

SEED 2 SUPPER

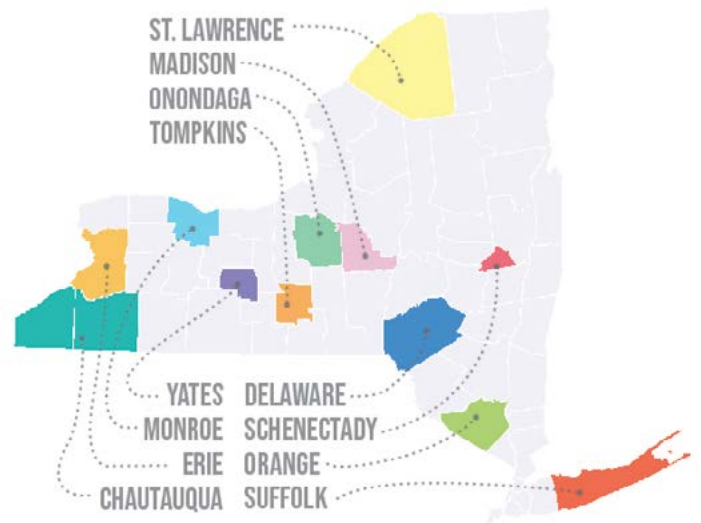


EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF THE STATEWIDE SEED TO SUPPER PROGRAM 2021

In the wake of Covid-19, the 2021 Seed to Supper growing season was challenged by delays and uncertainty, prompting unforeseen modifications, but also novel innovations to the program. The protocols and precautions that emerged in response to the pandemic had a huge effect on how each county rolled out their program. Recruitment efforts, scheduling, and attendance were all seriously impacted by Covid restrictions, nevertheless, counties found ways to pivot on short notice and come up with creative solutions. Many of the adaptations to the program, such as digital learning formats, outdoor demonstrations, and modified scheduling were responses that turned out to have unexpected positive outcomes. The flexibility built into the S2S program allows counties to go beyond the basic framework of the curriculum and come up with programs that are uniquely adapted to the situation at hand as well as the needs of their communities.

Adapting the program successfully is a collaborative effort; counties rely on partnerships with local community organizations to create effective programs. Community partners help to recruit participants, design the program, and deliver the curriculum. Since they often uniquely understand the barriers, obstacles and opportunities within the community, involving engaged and committed community partners brings sensitivity and life to the program, and draws it closer to the goal of empowering people and communities through gardening.

Each county faces vastly different circumstances - including the populations they serve, the community partners they work with, and the resources available to them. Working with the basic framework provided by S2S, each county responded to their unique situation differently, coming up with new approaches and creating a wide array of distinct strategies for delivering the program. Every county displayed creativity, ingenuity, and flexibility, so there is much to learn from each of them.



While there is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach for S2S, taking a closer look at the experiences of each county can inform the program in the future, as well as celebrate the successes and impact of each county.

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There is a vast array of lessons learned from each county in 2021, but they can be categorized into 4 groups: Retention, Session Format, Scheduling, and Community Partners. Each of these areas is recapped below.

Retention:

Attracting the target audience, and then maintaining consistent participation is often the foundation of an impactful program. There are several key takeaways from counties that had good retention of participants:

- Working with community partners who understand the community helps to get the word out to the target audience and lead to more sign-ups.
- Providing materials, seeds, and other 'giveaways' at each session can incentivize participants to come back week after week. Timed appropriately, (i.e. providing seeds at the right time of year for them to be planted, and coordinated with the lesson), can be encouraging and motivating to participants.
- Consider barriers that prevent participation, such as internet access (if sessions are held online), childcare (especially for mothers with young children), and language. Proper planning can help to overcome these barriers.

Session Format:

The way that the the S2S curriculum is implemented varies from county to county. 2021 had many adaptations

- Since many counties could not hold programs inside due to Covid protocols, hybrid models were used that included holding sessions outdoors and utilizing digital learning platforms.
- Outdoor sessions allowed for live demonstrations and hands-on practice in the garden, which participants appreciated, but they are also subject to weather and other unforeseen circumstances.
- Varying the activities keeps the sessions interesting and fun. Switching between presentations, demonstrations, hands-on work, and cooking are great ways to keep participants engaged.
- Expand on the curriculum by having Community Partners to teach lessons, including topics like

Schedule:

Considering the difficulty of holding programs indoors, many counties adapted the schedule, truncating or condensing the sessions. Some of the scheduling adaptations promoted participation while others seemed to deter.

- Number of sessions: Too few sessions (two or less) seem to deter participation as there is not an opportunity to make-up a missed class. Several counties had success with 3 - 6 sessions.
- Session Length: 1.5 - 2 hours seems to be ideal
 - Time of day: programs during the day often conflict with participants working schedules. Keep participants schedules in mind.
- Outdoor sessions are great, but are also subject to weather delays or other unforeseen conditions, its important to be flexible and have a backup plan.

