>18% (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raised bed materials</td>
<td>35% (14)</td>
<td>13% (5)</td>
<td>15% (6)</td>
<td>43% (17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent sign</td>
<td>28% (11)</td>
<td>18% (7)</td>
<td>38% (15)</td>
<td>15% (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plowing/tilling</td>
<td>23% (9)</td>
<td>45% (18)</td>
<td>15% (6)</td>
<td>20% (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy duty fencing</td>
<td>20% (8)</td>
<td>13% (5)</td>
<td>13% (5)</td>
<td>50% (20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tool container</td>
<td>20% (8)</td>
<td>8% (3)</td>
<td>30% (12)</td>
<td>18% (7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Cells highlighted in gray denote a prominent finding for that column.
Participants

School community gardens involved students, teachers, parents, school administrators, volunteers, and other community members. Gardens relied on partnerships between the school and community for educational programming as well as to ensure that the gardens were well managed and maintained during the school year and summer months. Table 4 shows student involvement in school community gardens, both in the spring of 2011 when school was in session and during the summer of 2011. The data represents the number of students reported by mini-grant recipients as being actively engaged in hands-on gardening and learning in the school community gardens during the two time frames.

Table 4 Student involvement in school community gardens in spring and summer, 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Number of students</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spring 2011</td>
<td>Summer 2011</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total students involved</td>
<td>3,950</td>
<td>730</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range of students per site</td>
<td>4 to 380</td>
<td>0 to 50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25% of total sites</td>
<td>Up to 30</td>
<td>Up to 10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50% of total sites</td>
<td>Up to 55</td>
<td>Up to 16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75% of total sites</td>
<td>Up to 135</td>
<td>Up to 25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students

During the school year, a total of 3,950 students were actively involved in the 40 garden sites. During the summer months, 730 students were actively involved in the 40 garden sites. (See Table 4.) The number of students who participated in garden activities during the school year ranged from four students (100% of students enrolled at this school) to 380 students (44% of students enrolled at this school). The six garden coordinators interviewed indicated that students also worked in the garden during the summer months as volunteers by themselves or with their family members; for internship credit or community service hours; or as part of their summer school or summer camp program. Additionally, college students enrolled in an environmental studies program volunteered their time at one garden site.
Adults

Mini-grant recipients were asked to rank the level of adult support and/or involvement in their school community garden project, on a scale of Low support to High support. Table 5 displays respondents’ ranking of adult support and involvement, listed in descending order of support. Overall, 88% of sites rated school administrators as having a Medium to High level of involvement in school garden programs, with this group receiving the highest rating from the most respondents (63%). Approximately half the sites (48% to 50%) received strong support from school custodians/grounds staff, food service and Extension Master Gardener volunteers. Primarily teachers, parents and school support staff provided moderate support for 38% to 50% of programs, while a third of programs ranked parents and community volunteers as providing a low level of support.

Table 5 Level of adult support/involvement in school community garden
Note: Cells highlighted in gray denote a prominent finding for that column

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School administrators</td>
<td>5%  (2)</td>
<td>25% (10)</td>
<td>63% (25)</td>
<td>8% (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School custodian/grounds staff</td>
<td>18% (7)</td>
<td>30% (12)</td>
<td>50% (20)</td>
<td>3% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School food service</td>
<td>20% (8)</td>
<td>25% (10)</td>
<td>48% (19)</td>
<td>8% (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extension Master Gardener(s)</td>
<td>15% (6)</td>
<td>23% (9)</td>
<td>48% (19)</td>
<td>15% (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School board</td>
<td>18% (7)</td>
<td>20% (8)</td>
<td>35% (14)</td>
<td>28% (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community volunteers</td>
<td>30% (12)</td>
<td>25% (10)</td>
<td>33% (13)</td>
<td>13% (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>18% (7)</td>
<td>50% (20)</td>
<td>30% (12)</td>
<td>3% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School support staff</td>
<td>23% (9)</td>
<td>38% (15)</td>
<td>30% (12)</td>
<td>10% (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-profit staff</td>
<td>3% (1)</td>
<td>15% (6)</td>
<td>23% (9)</td>
<td>60% (24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>30% (12)</td>
<td>45% (18)</td>
<td>18% (7)</td>
<td>8% (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmers</td>
<td>18% (7)</td>
<td>30% (12)</td>
<td>18% (7)</td>
<td>35% (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business sponsor</td>
<td>15% (6)</td>
<td>33% (13)</td>
<td>10% (4)</td>
<td>43% (17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AmeriCorps member</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3% (1)</td>
<td>10% (4)</td>
<td>88% (35)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Garden coordinators interviewed discussed the various types of adults involved in their garden sites, both during the school year and summer time:

- Garden committee members
- School principal and vice principal
- Food service staff
- Parents and volunteers from the community
- Farm-to-School coordinator
- Regular and substitute teachers, special educators and para-educators
- School nurse
- Extension Master Gardener volunteers
- School facilities and grounds director and maintenance staff
- School board participants

A parent garden coordinator works with a student from Camel's Hump Middle School.
Impact of the Garden on Participants

Respondents to the final reporting surveys and garden coordinators interviewed during site visits discussed the impact of their school community garden projects on lessons learned, use of space, community pride, access to fresh vegetables, and approaches to teaching and learning. Survey respondents reported the following outcomes as a result of their participation in the school community garden mini-grant program:

- Physical improvements to garden space and infrastructure (83%, 33)
- Increased student involvement (53%, 21)
- Increased community awareness/involvement (50%, 20)
- Increased access to food (35%, 14)
- Improved/better location of garden or infrastructure for garden maintenance (30%, 12)
- Integration of the garden into teaching curriculum (28%, 11)
- Acquired materials and tools (18%, 7)
- Increased hands-on learning by students (10%, 4)
- Addition of outdoor classroom space (8%, 3)
- Leadership established (5%, 2)
- Learning process (5%, 2)

“My students were surprised that carrots and beets grew in the ground.”
- St. Albans City School

Student Learning

Interviews with garden coordinators revealed that students learned much about gardening, such as growing and transplanting seedlings, determining when and how much to water the garden and identifying when vegetables are ready to be picked. Older students in particular developed leadership, management, decision-making and problem solving skills from experiential learning. Younger students benefitted from the active and kinesthetic learning gardening provides by allowing them to get outside and learn in a hands-on way.

“The students learned about planting seeds, the importance of weeding and watering and how and when to pick the vegetables.”
- Richford Elementary School

By watching plants grow from seeds, students also gained a deeper understanding about caring for living things and from where their food is produced. As an example, one teacher commented, “My students were surprised that carrots and beets grew in the ground.” Students also demonstrated responsibility for maintaining the garden and pride in sharing the garden’s harvest with their school community. Another teacher noticed that because of their work with the garden, her students became more open to trying new foods and eating more healthfully.

Students harvest cabbage at Williston Central School.
Beautification of Space and Community Pride

Several interviewees talked about how the school community garden has positively impacted the larger community. All of the gardens transformed unused space into something beautiful, flourishing, and beneficial to the school, opening up and expanding other possibilities for school improvement. People took pride in their achievement—knowing their school is one step further into the farm-to-school movement. One interviewee commented: “The vision of the garden [at our school] sells itself” and the garden has “become a source of pride for all who are involved.”

The gardens also brought people together in meaningful ways, including teachers, parents, and students from different grade levels that otherwise might seldom interact. A teacher explained, “[the garden] brought the community together to work toward a common goal … and built a sense of ownership for all involved.” Another teacher expressed, “people came together to work as a team on a centralized project that involved both the middle and elementary school.”

Community members also brought together their expertise and resources to serve a highly valued, common purpose. Interviewees felt that the gardens gave back to the community by providing fresh vegetables to children and adults, many of whom may not have access to them. Interestingly, all garden coordinators felt that the community respected the gardens in general because of the absence of vandalism. In fact, a few respondents were surprised that their gardens were not vandalized, considering that vandalism persists in other facets of their community.

