



Highlights of Our Work in 2013

2013 was a year of focused growth for our garden-based learning and youth empowerment programs locally, regionally and nationally. Life Lab’s unique resources reached more children, youth and educators at all three levels through expanded direct service offerings, curriculum and professional development linked to new national education standards, and leadership to advance movements for garden-based learning; food, nutrition and environmental education; and youth empowerment. We are excited to share with you some of the highlights of this work.

During the school year, Life Lab’s **field trip program** brought 2,800 local children to our Garden Classroom at the UC Santa Cruz Farm. Preschool kids experienced our 75-minute “Sowing the Seeds of Wonder” program, building early social skills, such as empathy and cooperation, and connections with the natural world and healthy foods. Elementary school students learned about where food comes from, how foods vary in relation to nutrition and health, and garden-based science in our 3-hour seasonal field trips. They picked fresh foods and prepared them together and took home healthy recipes to share with friends and family. 45 undergraduate



interns learned garden-based education skills and led student activities, too.

Demand is high: teachers book field trips seven months in advance. As a result, we are considering adding a pre-registration period for schools that we identify as strategically important to us, including low-resource schools and those located in Santa Cruz County (demand is increasing from Santa Clara and Monterey Counties). We look forward to maintaining equitable access to our field trips with this approach.



In March 60 teens who have experienced challenges at home, school or in their communities began Spring Internships in our **“Food, What?!” youth empowerment program**. Chosen carefully by our staff in consultation with the teens’ teachers and counselors from more than 200 applicants, these “at-risk” youth were awarded spots in the 12-week program. More than 70% of the youth selected had family members who were agricultural field workers on the Central Coast. Each week, groups of twelve interns spent three hours digging into our/their organic farm fields, in workshops, and cooking and eating healthy meals together. Workshops led by our staff and invited program partners ran from “straight talk” sessions about healthy interpersonal communication (within the program and throughout life) to



basic job skills (being on time and ready to work, resume development, interviewing), personal budgeting, nutrition, food justice, and more. With the added capacity of a third program staff member, we successfully supported all 60 youth to complete the program. At the end of the 12 weeks, each youth received a \$175 stipend to value their work and reward their openness and commitment to their personal growth.



In May a record 40 of the Spring Interns applied for FoodWhat Summer Job Program positions, and 20 were chosen to continue into that deeper farming and job skill building experience. The summer brought significant growth to the youth, including increased respect for farm workers, understanding of the role of nutrition in their personal health, and their ability to impact health in their community through food systems change.



In the fall, 15 youth continued on to take leadership roles in education and microenterprise projects, including producing an educational harvest festival for 225 middle and high school students from around the county, catering and cut flower businesses, and a subsidized organic produce farm stand at Gault Elementary School for low resource children and families. In addition, two experienced FoodWhat youth leaders led peer-to-peer workshops on food justice and nutrition in local high schools, reaching more than 400 high school students.

FoodWhat staff also helped many of the youth move toward higher education goals by helping them with community college entrance and financial aid applications. This area of our work will grow in the 2014 with a new USDA-funded 3-year partnership with UC Santa Cruz to help youth access higher education and careers in food and agriculture related fields.

During the spring and summer 186 children from 4 to 14 years old had life-changing experiences in Life Lab **day camps**. For two weeks at a time, children learned about nature, plants, organic farming, food sources, cooking and eating healthfully, as well as building character and life skills through cooperative activities and games. Always in high demand, the camps filled more quickly than ever before. Our Garden Sprouts camps for 4 to 6 year-olds is particularly popular, so we doubled the number of spaces offered in the summer by adding Tuesday/Thursday sessions to augment our existing Monday-Wednesday-Friday sessions.



We were able to offer qualified scholarships for 35 camp kids through a special grant from the Dean Witter Foundation, increasing the socioeconomic diversity of the camp community and experience for everyone. The families were incredibly grateful for this special opportunity that would otherwise have been out of reach. One mom and child wrote, *“Emily, Thanks for your amazing energy during camp! Every counselor was so lovely. We wanted to express a special thanks to Jackson's counselor Sean. Would you kindly forward this on to him as time permits? Look forward to seeing you next summer! (Or, even before.) ~ Jodi & Jackson”* We hope to fund equitable access to camps and field trips through additional support in future years.

Our **Professional Development program** had a banner year in 2013, as well. Life Lab staff led educator workshops at our Garden Classroom and across California and the U.S. A special California Department of Food and Agriculture Specialty Crops Block Grant continued to fund Life Lab and our partners in Davis and San Diego to offer free trainings for teachers across California on *Creating and Sustaining Your School Garden* and *Garden-enhanced Nutrition Education*. In our second year, our team trained 617 educators and has already surpassed the project goal of training 1,500 educators statewide, 600 through direct trainings and 900 more through workshops by teachers we trained to deliver the content in their own communities.

