

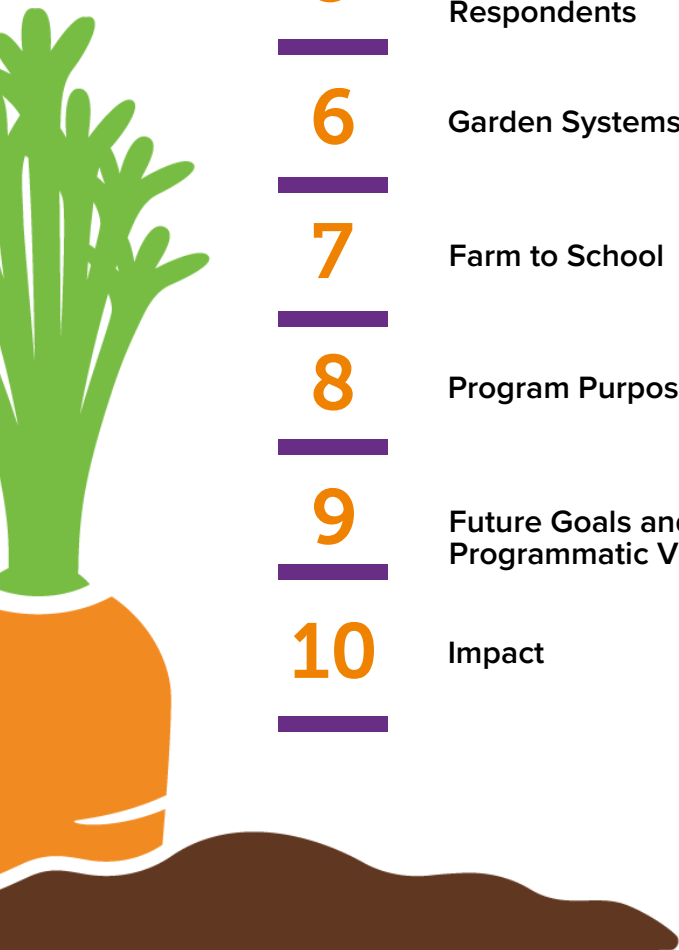


Understanding the needs
of farm to school educators



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OVERVIEW

School-based edible gardens offer an abundance of opportunities and experiences for engaging youth in learning about food, cooking, nutrition, and food systems.

As part of a USDA Farm to School implementation grant project, this needs assessment was designed to gather ideas and feedback for expanding existing teaching tools and creating new resources specifically for edible school garden leaders.



GOAL

Understand where there are needs that are not being met in the school food garden community and how we can use the Kids Garden Community to address them.

ABOUT THE SURVEY

- Data was collected September 1 - 19, 2021.
- 23 required questions in multiple choice, multi-select, and open answer format.
- 8 optional demographic and follow-up questions.
- Shared with peer organizations and educators in the garden education community.
- Sent out to the KidsGardening.org subscriber list of 45k, School Garden Support Organization (SGSO) Network listserv of 919, and to personal emails of key stakeholders.



DETAILED REPORT

[Click here](#) to view a more detailed version of the needs assessment report.

ABOUT OUR RESPONDENTS



542

RESPONDENTS

The majority of the 542 respondents we surveyed identified as a school garden coordinator; leader or manager; school garden teacher; formal educator or classroom teacher; or non-profit organization, administration, or staff.