Access to Food Grown in the Garden

School community garden coordinators noted that several groups of people accessed food grown in the school community garden. All six interviewees commented that students harvested vegetables and herbs grown in the garden for the school food service program to include in the cafeteria menu (during both the summer and school year). Raw and fresh items, such as cherry tomatoes, carrots, cucumbers, and watermelon, were added to the school’s salad and/or sandwich bar. Items like basil and other herbs, garlic, and squash were processed into soups and pesto or frozen and stored for use throughout the school year. When asked about the extent that garden grown vegetables are used by the school cafeteria, a parent
volunteer coordinator clarified, “The purpose of the garden is not to feed the school, but to complete the link for kids so they know where the food they eat comes from.”

Three interviewees also noted that vegetables are harvested from the school community garden for students to taste and/or process into meals in the classroom. A physical education/health teacher had students try different varieties of cherry tomatoes to test their preferences. The students also made a fresh salsa out of garden produce for comparison to a store-bought salsa. A home economics teacher had her students harvest and process ingredients from the school community garden into tomato sauce for a unit on Italian foods. Garden coordinators also regularly invited school staff to take vegetables for personal consumption. Invitations included a weekly notice displaying items ready to be harvested, or leaving vegetables in the faculty lounge or other public area for people to take.

Additional groups that accessed food grown in school community gardens included:

- Summer camp and summer library programs (fresh vegetables included in lunch and snacks)
- Students and their families
- School staff and faculty (including teachers, custodians/grounds staff and administrators)
- The local food shelf
- A local child care program
- Anyone who worked in or visited the garden.

“[Our school cafeteria] kitchen [staff] was very willing and excited to use the fresh vegetables [from our garden]! They [prepared fresh] veggies to the kiddos [so they would] have something to taste test.”

- Richford Elementary School

Garden cherry tomatoes and squash harvested for Food Services at Mt. Abraham Union High School.
Changes in School Food Service Programs

Interviews with garden coordinators show that school community garden projects coincide with positive changes in school food service offerings. The recent change in leadership at three schools, and existing leadership at the other three schools, have prompted school food service programs to commit to increasing the amount of healthier, fresh, and local food choices available at school. As one interviewee noted, “[Our] school is part of a farm-to-school network where the school buys [food for school lunch] from local farmers.”

Additionally, all interviewees said that their school cafeteria has a salad bar, which includes fresh garden produce when available. Some food service programs have completely overhauled their menus, changing from fried and re-heated offerings to fresh vegetables and meals prepared with fresh and wholesome ingredients. Coordinators felt that the existence of their school community garden further bolstered the school’s shift in food service philosophy.

All interviewees noted that school leaders and food service staff are in full support of their school community gardens and are flexible to incorporate garden produce into weekly cafeteria offerings. Food service staff members have been very willing and excited to use fresh vegetables grown in the garden to prepare meals. One garden coordinator explained, “[Our] school food service chef does ask for [specific] items to be planted [in the garden] that he can incorporate into school lunch.”

Some schools have taken this involvement further by harvesting vegetables from the garden in accordance with the school menu and by working with students to prepare fresh and processed items for in-school taste tests. A teacher commented, “[Our school cafeteria] kitchen [staff] was very willing and excited to use the fresh vegetables [from our garden]! They [prepared fresh] veggies to the kiddos [so they would] have something to taste test.” Additionally, most school food service staff worked with their garden coordinators to help plan the garden for the next year so more vegetables grown can be better utilized by the cafeteria.
Changes in Approaches to Teaching

As discussed in the educational activities section (page##), at least one teacher from all sites visited has integrated the garden and its activities into their traditional classroom-based lesson plans. One teacher noted that her school will offer a continuing education credit course on integrating food, gardening and nutrition into traditional teaching. The EMG volunteer partnered with her program is also planning to hold 20 minute long “mini-workshops” after school hours, to give teachers more ideas and resources for lesson plans and activities involving gardens. Below are examples of how teachers have altered their curriculum to include their school community garden as hands-on, experiential learning:

- A social studies unit on Native American planting methods and heirloom plants.
- A math exercise to determine the volume and cost of compost needed to fill the beds.
- Reading books about gardening and writing about their school garden in their journal
- Enhancing a kindergarten “five senses” curriculum with hands-on learning.
- Wood shop students making the sign for the garden and frames for raised beds.

Students at Barre Town Middle & Elementary School work in their outdoor classroom at their school community garden (above left) and then examine seeds from vegetables harvested in the classroom (right).
Activities

School and community members participated in numerous activities for school community garden programs. Activities spanned the lifecycle of the garden, from creating the garden concept to harvesting the garden. Since this survey data was collected in midsummer of the mini-grant program, early/late fall activities were captured through site visit observations described in a later section of this report.

Table 6 shows that the three main activities in which students participated were planting seeds and plants; preparing and tending to beds; and weeding, watering and other ongoing maintenance during the growing season. Almost half of sites engaged students by tilling compost into the beds to enrich the soil. Younger students tended to grow and transplant seedlings into the garden. Older students tended to plan the garden design and make decisions about what to plant. Educational and community oriented activities presented in Table 6 are discussed in more detail below.

Table 6 Summary of student activities completed during the school year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Planted plants and seeds                               | 40  | 100%
| Prepared and tended beds                               | 31  | 78%
| Weeded, watered and maintained beds                    | 28  | 70%
| Adding compost to beds                                 | 19  | 48%
| Completed an educational lesson (related to current curriculum?) | 19  | 48%
| Planned garden plot design and chose what to plant     | 14  | 35%
| Grew and transferred seedlings                         | 14  | 35%
| Built beds and other garden infrastructure (tool box, picnic table) | 13  | 33%
| Harvested                                               | 13  | 33%
| Managed and maintained garden tools                    | 12  | 30%
| Designed and painted sign for garden                   | 11  | 28%
| Community and/or family participation, day event held  | 9   | 23%
| Cooked/prepared food, tasted food from garden          | 8   | 20%
| Participated in a garden club                          | 8   | 20%
| Measured beds                                          | 8   | 20%
| Planned and/or installed fencing                       | 6   | 15%
| Managed pests and invasive animals                     | 5   | 13%
| Students participated in every aspect of garden        | 4   | 10%
| Older students mentored younger students               | 3   | 8%
| Wrote grants to obtain funds for garden                | 2   | 5%
Interviews with garden coordinators during September and October demonstrate examples of garden activities taking place during that time frame. Activities involving adult and student gardeners included:

- Maintaining and watering the garden
- Harvesting food for student/family use and for school food service programs
- Preparing food and participating in food taste tests
- Preparing the garden for winter
- Saving seeds to plant in the garden next year
- Planning for the next year of the garden
- Preparing for a fall harvest dinner

The following are quotes from mini-grant recipients’ Final Reports which illustrate ways students and other community members participated in school community garden activities:

“The entire school helped plant the garden during our Garden Dedication Ceremony, where each class performed garden chores, had a quick hands-on lesson about what they were planting, and planted several plants together as a class.” – Glover Community School

“Second year garden club participants have mentored younger, first year participants through the planning, planting, and harvesting process.”
- Brighton Elementary School

“Students who participated in the after school enrichment program worked with an educator from Green Mountain Farm-to-School to measure beds, rake walkways, weed, plant, and spread compost. Students in the summer program worked in the garden once a week. They evaluated [plant] growth, sampled foods, weeded, and harvested.” - Cambridge Elementary School

“Students were engaged in siting and measuring the placement of our two new watering lines and spigots. Other students inspected our inventory of garden tools and gave recommendations of which tools should be replaced or purchased.” - Ferrisburgh Central School

**Educational Activities**

As shown in Table 6, 48% (19) of respondents noted that students and teachers participated in garden-based education activities during the school year which were directly tied to classroom learning. Below is a list of subject areas mentioned in respondents’ open-ended comments as well as examples of student activities completed as part of these lessons. In a few cases, high school students engaged in more advanced and in-depth projects and activities for their school community garden.
- **Physical Education** – Digging and filling beds with compost and soil; tilling the soil; hauling materials and tools to garden site.

