

# Let-tuce Try Salad From The Garden!

 (/docs/stories/)

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| <b>Reporting Periods</b>            | SNAP-Ed 2020 (October 1, 2019 - September 30, 2020)   |
| <b>Site</b>                         | William Rice elementary   |
| <b>Unit</b>                         | Santa Barbara (County)  |
| <b>Associated Program Activity</b>  | salmaguer-2*19-20 (/track/programs/221957/)   |
| <b>Keywords</b>                     | Citizenship and Leadership<br>Food Resource Management<br>Free School Lunch<br>Healthy Living   |
| <b>Related Framework Indicators</b> | Healthy Eating (ST1)<br>Physical Activity & Reduced Sedentary Behavior (ST3)<br>Healthy Eating Behaviors (MT1)<br>Physical Activity & Reduced Sedentary Behavior (MT3)<br>Organizational Partnerships (ST7)<br>Nutrition Supports (MT5)<br>Fruits and Vegetables (R2) |
| <b>Socio-Ecological Framework</b>   | Individual/Family<br>Environmental Setting<br>Social and Cultural Norms and Values  |
| <b>Approaches</b>                   | Individual or group-based nutrition educators (e.g. direct education)<br>Comprehensive multi-level interventions (a combination of direct education, PSE's, and social marketing)   |
| <b>Uploads</b>                      | Rice Lettuce Tasting 3.jpg<br>Rice Lettuce Tasting 1.jpg<br>Rice Lettuce Tasting 2.JPG<br>Rice Lettuce Tasting 5.jpg  |
| <b>Has Photo Releases</b>           | Yes   |

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**Favorite Quote**

"I tried it and I liked it! Can I have more?" - 1st grade student

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**Background**

CalFresh Healthy Living, UC in San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara counties (CalFresh) partners with staff, students and families in schools to provide comprehensive nutrition and physical activity education services based on the goals of school stakeholders and the needs of the priority population. CalFresh focuses on K-6<sup>th</sup> nutrition education and physical activity curricula, positive youth development through the 4-H SNAC program, and support for farm-to-cafeteria and home efforts as a primary PSE (Policies, Systems, and Environments) activity.

In FFY19, school partners at Rice Elementary identified the need to revamp and expand their school garden and outdoor classroom. With support from teacher champions, school administration, parent volunteers, and community partners (including Cal Poly and CalFresh), Rice remodeled the garden to include a new storage shed and six 4'x8'x2' corrugated metal and redwood beds with in-ground irrigation installed by 4-H SNAC youth leaders. The new renovations provide a safe and structured outdoor learning space for students.

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**Story Narrative****THE NEED:**

Most American youth are not meeting daily recommendations for fruit and vegetable consumption[1]. Studies of eating behavior have shown that youth may refuse an unfamiliar fruit or vegetable up to 15 times before they develop a taste preference. However, students who have a role in growing fruits and vegetables, are more likely to develop a preference for eating them[2].

For families with low incomes, the economic cost of wasted food is an increased barrier to developing a preference for nutrient dense foods like fruits and vegetables. Indeed, when the food budget is tight, families are less likely to risk purchasing food that they are not sure their children will consume[3]. Lower income families are more likely to purchase foods that they know their children will eat, and are often lower in nutrients, as a strategy for avoiding hunger and waste.

Nutrition programs can help share the economic risks of testing unfamiliar foods with lower income families by creating opportunities for youth to taste a variety of fruits, vegetables and other nutrient-dense foods at school. However, without encouragement and behavioral nudges, students will often refuse to try unfamiliar foods or pass right by them in a crowded lunch line. At Rice Elementary, the food service staff reported that the lettuce on the salad bar is often untouched. In a typical day, only a few heads of lettuce are being taken at a school with over 800 youth.