50

STATES

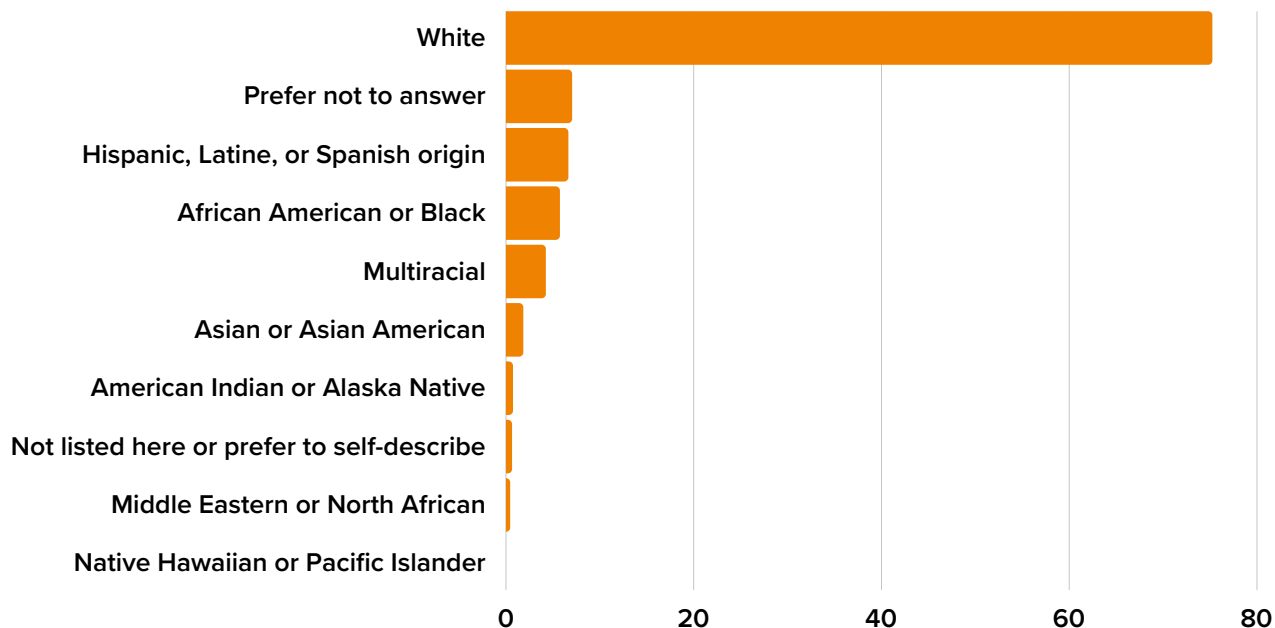
We received responses from all 50 states and Guam. The top 5 states represented by respondents were California, Florida, Texas, Georgia, and New York.

6

YEARS

The average length of involvement in youth edible gardens was 6 years. 55% identified as “Intermediate: gardening for a while, but still have a lot to learn.”

Respondents identified as:



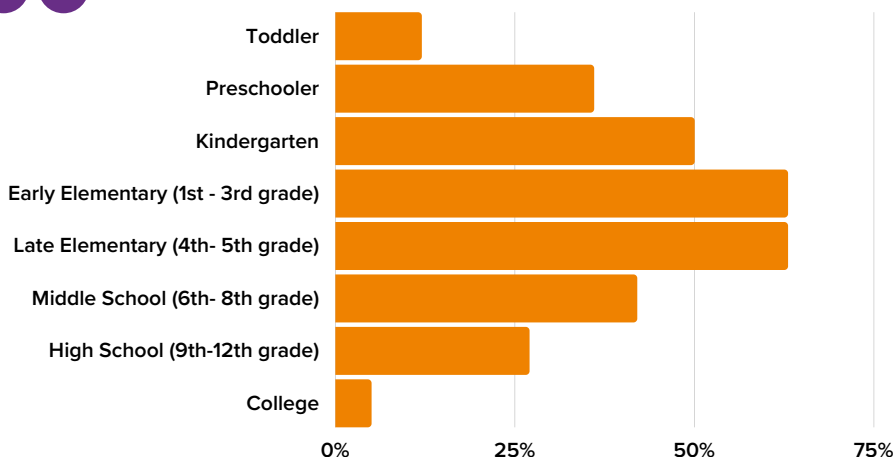
We acknowledge the lack of diverse representation we received and are working to address this. Please see our action steps on page 18 & 19.

ABOUT THE STUDENTS OF OUR RESPONDENTS



47% of respondents said 50% or more of the students they engage with are from under-resourced populations

Developmental age of children taught:



Primary languages used at respondents' program sites

96% - English

52% - Spanish

1-6% - Chinese, Vietnamese, Arabic, Russian, French, Creole, Tagalog, ASL, Portuguese, Hindi, Hebrew



TOP 5

Traditionally under-resourced communities served by respondents' garden programs

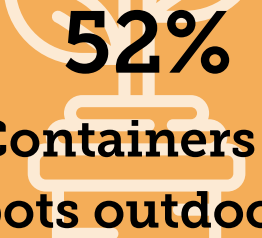
- 75% Low income or economically disadvantaged families
- 67% Youth of Color
- 54% Youth with Disabilities/Special Needs
- 52% English Language Learners
- 51% Youth with ASD, ADHD, SPD