- **Science** (including horticulture, environmental, and consumer sciences) – Purchasing of seeds; growing and transplanting seedlings; researching ways to control pests and invasive animals; researching ideal plants to grow under certain environmental conditions; testing of soil; understanding organic and non-organic practices.

- **Mathematics** – Measuring and designing beds, fencing, and placement of water lines and spigots; calculating amounts of compost and mulch needed to fill a space; drawing blueprints and mapping out garden layout.

- **Food & Nutrition** (including cooking and biology of foods classes and working with food service staff) – Harvesting and sampling foods; studying foods that are new to students; using a recipe to prepare harvested foods; preparing fresh produce for a school-wide dinner.

- **Art** – Drawing sketches of the garden; painting with colors from the garden; designing and building garden mosaic stepping stones and other aesthetic features of the garden; designing the garden sign and logo.

- **Language Arts** (including reading and writing) – Reading stories about growing food in a garden; journal writing about garden activities and learning; grant writing for FBG mini-grant proposal.

- **Technical Education** (including woodworking, precision machining, and other vocational education) – Designing and creating the garden and plant identification signs; cutting wood and assembling framed beds; manufacturing metal parts for a greenhouse frame.

...
Several survey respondents described educational activities that took place in the garden and classroom.

“Our science teacher [created] a lesson plan that covered all phases of vegetable plants from seed to harvest. Our students [took] what they learned in science class and [applied] those lessons to the creation of a bountiful raised bed garden.” - Easter Seals Independent School

“[Students calculated] how much compost we needed for the size of garden we were planning. This was an excellent activity for math class (measuring, area, and volume) and an example of a real world application for math. They also took inventory of tools and discussed what tools we needed and the quantity.” - Fairfield Center School

“Students in the after school program helped measure our current garden size, and find the best way to expand it with the space we had available. We measured the new expansion and staked it out to be tilled. We then tested the soil for fertility, and compost from one of our after school student’s parents farm was added to the newly tilled site. Students created their own maps of what to do with the new garden space. We used parts of each student map to create a master planting plan and chose what vegetables to put where on the map.” - Glover Community School

“Students very successfully complete a “Greens Project.” They started lettuces in flats in the classroom, transplanted them to prepared beds, tended and harvested them.” - Putney Central School

“Students were the first [people] to meet with the Superintendent to begin the discussion of [having] a garden at the high school. A committee of students visited Montpelier High School to interview [the school’s garden coordinator] on his very successful school garden. Students have served on the [our] Garden Committee the entire 2010-2011 school year and were involved in the naming of the garden, garden logo design, grant writing, summer internship development, initial planting of the garden, and on-going watering, weeding, harvesting, and processing of the vegetables.”

- South Burlington High School
Community Activities

Table 6 shows that 23% (9) of survey respondents gave examples of the participation of community members, families, and other volunteers in garden activities. Interviews with garden coordinators showed similar findings. Activities involving the community include kick-off events to celebrate establishment of the garden; working days to plant, maintain and harvest the garden; slide shows and presentations given at open house and parent night events; and harvest dinners. During work days, the community helped build raised beds; plow and till beds; plant and maintain the garden; and harvest food.

Survey respondents gave examples of community activities that took place in the garden.

“[We have] engaged the community in the garden [by] giving garden plots to three newly arrived families.” - Lyman C. Hunt Middle School

“[Our school] held a [School Community Garden] Work Day. Many students and friends of the garden volunteered their time, energy, and enthusiasm throughout the day, planting, weeding, and expanding and enriching the garden and adding four community plots. The major accomplishment was the creation and installation of a new larch wood fence with 14 gauge steel 1”x2” mesh fencing and 4 gates.” - Chester Andover Elementary School

“One family’s dad built the raised beds with his sons, [who are students], and a high school student. The [family] also spent 8 hours at the school on the day the compost arrived. The pile had to be moved from the front sidewalk over a [15” high] granite curb and then over shrubs. We moved it shovel by shovel to get enough moved to the raised beds. The entire front yard is enclosed by the granite curb.” - Bellows Falls Middle School

“[Our long term goal is to] become an integrated part of the school community and cultural landscape, a key part of a pocket park which includes a fitness trail and the site of an alternative school program facility.”
- Mill River Union School
Summer Activities

On their Final Reports, mini-grant recipients listed the individuals and groups who conducted hands-on activities during the summer months in the school community garden. The responses are detailed in Table 7. Of the respondents, 90% said that summer activities included physical work in the garden (such as weeding, watering and harvesting) and 58% mentioned summer educational components related to traditional instruction. At 27 sites (68%), summer programming took place weekly, ranging from one to five days per week. While some groups worked in the garden weekly throughout the summer, others worked only when a program was in session (sessions ranged from two to six weeks). Activities took place during morning, afternoon, and/or evening hours, for two to six hours per session. Survey respondents gave the following examples of summer garden activities:

“A 6-week summer Garden Club [that started] the first week in July [was] conducted by [Extension] Master Gardener, Rosemary Moser, on Wednesday afternoons from 1-3 p.m. during the summer school program.”

- Middletown Springs Elementary School

“[We had] two harvest days with students and parents in August, [where they] took harvest to the Waloomsac Farmers Market on Saturdays and presented an outreach table with educational talks given by students who worked in the gardens in the summer.”

- Mount Anthony Union Middle School

“Children in YMCA Live Y’ers 10-week summer program have helped plant and maintain the garden throughout the entire summer. Students have been very enthusiastic about the gardens.” - Thatcher Brook Primary School

Two sites utilized the garden for monthly activities, including a children’s science camp and garden committee work days. Seven sites also held one-time events at the garden, such as a community work day, a food-based social event, a week long summer camp, faculty in-service professional development days, and summer school activities. While the majority of garden sites had some level of summer programming, 18% (7) reported that they had not yet developed formal programming, but plan to do so next summer.

Table 7 Groups that conducted hands-on summer activities at the school community garden

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community partners/volunteers</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer camp youth and adults</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer school students and staff</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garden club/committed students</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMG</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School garden committee</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School librarian</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer food service staff</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm to School and garden educators</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Garden maintenance during summer months

During the summer months, the 40 school community gardens were managed and maintained by groups noted in Table 8. There is some overlap with those who used the garden for summer programs (see Table 7). Individuals, families, and community groups helped with regular watering and weeding, rotating and transplanting crops, and harvesting and cooking/eating vegetables. Garden maintenance took place at a minimum of once a week (i.e. a weekly community work day) and as often as daily (i.e. when day camps or summer school were in session).

Along with the active garden coordinators, 68% of gardens relied on community partners and volunteers, while 55% had school staff and teachers maintain the gardens during the summer. Participating school staff included para-educators, the nurse, librarian, principals, school board members, college interns, food service staff, and grounds/facilities and maintenance staff. Additionally, 43% of garden sites had families sign up for regular or rotating shifts, while 35% had students sign up for shifts. Resources used to a lesser extent included: Extension Master Gardeners volunteers; local summer camp programs; community-based gardening educators; gardeners who tended designated community plots; and garden committee members. Three mini-grant recipients noted strategies for coordinating volunteers:

"Laminated notes are posted on all garden entry ways offering suggestions on what visitors can do [in the garden]. We have a white board inside our garden shed where volunteers date notes about what they have done in the garden. We have an e-mail list where anyone can ask for help or share when veggies are ready to harvest." - Barre Town Middle & Elementary School

"To sign up for their week, volunteers simply go to [a website] and click on a link to access the garden blog and sign up [to work in the garden].”

- Chester Andover Elementary School

"During the weeks that [a science] camp is in session, their primary responsibilities are garden maintenance, harvesting, and cooking. When the camp is not in session, we have parent volunteers who have signed up to maintain the gardens in exchange for harvesting the vegetables.”