**THE WORK**

During October 2019, CalFresh staff and Rice Elementary teachers led classes of 1st - 6th graders in planting vegetables in their newly refurbished school garden. By December 2019, a crop of crisp, green

and purple lettuce was ready for harvest. Classrooms that planted lettuce earlier in the Fall signed up for times to harvest with the CalFresh educator and teacher champions. When students came out to the garden, they could not contain their excitement to see the produce they had planted and how much it had matured into something that looked like food. Several started asking questions about what it would taste like. Many students searched for their specific lettuce plant, feeling ownership over their school grown vegetable.

With an abundance of lettuce to harvest and eat, CalFresh staff worked with the teachers and 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade youth leaders in the 4-H SNAC club to develop a plan to use the school garden produce. Since their food service staff reported that lettuce on the salad bar has not been a big seller in the past, 4-H SNAC youth leaders decided to take on the challenge. During their after school 4-H SNAC club meeting, youth decided they should host a lunchtime tasting to increase excitement about lettuce from the school garden. They discussed how to taste the lettuce and came to the decision that students would most likely try it if they were given two options: lettuce with reduced-fat ranch dressing or served plain so they could add it to their burgers which were on the menu the day of the planned tasting.

The week of the tasting, youth leaders worked with their school Principal to make announcements letting everyone know that they would get to taste produce grown in their school garden. 4-H SNAC leaders created and hung posters promoting the “purple and green lettuce” that is “good for you and fresh out of the garden.” On the day of the tasting, youth continued to promote the salad in an announcement over the intercom, and managed and conducted the tasting using the food safety, nutrition and garden expertise they had been working on developing during October and November. At the tasting table, they encouraged peers who were reluctant to try the salad and worked to generate excitement about food that they had grown as a school.

#### THE IMPACT

4-H SNAC youth collected preference data for 270 of the students who tried the salad. Of the 270, 240 reported that they liked it and several asked if they could have more. In total, 50 heads of romaine, green leaf, and red leaf lettuce were harvested at Rice Elementary in the Fall of 2019. This food was used during the school wide tasting and classroom tastings. This was the school’s first crop following a long and time-consuming garden re-build.

After the tasting event, 4-H SNAC youth leaders discussed best practices and gave each other feedback to strengthen their organization and promotional techniques for their next harvest and tasting. The 4-H SNAC leaders reported that they felt good seeing their peers enjoy the salad they helped to grow, prepare and promote. Youth were especially excited that several of the younger students tried salad for the first time and liked it.

This work was the result of lengthy relationship building with the school partner and food service, youth engagement through the 4-H SNAC program, classroom nutrition and garden education, and support and technical assistance for environmental changes at the school site including the enhancement of the school garden and point of decision prompts in the cafeteria. All of these efforts culminated in peer-to-peer promotion and student-grown food, both evidence-based strategies for developing long term taste preference for lettuce and other nutrient dense foods.

#### SUSTAINING SUCCESS

Moving forward, plans are underway to adopt district-wide protocols permitting the use of school garden produce in school cafeterias. CalFresh staff are providing technical assistance to create systems change and increase the use of school grown produce, wherever feasible, across the district.

The 4-H SNAC club at Rice will continue to conduct peer education and produce tastings through the rest of the academic year. Already a school garden cauliflower tasting is being planned for February.



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[1] Moore, L. V., Thompson, F. E., & Demissie, Z. (2017). Percentage of Youth Meeting Federal Fruit and Vegetable Intake Recommendations, Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System, United States and 33 States, 2013. *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*, 117(4), 545–553.e3. doi:10.1016/j.jand.2016.10.012

[2] <http://gardening.cals.cornell.edu/program-tools/benefits-and-research/key-findings/> (<http://gardening.cals.cornell.edu/program-tools/benefits-and-research/key-findings/>)

[3] Daniel C. (2016). Economic constraints on taste formation and the true cost of healthy eating. *Social science & medicine* (1982), 148, 34–41. doi:10.1016/j.socscimed.2015.11.025

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