

Inner-city school garden introduces students to more fruits, vegetables

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U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy (right) and students of John C. Fremont High School hold a beet grown in the school's Gardening Apprenticeship Program plot on the campus, which is located south of downtown Los Angeles. Photo: AP/Nick Ut

LOS ANGELES, Calif. — Not that long ago, Elizabeth Castro had never tasted beets or kumquats. Now the 15-year-old grows them.

Castro is part of a gardening program at her inner-city Los Angeles high school. The school is right smack in middle of a city neighborhood filled with auto shops and fast-food restaurants. Yet she grows fruits and vegetables of all kinds on the school's grounds.

"Many things that I experienced here, I had never experienced before," Castro told U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy when he toured the garden. The surgeon general is the top doctor in the United States. He was hired by the government to oversee the health of all Americans. Murthy visited to give support to this program.

"Instead of going home and doing nothing at all, we come here," Castro said. She has taken samples of what she grows home for her family to try.

They Cook What They Grow

The garden, which is about the size of a football field, was created in a partnership between community groups and John C. Fremont High School.

"These kinds of programs, they help build a demand for healthy foods," Murthy said.

At the South Los Angeles school, students join the program after school for 12-week sessions. Students learn to grow limes, potatoes, peas, beets and other foods. They also learn to cook healthy dishes using the healthy foods that they grow themselves.

Nutrition Has Improved – And So Have Grades

The Los Angeles Neighborhood Land Trust, a group that works to create parks and gardens in Los Angeles, helped the school start the garden four years ago. The organization plans to soon add a greenhouse. Mark Glassock, who is head of special projects for the Trust, said the students in the program have seen improvement not just in their nutrition, but also in their grades. He would like to see more programs like this one.

Glassock said many schools have outdoor space that is not being used. "This is a great alternative to use that space," he said.

Fighting Obesity

A 2013 report showed about 40 percent of Fremont High School's students were overweight or obese, Glassock said. That is higher than the national average. People who are very overweight are considered obese. Various diseases are caused by obesity, including heart disease.

About 17 percent of children ages 2 to 19 are obese, according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), a government agency in charge of protecting the health of Americans. Studies show that eating more fruits and vegetables can help fight obesity.

Azucena Lozoya, 16, said she signed up for the gardening program because she wanted to try something new. Since then, she has enjoyed tasting kale and a variety of melons. These foods are new additions to the rice, bean and chicken dishes she usually gets at home, she said.

"My mom never makes stuff like that," Lozoya said. "This helps us have a different range of food. This helps us have choices."

Quiz

- 1 What is the most likely reason why the author included information about the gardening program in the section "Nutrition Has Improved – And So Have Grades"?
- (A) to encourage schools to grow gardens
 - (B) to emphasize the benefits of gardening in schools
 - (C) to encourage students to help in their school gardens
 - (D) to emphasize the benefits of school gardens to parents
- 2 Based on the section "Fighting Obesity," with which of the following statements would Azucena Lozoya MOST LIKELY agree?
- (A) Working in the garden at school is fun.
 - (B) All students should help in the school garden.
 - (C) Trying new fruits and vegetables is often unpleasant.
 - (D) It is good to have many choices of kinds of foods to eat.
- 3 Read the selection from the introduction [paragraphs 1-4].

The surgeon general is the top doctor in the United States. He was hired by the government to oversee the health of all Americans.

What is the BEST meaning of "oversee" as used in the sentence?

- (A) control
- (B) inspect
- (C) manage
- (D) operate

4 Read the quote from the article.

Glassock said many schools have outdoor space that isn't being used. "This is a great alternative to use that space," he said.

Which word would make the BEST replacement for "alternative" in the quote?

- (A) option
- (B) selection
- (C) substitute
- (D) opportunity