- Stockbridge Central School

| Table 8 Groups who managed and maintained gardens during summer months |
|-----------------------------|---|---|
| Group                        | N | %  |
| Community partners/volunteers | 27 | 68% |
| School staff/teachers         | 22 | 55% |
| Families                      | 17 | 43% |
| Garden club/committed students| 14 | 35% |
| Extension Master Gardener     | 9  | 23% |
| Summer camp youth and adults  | 7  | 18% |
| Farm to School and garden educators | 6 | 15% |
| Community plot holders        | 4  | 10% |
| School garden committee members | 4 | 10% |
| Summer school students and staff | 4 | 10% |
Extension Master Gardener Activities

Survey data from mini-grant recipients shows that 85% (34) of sites worked with between one and three Extension Master Gardener (EMG) volunteers recruited via the Mini-grant Program. However, 15% (6) did not have EMG assistance. Of those sites that did not work with an EMG volunteer, four sites indicated that no assistance was provided and two had difficulty coordinating schedules with their EMG. Types of assistance that EMG volunteers provided mini-grant recipients are presented in the box to the right.

Primarily, EMGs helped with garden coordination, including selection and planting of vegetables; provision of resources, guidance and oversight; and directly working with students to teach basics and demonstrate skills. To a lesser extent, EMG volunteers helped with the specific needs of individual garden projects. Most respondents rated their EMG volunteer as being Very Helpful (45%, 14) to Somewhat Helpful (45%, 14). Ten percent (3) felt they were Not Helpful because of scheduling difficulty, limited availability, and/or lack of clarity of the EMG volunteer’s role.

EMG Reporting

In addition to mini-grant recipients’ Final Report responses, EMG volunteers provided a description of the technical support they provided for mini-grant award recipients. These descriptions were compiled by the EMG Program Coordinator from University of Vermont Extension. EMG volunteers offered education and hands-on gardening support at 34 of the 40 selected schools and community gardens.

EMG volunteers reported a total of 493 volunteer hours at these garden sites from April 15 through July 31, 2011. The EMG volunteers assisted garden project leaders with a variety of tasks determined by the needs of the garden group and the project leader’s level of gardening experience. Initially, the EMG volunteer’s role was to help identify what expertise they could provide to ensure a productive, sustainable, edible garden based upon each site’s unique circumstances. The EMG support included:

**EMG assistance provided to mini-grant recipients:**
- Garden coordination and planting (38%, 13)
- Resource, guidance and oversight (29%, 10)
- Taught students skills (24%, 8)
- Pest identification and control (9%, 3)
- Soil testing (9%, 3)
- Composting project (3%, 1)
- Donation of plants (3%, 1)
- Incorporate harvest into school cafeteria (3%, 1)

(n=34, reported on final report)
• **Site evaluation and plot design**: At planting time and/or in the beginning stages of the grant application.

• **Soil health**: Testing soils, making recommendations for soil improvement, teaching basics of soil structure.

• **Garden calendar**: Developing seed sowing and transplanting schedules, succession planting, and journaling.

• **Disease and pest control**: Identification of pest or disease problems and recommendations for organic control.

• **Hands-on garden support**: Weeding, planting, watering, composting garden waste, etc.

• **Compost education and awareness**: Promoting compost as a valued resource and/or establishing initial compost structures and methodologies.

• **Educational programming**: Delivering sustainable gardening learning modules with consideration of garden site needs/requests.

Based on comments and reviews from the mini-grant recipients, it appears that the EMG volunteers were most valued in the role of technical advisors, followed by direct education to the students. This is logical given that most of the garden coordinators were members of their educational communities. Some challenges of this relationship were a very short time-line for EMG volunteer recruitment and orientation, as well as the separation of communications roles, with the Project Director for Friends of Burlington Gardens communicating directly to mini-grant recipients, and the EMG Director communicating directly to EMG volunteers.

Suggestions for successful future partnerships are:

• Greater lead time between mini-grant award decisions and the start of the gardening season.
• Production of a written guide to assist garden leaders and EMG volunteers in partnering together.
• Garden time frame and reporting should extend through October 31 to include greater interaction, harvest, and garden wrap-up.
• Facilitate communication between garden leaders and potential EMG volunteers to determine site needs before assigning volunteers.
• Maintain ongoing communication throughout the grant period to ensure consistent and helpful EMG volunteer support.
On-site Observations of Gardens

On-site observations took place at five garden locations during the last week in September and the first two weeks in October 2011. The observation tool used during site visits documented a snapshot of each garden site, the participants involved, tools used, and activities and learning that took place during visits.

Description of Garden Sites

The five school community gardens visited are located on school grounds in prominent and visible locations. Gardens were strategically placed where students, school community members, parents, and visitors would notice the garden, identify it as a unique space, and easily access it. Two gardens were located in the front of the school, two were on the side of the school building and next to athletic fields, and one was located in the back of the school in a courtyard surrounded by classroom windows and the students’ playground. Four site visits took place only in the garden, and one site visit took place both in the garden and in the classroom, since activities students completed in the garden were directly related to their classroom work. Notable characteristics of garden sites included:

- All five garden sites displayed a student-made sign that indicated the garden’s name.
- Three garden sites were partially or fully fenced in, and two were open without fences.
- One site had a formal outdoor classroom space comprised of three picnic tables donated by the PTA. One site had an informal classroom space using plastic crates and natural items found in or near the garden.
- Two garden sites had archways through which visitors entered the garden. Two sites had open entryways, and one site had a gate attached to the fence.
- Three sites consisted of in-ground garden beds. One site had raised wood framed beds, while another site had a combination of bed types.
- The number and size of garden beds varied: One site had four large beds, three had 12 to 13 moderately sized beds, and one site had 18 smaller beds.
- All five gardens grew vegetables, flowers, and herbs. Sunflower varieties were the most common flower grown in gardens. Common vegetables and herbs are listed on the following page.
Common vegetables grown:
- Tomatoes (many varieties and sizes)
- Cucumbers
- Corn
- Peas
- Onions and scallions
- Cabbage and bok choi
- Zucchini and summer squash
- Butternut squash and pumpkins
- Kale and chard
- Broccoli and cauliflower

Common herbs grown:
- Lettuces and spinach
- Watermelon
- Potatoes
- Beets
- Celeriac
- Carrots
- Radishes
- Rutabaga
- Garlic
- Mint
- Basil
- Cilantro
- Dill
- Chive
- Thyme
- Sage
- Oregano

Participants

Grade level participation at school community gardens ranged from kindergarten to high school. During the site visit, the number of people working or visiting the garden ranged from:
- 5 to 10 people (1 site)
- 11 to 15 people (2 sites)
- 16 to 20 people (2 sites)

Participants’ work styles varied during the visit and across garden sites; entire groups worked together (3 sites), people worked in small groups or pairs (3 sites), and individually (2 sites).

Activities

Adults and students (with adult supervision) used tools in the garden during the site visit, with tools generally used by pairs of people or by individuals. Tools and other items used included: Pitchforks, wheelbarrows, safety knives, hand shovels, spades, gloves, grass seed, vegetable seeds, scissors, wheelbarrows, twine and hands. At one garden site, the garden coordinator had set up a pot of water on a camp stove that students filled with garden herbs (e.g. mint) to make tea. Additionally, during the site visit that took place both in the garden and the classroom, students used observation trays and handheld magnifying glasses to view seeds they collected from the garden.

Students at Williston Central School pick herbs (left) to make tea in a pot of simmering water (left)
Table 9 shows the activities that participants engaged in during site visits. The most common activities were harvesting crops, informal sharing and learning, tasting food from the garden, a formal lesson, and preparing or packaging food to take home or share. Students and adults participated equally in activities. Most often, the adults present would demonstrate an activity, followed by students, or students and adults, carrying out the activity. If adults were not actively participating, they were supervising and helping students carry out the activity. Both students and adults demonstrated eagerness to work in the garden; students often verbalized that they enjoyed working in the garden and loved that the garden was at their school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Students/Children</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>School Teachers/Staff</th>
<th>Garden coordinator</th>
<th>Volunteers</th>
<th>EMG</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Harvesting crops</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal sharing and learning</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasting food from garden</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal sharing and learning (i.e. specific lesson)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparing/packaging food to share</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weeding</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transporting food to school cafeteria</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planting</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pruning</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addressing pests or other issues</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinating activities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical assistance</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watering</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community event</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Other activities observed included:

- Harvesting crops and washing vegetables
- Addressing pests or other issues
- Preparing beds for winter
- Composting plants

- Collecting rocks
- Saving seeds
- Transporting food to school cafeteria
- Drinking tea from garden herbs
- Writing and drawing about the garden

During the site visits, student educational activities included hands-on tasks and strategies to maintain and care for a garden such as:

- Plant life-cycles
- Edible parts of plants and medicinal properties of herbs
- Proper and safe use of tools
- Plant care
- Harvesting and pruning techniques

All five sites also engaged students in some level of academic learning that connected the indoor classroom to the outdoor classroom and vice versa. Adults – teachers, site coordinators, community volunteers and parents – led the educational components in the garden, but students also helped each other. Below are examples of educational components that took place during site visits:

**Mt. Abraham Union High School** students used the garden as a hands-on laboratory for their Biology of Foods class. Students harvested and washed vegetables (e.g. broccoli, photos at right), began the process of preparing the garden for winter, and then delivered a wheelbarrow full of squash to the school’s food service staff for inclusion in the lunch menu.