Garden systems in use

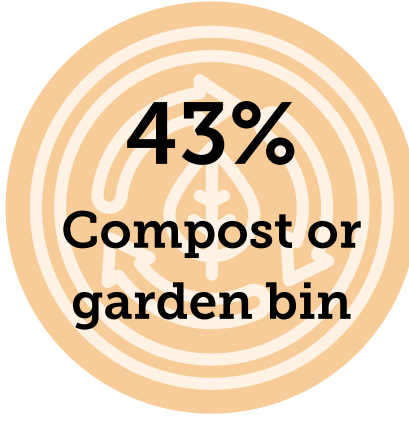
85%
Raised beds



52%
**Containers or
pots outdoors**



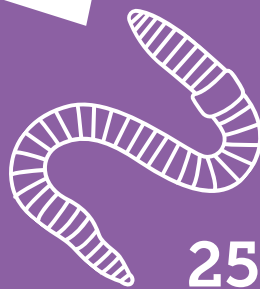
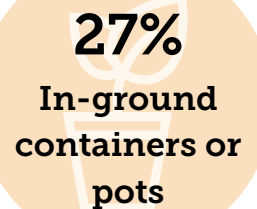
43%
**Compost or
garden bin**



47%
**In-ground
gardens**



27%
**In-ground
containers or
pots**

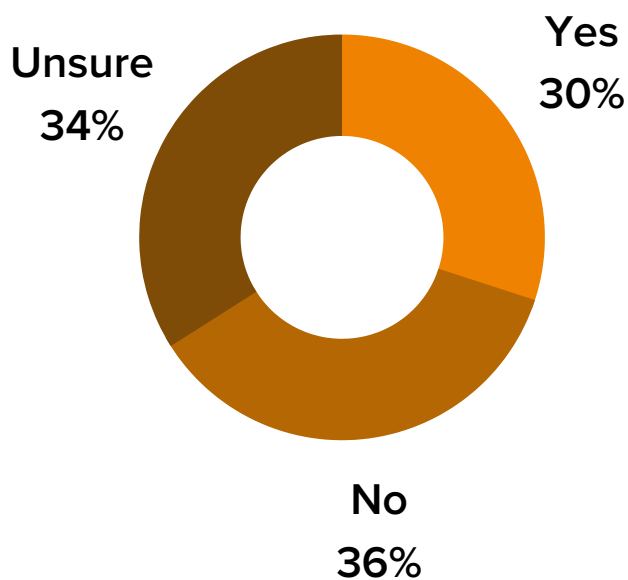


25%



**of respondents reported
using a worm bin or
greenhouse!**

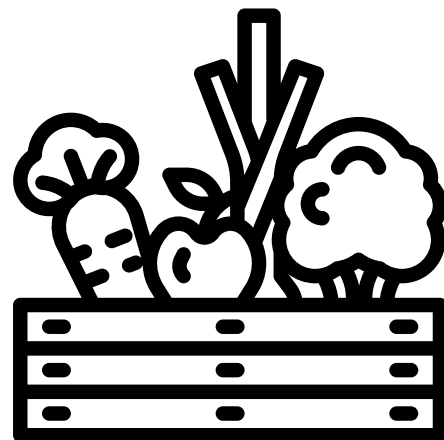
"Do you consider your school garden program to be part of a farm to school effort?"



The National Farm to School Network states: "Farm to school implementation differs by location but always includes one or more of the following:

- **Procurement:** Local foods are purchased, promoted and served in the cafeteria or as a snack or taste-test;
- **School gardens:** Students engage in hands-on learning through gardening; and
- **Education:** Students participate in education activities related to agriculture, food, health or nutrition."

While all respondents are involved in growing food gardens in schools, some may associate the term "farm to school" with having a formally organized effort that involves all three pillars. The survey intentionally left the definition open to interpretation to gain insight on whether respondents identified as having a farm to school program.



"How do you use your edible school garden program?"



94% To teach youth how food grows



72% To create awareness around environmental issues



71% As a tool for nutrition education lessons



62% To reinforce multidisciplinary academic learning



56% To introduce food systems



53% To strengthen students' sense of place



53% To provide fresh food for cooking lessons



50% To provide fresh foods for families and/or to donate to community



45% As a way to connect with students' culture



19% To supply fresh foods for our cafeteria



10% For a school garden business

Future goals and/or programmatic vision for our respondents' school food garden programs



Growing a certain amount of produce (i.e. to donate, to use in cooking lessons, to give to families)



Integrating the garden into the curriculum



Gathering more support from teachers, parents, volunteers, community



Hiring someone to lead the garden program



Finding ways to make the garden more sustainable

"How does your edible garden program impact your school and students?"