Community Partners:

Community partners are often the bridge to the community. Forming successful partnerships requires trust and strategic planning from the outset, but strong collaboration produces programming that is likely more comprehensive, community focused, and reaches the target audience.

- Assess the strengths of all partners involved, and divide tasks accordingly, including recruiting participants and teaching sessions.
- Public libraries, food banks, community gardens, 4-H clubs, MG volunteers, SNAP-Ed, affordable housing, and other non-profits expand the reach of the program and provide resources.
- Partner strategically with organizations that are already working in the community, they will have the best info on barriers, opportunities, and assets.
- Building trust and mutual respect between Community Partners strengthens the program.



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PROGRAM IMPACT

Impact reports completed by each county as well as surveys filled out by participants before and after the program offer valuable insight on the reach and impact of S2S. While there are many intangible benefits to gardening, the impact seen in S2S falls into three main categories: (1) Improved Health and Well Being (2) Confident and Self-Reliant Gardeners, and (3) Stronger Communities.

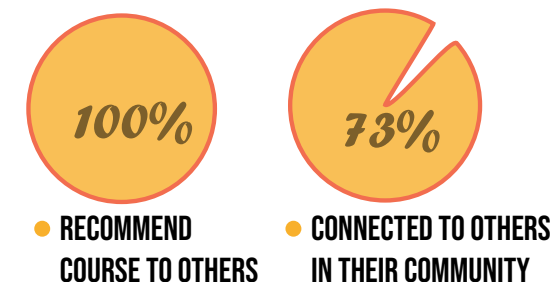
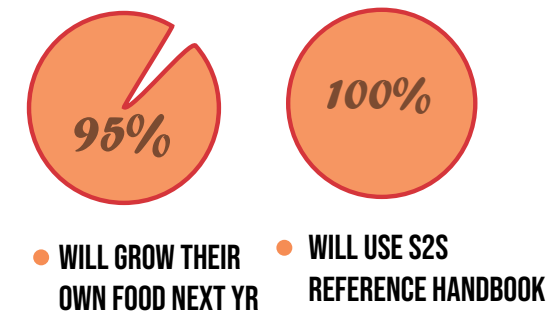
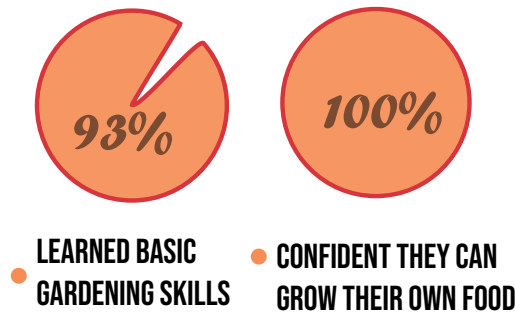
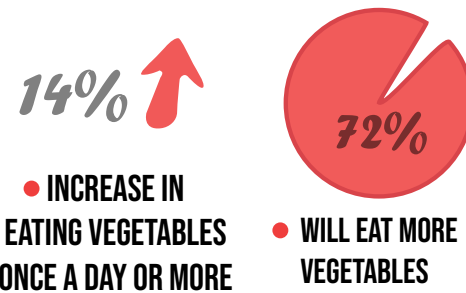
(1) Through the program, participants were equipped with knowledge and gardening materials, allowing them to grow their own produce. At the end of the growing season, many reported eating a healthier diet, rich in home-grown vegetables and herbs, and feeling reduced stressed levels due to working in the garden, among other positive benefits.

(2) Additionally, the program gave participants the hands-on experience and confidence they needed to grow some of their own food, reducing dependence on unhealthy food options, and increasing their ability to eat according to their preferences.

(3) Finally, S2S brings together local organizations to achieve a common goal, which strengthens the program and the community. Participants reported getting to know their neighbors, and feeling a stronger sense of community and connection.

While the most direct goal of S2S is to increase food security, the overall impact of the program reaches even further. Through gardening, participants learn not only to plant a seed and harvest their own food, but experience firsthand the joy of gardening leading to a greater sense of wellbeing, health, and connection to their community.

SURVEY RESULTS



PARTICIPANT QUOTES

“The seed to Supper course taught me fantastic gardening techniques, offered me seeds and plants to get started and made me a more confident gardener and helped me to provide myself and my family with fresh homegrown fruits and vegetables to eat!!”

“It gave me a confidence that I didn’t have before. I feel empowered and already am looking to next year.”

“I am more engaged with the Ithaca community of gardeners, have met some wonderful people.”

“I wish you could see my beautiful garden! It is an oasis!”

“I ate many vegetables from my garden so they were all organic, pesticide free and it makes my diet more”

“I was able to do and grow more because of the additional supplies and resources I was supplied as part of this course. I would not have been able to afford on my own”