**Williston Central School** third and fourth grade students learned where food they eat comes from, by harvesting root and winter vegetables and then delivering them to the school food service staff for inclusion in the school lunch menu.

**Camel’s Hump Middle School** students used their recess time to work in the garden and prepare bundles of herbs for school food service staff to dry and then use throughout the year to prepare school lunches.

**Barre Town Middle School** second graders read the book *How Groundhog’s Garden Grew*, visited the garden to collect seeds and draw pictures of plants, then returned to the classroom to inspect the collected seeds and discuss what they learned. This lesson crossed over several subject areas including reading, writing, art and science.

**Milton High School** students maintained and cared for the school community garden as part of a year-long internship for credit program. They developed management, organization and leadership skills through these hands-on experiences.
Overall, the types of learning observed during site visits included:

- Practicing specific skills (5 sites)
- Learning vocabulary/specific facts (5 sites)
- Identifying prior knowledge (3 sites)
- Developing appreciation for core ideas in the topic area (3 sites)
- Introducing new concepts (2 sites)
- Developing problem-solving skills (2 sites)

As a final component of the observations, sites were rated on the extent to which activities took place or were demonstrated during the site visit. Results are displayed in Table 10. The rating scale used was: 1 = Not at all, 2 = Minimally, 3 = Moderately, 4 = Very much or Not applicable (NA). Two areas in which all sites excelled were that 1) educators’ high level of instruction or resources for learners, and 2) students were highly involved in garden activities. Adult involvement in garden activities was rated as Moderate to High across the sites, along with student knowledge of harvesting plants. A rating of NA denotes that the activity was either not applicable to the site visit or not observable based on activities that took place. For example, in all but one case, parents were not involved in the garden during the site visit. Likewise, students at only one site demonstrated their knowledge of nutrition and food preparation to the extent that a rating could be discerned. It should be noted that ratings were made during a single visit to each site and represent a snapshot of activities taking place during the visit; thus, they do not indicate the extent to which these activities occurred over the course of the school community garden project.

Table 10 Extent that observation areas took place or were demonstrated during the site visit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educators provided instruction or resources for learners</td>
<td>4 4 4 4 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult involvement in garden activities</td>
<td>4 3 4 4 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student involvement in garden activities</td>
<td>4 4 4 4 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community member involvement in garden activities</td>
<td>NA NA 4 4 NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent or volunteer involvement in garden activities</td>
<td>4 NA NA NA NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student knowledge of gardening techniques/plant care</td>
<td>4 4 3 3 NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student knowledge of plant identification</td>
<td>NA 4 2 3 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student knowledge of plant harvesting</td>
<td>4 3 3 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student knowledge of nutrition/food preparation</td>
<td>NA 2 NA NA NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The rating scale used was: 1 = Not at all, 2 = Minimally, 3 = Moderately, 4 = Very much or the area was not applicable (NA).
Vision for the Future of the Gardens

Challenges Faced and Lessons Learned by Participants

While all of the school community gardens experienced success, undertaking this project was not without challenges. Table 11 highlights challenges that survey respondents identified on their Final Reports. Weather, more specifically rain and flooding, was a significant challenge for 30% of garden sites. Weather was most often the cause of soil issues, which was another challenge addressed by participants. Recruiting and coordinating volunteers to work in the garden, (e.g. involving parents, organizing work days and scheduling multiple volunteer groups), posed a challenge for 25% of sites. Summer garden maintenance -was equally a challenge for 25% of sites due to limited availability of summer volunteers and difficulty coordinating summer programs to work in—and harvest from—the garden. Finally, the timeline to plan, organize and establish the garden during a busy time of the school year posed a challenge for 23% of sites. Other challenges encountered are listed in Table 11.

Table 11 Challenges faced by garden sites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weather</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinating volunteers</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer maintenance</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timeline for project</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication with school community</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community involvement</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting mini-grant deadlines</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planting schedule</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soil issues</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher and student involvement</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinating with students’ schedules</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critters, pests and invasive species</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determining what to plant</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with a community organization or contractor</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of community garden plots</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging young students in gardening</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incorporating food into food service menu</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Securing donations and funding</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reflections and best practices from Mini-grant Recipients:
To overcome challenges, garden coordinators interviewed spoke of several lessons they and their students learned from this experience of growing and maintaining a school community garden. Here are some of the lessons mentioned:

- The garden will produce more food than you expect. Encourage kids to eat fresh vegetables right off the plant and make a plan for distributing what is harvested. Advertise to your community about when and how to harvest food!

- Involve kids in all aspects of the garden planning and maintenance.

- Make sure you have the support of people at the school, including school administrators, grounds/facility staff and food service staff.

- Encourage all of the school’s teachers to develop curriculum with the garden. One school brought in farm-to-school educators to teach a course on incorporating gardening, food and nutrition into the classroom. Eighteen teachers completed this course. Each teacher earned one college credit toward professional recertification.

- Determine what is realistically achievable. Don’t grow more than can be managed at one time by the help then available. Start with a small group of people and build the project with patience and perseverance.

- Organize students and other garden workers with specific tasks and equipment. Plan for meaningful ways that everyone can interact with the garden. Organize a schedule of people who will take care of regular weeding, watering, and upkeep of the garden. Establish a daily list of volunteers who are available to work in the garden.

- In order to be sustainable, make it a goal to shift ownership of the garden from volunteers (or one person) to the school community and students over time.

- Be aware of the weather and how weather related issues (i.e. drought, flooding) can impact the garden.

- Know the type of soil you have to work with and prepare it accordingly, such as adding compost, use of mulch, filtering out rocks, etc.

- Use straw and burlap sacks to reduce weed growth.

- Growing flowers, such as a variety of sunflowers, attracts attention to the garden and is a good talking point.

- Save seeds from plants harvested to grow [successful] items again next year.

- Intentionally plant items that will support growth of surrounding plants, reduce pests and disease infestation, and help maintain the soil.
Opportunities for Gardens

Survey respondents and garden coordinator interviewees addressed the future of their school community gardens by articulating their vision of activities and plans for the next year and beyond. Table 12 shows that half of survey respondents plan to focus on the educational pieces to better integrate the garden into the traditional teaching curriculum. Related to this finding is that 38% of respondents hope to encourage more interdisciplinary use of the garden across grade levels and subject areas. Almost half of respondents also have the goal of increasing the quantity and frequency of garden produce used by the school’s cafeteria.