"What do you think are the main benefits of your edible garden to your school?"

The two most common words were "love" and "excited" to talk about both the students and teachers and their attitudes to, in, and for garden programs.



The above word cloud portrays common themes shared about the impact and benefits of edible garden programs. We used this feedback to name the "Growing School Food Gardens" Project.

“
I see the benefit of our
garden program as a
stepping stone to bigger
ideas and changes.
”

- Jaimee Gleisner, Illinois school garden educator

Sustainability



61%

Described efforts to
keep their program
going as “challenging,
but not overwhelming.”

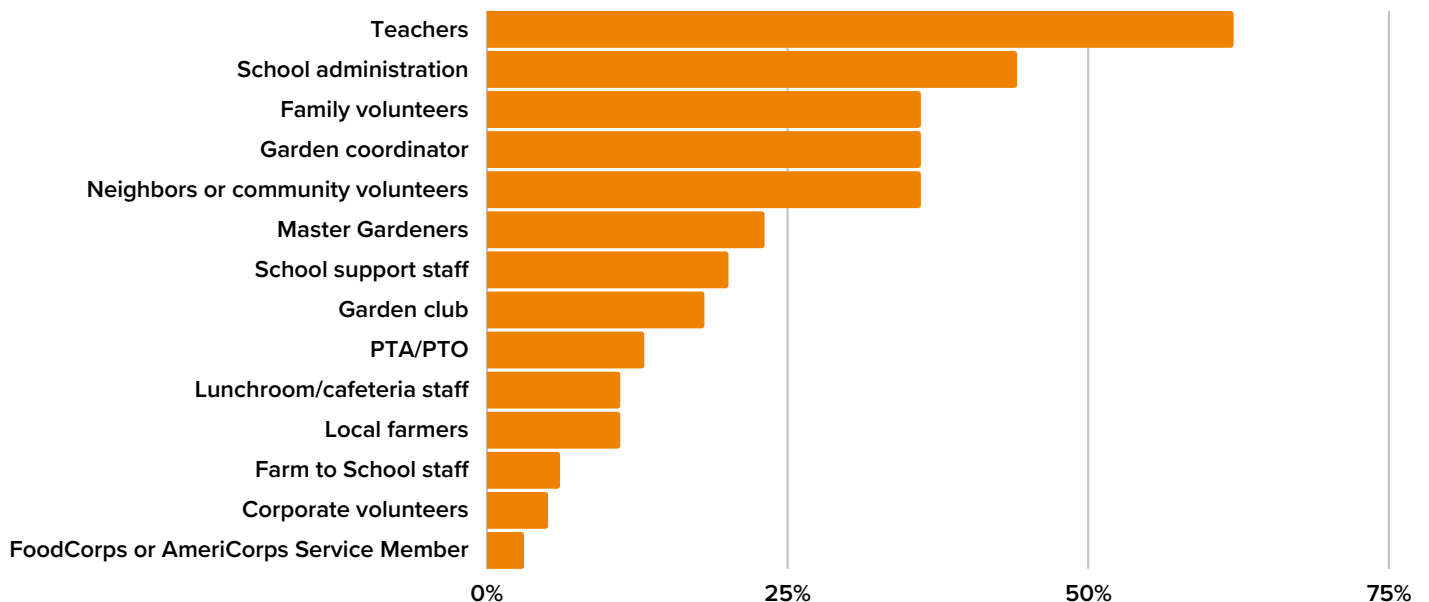


Described their ability to
maintain their program as “very
likely to be continued in the near
or foreseeable future.”

TOP 5 Challenges respondents have experienced with their school food gardens

-  Not enough funding
-  Difficulty with maintenance/upkeep
-  Difficulty building a support network
-  Difficulty organizing volunteers
-  Pest or wildlife issues

Who provides support for garden efforts?