Life Lab staff trained 116 educators in a variety of Garden Classroom workshops in 2013, and 627 more in 17 offsite workshops and conference presentations nationwide, from San Francisco to rural Missouri to Washington, D.C. Another 574 teachers across the U.S. attended our free edWeb online *Inquiry in the Garden* and *Garden Design* webinars live, and 764 more viewed them later. In addition, 157 educators attended custom on-site trainings or tours.



Training one teacher impacts 25+ students each year, so our 2013 professional development work likely impacted more than 30,000 students nationwide and will continue to do so each year as these teachers work with new classes. In November we surveyed workshop participants about the impacts on their teaching and received these results:

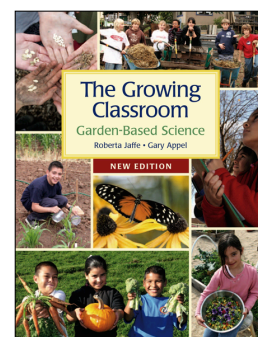
After attending a Life Lab workshop,

- 96% of participants experienced a marked improvement in their motivation to engage students in hands-on, experiential education.
- 82% of participants installed a new or improved an existing school garden.
- 96% of participants experienced a marked improvement in their effectiveness in implementing garden-based activities.

Life Lab workshop participants observed the following in their students,

- 86% noted marked improvement in their enthusiasm for learning.
- 84% noted marked improvement in their connection to the environment.
- 78% noted marked improvement in healthy eating choices.

Life Lab also impacts teachers and students nationally through our highly regarded **curriculum** offerings, including *The Growing Classroom*, *Sowing the Seeds of Wonder*, and *Life Lab Science*. Distribution of these materials in 2013 impacted at least 25,000 students and supported Life Lab's work with more than \$40,000 in sales income. Notable sales included the San Diego Unified School District purchase of 215 copies of *The Growing Classroom* for all of their nutrition educators and FoodCorps's purchase of a copy of *The Growing Classroom* for all 125 of their service members across 15 states.



Finally, here are a few notable updates from our **Movement Building program**, through which we offer regional and national leadership to advance the movements for garden-based learning; food, nutrition and environmental education; and youth empowerment:

The **National School Garden Network** went public in mid July with a broadcast email from Life Lab to partners and peers across the U.S. From a discussion with 16 colleagues in summer 2012

at the National Farm-to-School conference, we launched the Network with 65 members signed on this summer. By year-end we had 105 members and counting. Unlike the California School Garden Network and other regional networks that we facilitate for individual educators, NSGN is focused on sharing models and best practices among resource providers supporting an array of school gardens in their region. We hope to develop this peer-learning community through growing involvement in online forums and in discussions at national meetings, such as the National Children & Youth Garden Symposium of the American Horticulture Society conference in 2014.

National School Garden Network



A network of organizations and individuals that support multiple school garden programs at a regional, school district, or state level.

Our **California FoodCorps** program launched in September with 12 service members in 10 school districts and communities across the state. John and Life Lab education director Whitney Cohen also provided trainings in basic teaching techniques and creating and sustaining school gardens to 125 FoodCorps service members from 15 states in August, in preparation for their year of service. One member who had served in 2011-12 and was re-upping for another year approached Whitney after her 3-hour workshop and said, “I just had to come up and tell you that this is everything I needed last year, and I’m so glad to have it now for this next year!” In April 2014, John and Whitney will again provide training and mentoring for service members from across the country at the National Farm-to-Cafeteria conference in Austin, TX.



FoodCorps members are also joining educators nationwide in using **edWeb’s new Growing**

School Gardens professional learning community, co-hosted by edWeb.net, the Edible Schoolyard Project, the National Farm to School Network, and Life Lab. We joined this new partnership in September following a webinar on *Inquiry in the Garden* by Whitney in which more than 250 educators participated. In February and March 2014, Whitney will deliver another webinar on *Common Core in the Garden* and John will deliver one on *Regional Support Models for Sustaining School Gardens*, a key topic of the National School Garden Network.



The outcomes of this work are long-term. Life Lab’s high-impact programs are influential in the development of children and youth as community members, stewards of the natural environment, and healthy, inspired young adults. Looking ahead, we see rising demand for our local programs, leading us to focus on building future capacity and ensuring equitable access to these special resources. Our curriculum, professional development, and movement building are also growing quickly to meet increasing opportunities, impacting tens of thousands of children across the U.S.

We are grateful to our community of supporters and partners for making this work possible. We hope that you, too, are excited about what your investment with us is creating in the world and its potential long-term returns for children and youth in Santa Cruz and around the country.

Please feel free to contact executive director Don Burgett any time if you have discuss any aspect of our programs or organization. We’d love to hear from you! (don@lifelab.org, 831-459-3833)