Table 12 Future vision for next year’s school community gardens and beyond

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Better integrate garden into teaching curriculum</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase the quantity and frequency of produce used by cafeteria</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase interdisciplinary use of garden</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase outreach to community (access to garden food, education)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase student involvement/management of garden</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus year-round on garden</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make infrastructure improvements (fencing, composting, greenhouses)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrich soil</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve children’s attitudes towards healthy foods</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve the community’s perceived value of garden</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase parent/volunteer involvement in garden</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase use of community garden plots</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrate garden into the cultural landscape</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create a formal, outdoor classroom space</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve the garden committee/community/teacher partnerships</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve water/watering system</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase intentional planting of usable foods</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addition of new beds/expansion of garden plot site</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase summer program usage/involvement in garden</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continue working with EMG</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addition of fruit trees and other perennial plants</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide professional development for faculty on curriculum integration</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plant vegetables earlier in the year</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchase/acquire rain gear for kids</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Future Needs of Gardens

Final reports by mini-grant recipients anticipated future needs for their school community gardens, as shown in Table 13. The most prominent need is assistance in developing school-wide garden-based curriculum for classrooms, a finding rated as a Medium or High need by more than three quarters of respondents on their final report. Curriculum development includes the integration of existing curriculum into the garden and gardening activities and vice versa. Mini-grant recipients also reported an equally strong need for developing strategies to further build support for the project within the school and the larger community.

Table 13 Anticipated future needs of school community gardens for external assistance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Level of Future Need</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garden-based curriculum development</td>
<td>23% (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies for building support in the broader community</td>
<td>13% (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies for building support within the school community</td>
<td>20% (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community organizing skills (volunteer coordination, leadership development)</td>
<td>23% (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networking with other school community garden organizers</td>
<td>20% (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garden resources (Mini-grant funding for tools and infrastructure)</td>
<td>33% (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical assistance (garden planning, garden maintenance, garden produce utilization)</td>
<td>38% (15)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other future needs mentioned by mini-grant recipients include:

**Resources and support:**
- Acquiring additional funds
- Expanding guidelines for purchasing items
- Engaging community organizations
- Increasing help during summer months
- Obtaining school board support
- Obtaining support from businesses
- Building relationships with local EMGs
- Attending a regional meeting of school garden coordinators

**Planning and expansion:**
- Strategic planning for the garden
- Purchasing new compost, seeds, and plants
- Accessing garden planning maps or software
- Planting fruit trees and berries
Table 15 indicates the usefulness of various methods to help meet the needs of school community gardens, listed in descending order of the Very Useful column. The four most useful means of assistance, as indicated by survey respondents, are 1) school community garden conferences, 2) in-person workshops, 3) assistance from an EMG, and 4) online resources. In-person assistance is preferred by survey respondents, in comparison to methods such as online workshops and paper resources, which were rated as less helpful.

Table 14 Usefulness of methods to help meet school community garden needs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Usefulness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Community Garden Conferences</td>
<td>8% (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-person workshops</td>
<td>8% (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extension Master Gardener assistance</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online resources (tip sheets, videos)</td>
<td>3% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical assistance by phone and e-mail</td>
<td>8% (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-person technical assistance</td>
<td>5% (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online workshops (webinars)</td>
<td>20% (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper resources (brochures, handouts)</td>
<td>15% (6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other helpful means of assistance include:

- Hands-on assistance
- A resource list of other grant sources
- Support and strategies to obtain donations
- Assistance from garden landscapers, designers and other professionals
- Networking at a school community garden conference
Strategies for Sustaining School Community Gardens

Mini-grant recipients interviewed as part of site visits talked about other funds and resources they have secured to continue their school community garden projects. Coordinators addressed funding mainly through grants, fundraising events, donations, and volunteering. Every garden coordinator visited by CRS has written additional proposals for grant funding from other non-profit organizations and foundations. Three sites visited are hoping to receive funds from their school’s budget to support the garden. One garden coordinator is seeking to be hired as a part-time school staff person to continue his role with the garden.

All sites also plan to raise garden funds through food-based events, such as ticketed dinners or celebrations, the sale of branded (e.g. garden t-shirts) or donated items, and monetary donations collected from the community. In addition to financial resources, all garden sites have received and continue to depend on donations of materials, time and labor from students, teachers, community members and local businesses. Donations received by the five sites this past year include:

**Donated materials:**

- Seeds and seedlings from teachers, farmers and local garden supply businesses
- Burlap bags from coffee supply companies
- Fencing materials from a school board member’s fencing company

**Volunteer time and labor:**

- Community members that helped maintain the garden
- Volunteer garden coordinators
- Landscape designers and other local experts
- High school and college students who built garden infrastructure (i.e. framed beds and signs) and worked with younger students in the garden
- EMG volunteers
Evaluation of Project Implementation

For their final report, mini-grant recipients rated the helpfulness of technical assistance areas offered by Friends of Burlington Gardens (see Table 15). In general, all areas were rated as Somewhat to Very helpful or the area was not utilized. Emailing the Project Director with questions regarding their mini-grant was the most helpful and prevalent form of assistance.

Table 15 Helpfulness of technical assistance areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating of Helpfulness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emailing the Project Director with Mini-grant questions</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mini-grant planning workshop during the winter</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calling the Project Director with Mini-grant questions</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources on the <a href="http://www.burlingtongardens.org">www.burlingtongardens.org</a> web site</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermont Community Garden Network e-newsletters</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to the Final report submitted by 40 of 40 mini-grant recipients during the summer of 2011, 25 of 40 mini-grant recipients (63% response rate) also completed a brief survey in October 2011 to provide further feedback on the grant process. Figure 2 shows that most respondents rated mini-grant process areas as Good or Excellent. Respondents generally found the mini-grant application process to be clear, accessible, easy to follow and straightforward. Three respondents also appreciated attending the pre-application workshop. One respondent felt the mini-grant application process was too rigorous for the amount of money awarded. While most respondents were satisfied with the process of fund reimbursement, several respondents would have liked to receive the grant award up front rather than having to purchase items with other funds and wait to be reimbursed by the grant.

Respondents also found the mini-grant reporting process to be simple and clear, although some also felt there was too much reporting required for a small grant award. Positive comments were received with regard to the Project Director’s site visit; only a few respondents suggested this visit occur earlier in the season. Respondents found the Project Director’s site visit to be encouraging, helpful and supportive, and they appreciated the opportunity to show off their hard work. One respondent commented, “[The Project Director] has such wonderful energy and enthusiasm. It was great to have him visit and to see our accomplishments. He is a fantastic asset and resource to our garden.”

“[The Project Director] has such wonderful energy and enthusiasm. It was great to have him visit and to see our accomplishments. He is a fantastic asset and resource to our garden.”
the work we put into our school/community garden. It was nice to share with him.” Respondents also appreciated that the Project Director’s professionalism was balanced with a personal commitment to the project. Finally, mini-grant recipients that participated in CRS evaluation site visits or interviews rated this process as Good to Excellent.

![Figure 2 Rating of mini-grant process areas](image)

Additionally, respondents rated the helpfulness of a) communication with FBG staff and b) working with their EMG volunteer(s) in carrying out their school community garden project. As shown in Figure 3, 84% felt that communication with FBG staff was very helpful.

FBG staff mostly communicated with respondents by email and telephone. FBG staff were viewed as an available, helpful, and timely resource. Mixed reviews were received on the helpfulness of working with EMG volunteer(s). Almost two-thirds (60%) rated working with their EMG volunteer as moderately to very helpful, while 28% felt their EMG volunteer was not helpful. When EMG volunteers were viewed as not helpful, respondents specified that they were disappointed by their minimal contribution, felt their

![Figure 3 Rating of helpfulness of areas to carrying out grant](image)
EMG volunteer was not a good fit for their project, or noted that the EMG volunteer had scheduling conflicts that prevented adequate help. Additionally, a few respondents did not realize they had an EMG volunteer as a resource. When EMG volunteers were found to be helpful, respondents said they performed a specific service such as a soil analysis, provided needed support to new gardeners, assisted teachers, worked well with students, and provided an extra pair of hands in the garden. Four school community gardens plan to continue working with their EMG volunteer next year.
Conclusions and Reflections

The 2011 School Community Garden Mini-grant Program successfully improved farm-to-school programming by funding and providing technical assistance to community school gardens established at or near 40 of Vermont's 393 public schools. These garden programs effectively model healthy living and nutrition, while teaching new generations of students about the importance of locally grown foods and community involvement.

This project successfully met the following key objectives:

1) The 40 garden sites actively engaged more than 4,000 children and youths and numerous supportive adults, including garden coordinators, school administrators, teachers, facilities and food service staff, EMG volunteers and parents, in hands-on planting, growing, harvesting, and utilizing of fresh garden produce.