Respondents' interest in resources

Interested or very interested in:	Percent
Grant and funding opportunities	91
A source for garden supplies	89
A source for plants/seeds	87
Content to help with horticultural knowledge	77
A local network of peers	79
Content resources to support education program development	79
An online network of peers	65
Resources in the primary language of my students	66
Resources in my preferred language	57

TOP 5 Delivery methods requested for additional support



1

Grants



2

Donations



3

Teacher training



4

Webinars



5

Videos

50% of respondents said that they need educational materials & programming, peer networking, and financial support resources for:



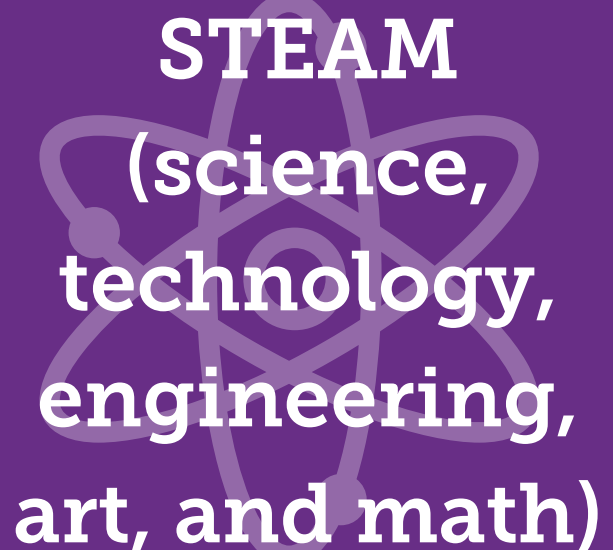
Cultural
diversity in
food and
gardening



Indigenous
gardening
practices in
the Americas



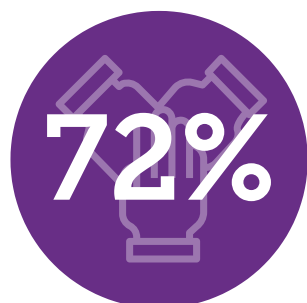
Teaching for
sustainability



STEAM
(science,
technology,
engineering,
art, and math)

TOP **5** Preferred methods for developing additional support networks for their school food garden program

- 1** Attending teacher trainings/
professional learning opportunities
- 2** Joining a state or local Farm to School
Network
- 3** Attending conferences
- 4** Joining online social networks
- 5** Joining in-person social networks or
Peer Learning Communities



mentioned a lack of access to
an in-person network of peers

SUMMARY

The majority of respondents said they:

- Are teaching about food, environment, and nutrition in grades K-6 using primarily raised beds.
- Aspire to grow a significant amount of food in their gardens, integrate the garden into their curriculum, and gather community support in order to sustain and grow their programs.
- Feel they need more funding for supplies and staff time, material resources, more volunteers, and better access to like-minded colleagues and peers.
- Would like in-person access to these peers via professional development opportunities, networks, or conferences but also see the value in online networks.
- Want more teaching resources around culturally relevant gardening and cooking practices (especially Native American) and for teaching STEAM through the garden.
- Are optimistic about the potential of edible school gardens to grow along with their students and are willing to face the challenges to sustain them.





TAKEAWAYS



OPPORTUNITIES



- Educators have a desire for in-person connection.
- Funding and upkeep are the biggest challenges.
- Gardens are predominantly grown in raised beds/containers and the focus of is mainly to teach youth about food.
- Garden programs have an overall positive impact on their students (love + excitement!).



- Cultivate support across diverse networks and create personal connections.
- Create support for and share funding opportunities.
- Address challenges, share resources on topics of interest, and provide unique value for garden educators.
- Celebrate the accomplishments of garden programs and learn from others.

ACTION STEPS

1 Engage a Focus Group to uplift voices of color and diverse representation

We reached out to respondents that identified as people of color and formed a focus group to better understand the needs of the traditionally under-resourced communities they serve or represent. In addition to conducting group interviews, we have also created a private sub-community to continue a collaborative dialogue. See pg. 19 for our initial feedback summary.

2 Form a group of Community Champions

Farm to school practitioners will be recruited and paid a stipend to act as outreach coordinators who will lead, facilitate, and promote the GSFG sub-community.

3 Create a Growing School Food Garden sub-community on the Kids Garden Community

The sub-community will host peer-to-peer learning opportunities such as a mentorship program, regional networking, and resource exchanges.

4 Host virtual sessions on relevant and requested topics

In collaboration with experts in the field, we will host 4 webinars and 12 coaching calls.

5 Develop a Growing School Food Garden Toolkit

A free virtual resource will be created for educators to get support on issues such as funding, maintenance, and cultivating community support.