2) School community garden sites integrated their gardens with farm-to-school and nutrition education programs sponsored by collaborative partner organizations. Additionally, teachers at all sites have begun integrating the garden space and gardening into their existing curriculum across subject areas of physical education, science, mathematics, foods, art, language arts and technical education.

3) School community garden sites fostered a local network of community gardeners, EMG volunteers, school staff, and civic and business sponsors to provide ongoing support to sustain the school community gardens in the years to come. Larger communities were involved in celebratory kick-off events; work days to plant, maintain and harvest the garden; open houses; parent night events; and harvest dinners. Additionally, coordinators interviewed for this evaluation said their programs have received—and continue to depend upon—donations of materials, time, and labor from students, teachers, community members, and local businesses.

Receipt of Mini-grants and Technical Assistance from FBG

The 40 participating school community gardens received mini-grants and technical assistance from FBG to develop their garden sites. Of the 25 mini-grant recipients who responded to the final evaluation survey, 84% rated communication and technical assistance from the mini-grant Project Director as very helpful, specifying that FBG staff were an accessible and timely resource.

Suggestions for ways to further support school community gardens include:

- Assist teachers with development of classroom and school-wide garden-based curricula across subject areas.
- Identify strategies to build further support for school community garden projects from the school and larger community, including community organizing training.
• Support garden sites’ efforts to increase the quantity and frequency of garden produce utilized by the school’s cafeteria and food service program.
• Provide resources for additional grant funding and expansion of local support networks for school community gardens.
• Support garden sites’ strategic planning and/or future expansion of their garden project.
• Host workshops and/or a regional conference for school garden coordinators to network and learn from their peers and experts.

**Partnership with University of Vermont Extension Master Gardeners**

University of Vermont EMG volunteers offered education and hands-on gardening support at 33 of the 40 selected school community gardens. A total of 493 volunteer hours were reported by EMG volunteers at these garden sites from April 15 through July 31, 2011. EMG volunteers provided horticultural support by helping to coordinate the garden design and select and plant vegetables. EMG volunteers provided resources, guidance and oversight, and directly worked with students to teach and demonstrate skills. They also helped to model best practices for sustainable organic vegetable production. Some EMG volunteers assisted with garden projects’ specific needs, such as testing and improving soil quality. Nearly two-thirds of garden sites rated their EMG as being moderately to very helpful in carrying out the mini-grant. Garden coordinators that viewed EMG volunteers as less helpful indicated they were not a good fit for their project; there were scheduling conflicts that prevented adequate help; or that there was a minimal volunteer contribution.

**Suggestions for future partnerships between EMGs and school community gardens are:**

• Ensure greater lead time between award decisions and the start of gardening season.
• Produce a written guide to support the garden leaders and EMG support volunteers.
• Extend the garden time frame through October 31 to include harvest activities and garden wrap-up.
• Ensure that the EMG coordinator communicates directly with garden leaders to determine their needs.
• Maintain ongoing communication with garden leaders and EMG volunteers throughout the mini-grant period to ensure consistent and helpful volunteer support.

**Enhancing school and summer programming of collaborating non-profits**

Collaborating non-profits, including Vermont FEED, Green Mountain Farm-to-School, Upper Valley Farm-to-School, and the Vermont Campaign to End Childhood Hunger, had their school and summer program activities enhanced by the school community gardens. The gardens provided a hands-on forum enabling partnering organizations to deliver programming for students, teachers, community members and summer groups. Collaborating non-profits also supported garden projects by providing training and technical assistance for teachers in curriculum development and assisting garden coordinators with planning, development, maintenance and harvesting of gardens during the school year and summer months. Garden
sites should continue to partner with non-profit organizations to help meet their future need for additional resources and support, as identified previously, such as assisting teachers with development of garden-based curriculum for classrooms school-wide.

**Reflections on creating (and replicating) a school community garden program**

The School Community Garden Mini-grant Program in Vermont serves as a model for the development of similar programs in other states. The following reflections and best practices, as noted by garden coordinators interviewed by CRS and the Mini-grant Project Director, should be taken into consideration by other organizations and groups seeking to develop or enhance a school community garden program.
Appendix A.

Friends of Burlington Gardens School Community Garden Mini-grant Program Internal Evaluation, Timeline, and Documentation

Submitted by Jim Flint, Project Director
August 25, 2011

Planning Period: August – December, 2010
Work on the federal grant was interspersed with day to day operations of FBG. Communication to the public regarding the federal grant took place predominately via the VCGN e-newsletter and FBG web site, which indicated that the Mini-grant Program would launch in January 2011.

- The grant began with work with Debbie Rooney and Christopher Kaufman-Illstrup from the Vermont Community Foundation to navigate the ASAP process of releasing the federal funds. The funds were released on August 16.
- Preliminary site visits were made to 9 school and community gardens in Western and Central Vermont on August 13; 20 school and community gardens in Northern Vermont on August 24; and 17 school and community gardens in Southern and Central Vermont on September 2 and September 3. The August 24 site visit included a brief meeting in Newport with Katherine Sims of Green Mountain Farm to School.
- Photo stories were created for each of the three site visit trips, posted on the FBG web site, and shared via the VCGN e-newsletter.
- A Vermont Public Radio story on school and community gardening, which included two of the site visits on September 3, aired on September 7. A link to the podcast of the story was distributed via the VCGN e-newsletter.
- A meeting was held with Nancy Hulett on October 1 to begin collaboration on the EMG part of the federal grant.
- Organizational and program budgeting for the federal grant took place during October and November, in preparation for the FBG Annual Meeting and Annual Report.
- Several phone and email queries regarding the federal grant were responded to during the Planning Period.
- The FBG Annual Report was prepared in November and disseminated statewide in December. The Annual Report included prominent mention of the school community garden program to launch in 2011.
- A drawdown schedule for the federal grant funds was implemented in collaboration with the Vermont Community Foundation. $10,000 was received on September 21; $4150 was received prior to the end of the 2010 Program Year on November 23; and $3300 was received prior to the end of the Fiscal Year on December 23. The $76,258 balance of FBG grant funds was received from VCF on January 19, 2011.
• Research to develop an on-line platform for the mini-grant application began during the week between Christmas and New Year’s Day.

Mini-grant Program Launch and Workshops: January – February, 2011

This time period began with collaborative development of the on-line mini-grant application, followed by public launch of the Mini-grant Program, and the successful implementation of three regional mini-grant workshops.

• Eligibility guidelines and mini-grant application questions were formulated. Christopher Kaufman-Illstrup, Bart Westdijk, Jess Hyman, Jenn McGowan, Nina McDonnell, Nancy Hulett, Katherine Sims (GMFTS), Peter Allison (UVFTS), Alison Flint, and Jon Flint provided the Project Director with helpful feedback in developing the online application.

• Arrangements were made to reserve workshop sites in Burlington, Derby Center, and Rutland, and to recruit local panelists and volunteers to assist with each workshop.

• The on-line mini-grant application and online workshop registration links were soft launched on the FBG web site on January 14, and hard launched via a VCGN bulletin on January 17. A pdf of the online application was posted on the web site as a preview copy that applicants could look through before filling out the live version.

• A VCGN e-newsletter highlighting the mini-grant workshops and additional topics was published on January 19. A Burlington Free Press story by Dorothy Pellett on the Mini-grant Program was published on January 20.

• Press releases announcing the Mini-grant Program and workshops were emailed to 40 state and local news media contacts on January 20.

• Each person registering for a mini-grant workshop received an individual email confirmation. Contact information for workshop registrants was added to or updated in the FBG database. Email addresses were added to the VCGN e-newsletter list.

• The first mini-grant workshop on January 29 at Gardener’s Supply was attended by 30 participants. Each workshop followed the same agenda which included an interactive slide presentation on school community garden models in Vermont, a panel discussion focusing on best practices, networking lunch, mini-grant application walk-through, and a time for sharing questions and ideas. A VCGN e-newsletter highlighting the workshops and additional topics was published on February 9.