GSFG FOCUS GROUP

During 2 different group meetings, we brought together a total of 12 voices of color to discuss the following topics. Below is a summary of the feedback we received in response to the listed questions. We are continuing these conversations with additional participants on the Kids Garden Community.

Diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in the garden

How does your garden program reflect, or not reflect, the students you teach?

- The educators generally represent the populations they serve
- Individualized instruction for students
- Books
- Integrating mental health awareness discussions and activities
- Introducing things students are not familiar with to promote diversity
- Incorporating different growing techniques
- Student ownership in gardens is key; involve them in the whole process
- Curriculum is translated to Spanish and English
- Bilingual educators
- Acknowledging indigenous influence on language
- Growing & cooking culturally-relevant produce
- Garden program during the school day, not after school
- Garden design should have a panel of parents/stakeholders to review the space; involve stakeholders in the process to increase ADA access

What resources for teaching about DEIA in the garden are needed?

- FUNDING!
- Books that serve as both "windows" and "mirrors"
- Parent volunteers
- Constant engagement of community
- Greenhouses for year-round gardening
- Dedicated garden personnel, not just volunteers with limited time
- Supplies and where to find donations
- Vehicles

How can KidsGardening uplift voices of color in the school food garden community?

- Uplifting Black farmers as people to look up to
- Directory/method for finding people of color gardeners/farmers
- Featuring successful gardens run by people of color
- Create networking opportunities
- Offer mentorships
- Short videos highlighting food producers of color

Connecting with other educators/volunteers & online community

If you'd like to be able to connect with other educators, how would you like to connect?

- Networking opportunities with people of color
- Peer-to-peer networking and sharing support
- Cross-sharing for students across the country (i.e. facilitated Zoom meet-ups for youth)

If there was an online community specifically devoted to school-based edible gardens/farm to school, what would make you want to join? What things would you want to be able to access or do?

- In-person meetings, emails, phone, or zoom calls
- Timing for events later in the evening
- Local directory of someone to reach out to in the community
- The ability to ask questions and share resources with one another
- Ability to see others' garden programs in-person and how they run them

Challenges & additional support

What are the top one or two challenges you've faced in starting and/or sustaining your school-based edible garden program?

- Funding
- Pests
- Water access
- Teacher turnover
- How to get started
- Lack of a database of resources
- Networking
- Sustainability - how to create buy-in with students
- Rules/regulations for food safety and selling food
- Not enough inclusive and accessible lesson plans

If you've found fundraising a challenge, please tell us what about fundraising you find the most difficult.

- The overall cost to run programs
- Lack of administrative support for funding anything other than supplies
- Not enough time to write grants/fundraise
- Discouragement when grants are not awarded
- Grants often do not fund personnel
- Garden leaders are already over-capacity in their other responsibilities
- Applying for grants is often inaccessible or inequitable for those who do not speak English as their first language
- Difficulty in garnering support at all levels (school community/admin, district, state, national)

POLL: What topics for virtual sessions would be of interest to you?

Results are listed below in order of preference.

1. Integrating place-based, culturally-relevant, and indigenous learning; elevating DEIA
2. Merging the indoor and outdoor classroom / integrating academic standards in the garden
3. Funding a SFG program
4. Starting/building/creating a sustainable school food garden program
5. Teaching cooking and food preparation
6. Maintaining a SFG program
7. Finding local Farm to School / Garden to Cafeteria Support

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We extend our gratitude to the respondents of the needs assessment, focus group participants, and organizations that helped share the survey.



A special thank you to the U.S. Department of Agriculture for funding this project!

Photo credit

A huge thanks to the Summer 2021 Photo Contest submissions that were used in this report:

Title page: "Plant Smiles, Grow Laughter, Harvest Love!" by Brooke Williams

Page 2: "Its a Cucumber Thing!" by Ursula Kendall

Page 3: "Hands In The Dirt, Head In The Sun, Heart With Nature!" by Arbendette Van

Page 16: "Jaxson and his first kale harvest. Taken in front of the potatoes!" by Michel Bain-Hernandez

Page 17: "Harvest time at Denver Elementary School." by Angie Marley

Page 18: "Just got to add a touch of "sugar" to our tomatoes to help them grow!" by Lauren Engram

"Michael with the biggest tomato of the season so far! He loooves to eat tomatoes!" by Michel Bain-Hernandez

"Creating connections with the Earth and each other!" by Lorie Morris