• The February 19 workshop at North Country Union Junior High School was attended by 12 participants. The February 26 workshop at Rutland High School was attended by 45 participants including two alumni of the Community Teaching Garden program.

• Ideas and best practices shared were scribed at each of the workshops and later typed. A plus/delta evaluation was done at each workshop, with feedback scribed and typed into a workshop evaluation document.

• The mini-grant workshops were well received, and the contact with participants was invaluable; 18 of the 40 people who served as a Contact Person for their mini-grant attended one of the three workshops. Several other groups who received mini-grants were also represented at the workshops.
Mini-grant application submission, review, selection, and awarding: March–April 2011

During this time period, mini-grant applicant groups met to finalize their applications and to select a Contact Person for each application. At Friends of Burlington Gardens, Jess Hyman was hired as Executive Director on March 28, which allowed Project Director Jim Flint to focus primary efforts on implementation of the federal grant.

- A VCGN e-newsletter highlighting the mini-grant application deadline and additional topics was published on March 2.

- 90 mini-grant applications were submitted by the deadline on March 15. Each mini-grant application submitted received a confirmation email. A few inquiries for technical help with the application were responded to. Mini-grant application data was downloaded from Survey Monkey into a spreadsheet. A mail merge document was created with pertinent data for each mini-grant application.

- The Project Director reviewed each of the applications for eligibility; 48 applications were deemed eligible under the application guidelines. The most common reason for ineligibility involved not meeting the garden size requirements. A few applicants were ineligible for other reasons, for example a preschool or private school.

- Nancy Hulett, Nina McDonnell, Will Workman, Kim Potter (a teacher and EMG from Orwell), and Jenn McGowan served as Mini-grant Review Committee members. Of the review committee members, Kim Potter had previously served as a mini-grant reviewer, while the other members were first time reviewers. Having a five member review team helped to level out reviewer bias. Including a sixth review committee member from another part of the state would have also been beneficial.

- Each review committee member was emailed a packet with the 48 eligible mini-grant applications and a spreadsheet to tabulate results. Applications were formatted and listed by number in the order received. The review process involved reading text responses to questions, since supplemental materials such as photographs, site maps, and support letters were not requested from the mini-grant applicants. This is in part due to a limitation with Survey Monkey, as applicants could not attach supporting materials to their application. Having text only responses helped to level the playing field between new gardens and existing gardens. However, the review process also required a higher level of focus from the reviewers.

- Each review committee member read through the applications and awarded 8 blue ribbons (top group), 32 red ribbons (middle group), and 8 white ribbons (bottom group). Review committee members were also asked to record comments for each application. At the completion of the review process, each committee member emailed back the spreadsheet with ribbons awarded, and the application packet with recorded comments.

- To achieve an adequate spread, each blue ribbon was weighted at 12.5 points; each red ribbon received 8.75 points; and each white ribbon received 2.5 points. The point values of the ribbons awarded for each applicant were added together in a spreadsheet and divided by 5 to yield an average score for each applicant. The tabulation process yielded 39 mini-grant applicants with average scores of 7.0 to 12.5. Five applicants had an average of 6.25 points, which resulted in a tie for the 40th position. After careful
consideration, the Project Director awarded the 40th mini-grant to Williston Central School. The other four applicants receiving an average score of 6.25 points were ranked as alternates. The bottom four applicants ranged from 3.75 to 5.75 in scores.

- Review committee member results were received by April 10 and non-recipients were notified by individual emails on April 11. Non-recipients were encouraged to contact the Project Director if feedback was desired regarding their mini-grant application. Several applicants requested and received feedback.

- The 40 mini-grant recipients were notified by individual emails on April 12, the same date that the recipient list was posted on the FBG web site.

- The Award Cover Letter, Terms of Award, Checklist, and Eligible Items documents were finalized on April 13 in collaboration with Jess Hyman and Nina McDonnell. Though the timeline was tight, 40 award packets were merged and mailed on schedule on April 14.

- A SASE was included in each award packet, and mini-grant recipients were given until April 29 to sign and return the Terms of Award document. All 40 Terms of Award documents were returned to FBG; a few mini-grant recipients required email and/or phone reminders.

Communications, reimbursements, final reports, and site visits: May - August 2011

During this time period, the focus shifted to maintaining consistent and regular communications with mini-grant recipients. There can be a natural tendency when a grant is received to put the project aside for the time being, as the completion deadline is two months away. The goal of communications was to keep the mini-grant timeline on the forefront of recipient’s minds by requesting brief reporting tasks on the part of recipients. When a reporting task was overlooked, follow up was done so as to keep all 40 recipients moving ahead. At each communication step, mini-grant recipients were encouraged to call or email the Project Director with questions and requests for technical assistance.

- On May 2, individual mail merged emails with information on EMG volunteer process (including links to Job Description and Reporting Form) were sent to the 40 mini-grant recipients. Follow up was done as needed. EMG Volunteers were placed by Nancy Hulett with 38 of the 40 mini-grant recipients. Poultney Elementary School and Poultney High School were the exceptions. Time logs were due from the EMG Volunteers during August 1-10.

- On June 21, individual mail merged emails with reminder of the deadline for submitting the checklist, receipts, and CD with images were sent to the 40 mini-grant recipients. A link was provided to remind recipients of the eligible items list. A few recipients requested a replacement checklist. A few recipients emailed or called with questions about eligible vs ineligible items. 36 mini-grant recipients submitted their checklist, receipts, and CD with images by the June 30 deadline. Three mini-grant recipients were given extensions to submit their materials. One mini-grant recipient overlooked the June 30 deadline. Follow up work was done to assist the recipient with the checklist process.

- Processing of each reimbursement check involved matching the itemized Mini-grant Checklist with receipts and with images submitted on CD. Mini-grant recipients were
notified by email or phone if there were questions on item eligibility, or if a photo showing a completed project or purchased item was not included.

- If a project was not completed, a plan for completion of the project was worked out with the understanding that reimbursement would take place after photo documentation was received showing the completed project. The most common projects not completed by the June 30 deadline involved garden signs, water systems, fence construction, and compost or topsoil deliveries.

- A portion of mini-grant recipients sought reimbursement for items that were not eligible under the guidelines. In most cases, the cost of the items purchased was relatively low. In two cases, higher value ineligible items were purchased, and a plan was approved to allow purchase of other eligible materials after the June 30 deadline. In two cases, the reimbursement was paid in two installments to allow time for project completion.

- An email was sent to each mini-grant recipient after their reimbursement checklist was processed. Reimbursement checks were processed in batches and in most cases were mailed with a letter to the Contact Person for the mini-grant. Reimbursement checks were processed from early June through early August.

- After reimbursement processing, each Contact Person received an email with a link to the online final report, together with information on the site visit and the $100 honorarium stipend.

- Site visits began on July 22 and concluded on August 23. The Contact Person for each mini-grant was present at their respective site visit. The hour-long site visits were mapped using Mapquest, allowing enough time between visits for travel and finding the garden site. The most site visits completed in one day was six. Reminder emails were sent and/or phone calls made prior to each site visit. Each Contact Person was aware that the site visit would include a garden tour, informal conversation, installation of the award sign, photos, and provision of the $100 honorarium check.

- Each Contact Person was encouraged to invite garden participants, school personnel, and community volunteers to attend the site visit. Principals and teachers were present for a portion of the site visits, as were EMG and community volunteers, and children and/or youths. The Contact Person at each site indicated that children and youths present had permission to be included in photos.

- The 40th site visit took place on August 23, 2011 at Champlain Elementary School, where the school community garden program was first announced by Senator Sanders on June 4, 2010. Senator Sanders and staff attended the final site visit at Champlain to celebrate the successful completion of the Mini-grant Program.

- All 40 mini-grant recipients completed their online Final Report form using Survey Monkey. Data from the Final Report forms was downloaded, merged with selected site visit photos, and formatted for publication on the www.burlingtongardens.org web site. The formatted reports were reviewed for accuracy by the mini-grant recipients, with edits processed by the Project Director.

- The formatted final reports are attached as Appendix B.