

Life Lab Highlights of 2014



It's been a great year for garden-based learning and youth development here on the Central Coast and nationally! Our work in hands-on science, nutrition and environmental education has impacted more children in 2014 than ever before. Life Lab reached new levels of national impact, too, training and equipping educators from over 20 states working with more than 100,000 children. Here are just a few of the many highlights of this work:

Life Lab's Garden Classroom programs hosted 2,907 local children from 54 schools on 120 field trips this year.

Preschool kids built early social skills, such as empathy and cooperation, and connections with the natural world and healthy foods in our 75-minute "Sowing the Seeds of Wonder" program. Elementary school students discovered where food comes from, learned about nutrition and healthful cooking, and dove into garden-based science in our 3-hour seasonal field trips: Farm-to-Fork in the fall, Feeling Fine with Fresh Foods in winter, and Science Explorations in spring. **Demand is high:** *teachers reserved 50 spring 2015 field trip spots in two hours in September.* As we strive to serve



Santa Cruz area students, we're also working with partners to support new field trip programs in nearby communities, to meet this demand and make these experiences available to all.

"The most valuable part personally was the breakdown at the end of the day of the teaching styles that were the most effective and possible improvements for other less effective methods tried out each week. Thank you for your time and immense support this quarter!"

~ Aisling Mitchell, Field Trip Intern, June 2014

70 undergraduate interns built garden-based education skills and led student activities, most as group leaders in our field trips.

The heart of our field trip program, our interns discover their passion for hands-on education through working with kids and learning from our expert staff. These are formative experiences: past Life Lab interns now serve as classroom teachers, environmental educators, garden coordinators, and sustainability leaders across the U.S.





Small beginnings for a big new effort in the Pajaro Valley

Following a year of discussions about how to extend our elementary school programs to Watsonville children, Life Lab launched a major new initiative this fall. In partnership with a retired farmer, we are developing an educational site on a beautiful farm in Watsonville and will pilot Science Exploration programs there in 2015. At the same time we are working with Hyde Elementary and other high-need schools, along with district and community partners, to bolster and expand garden-based learning programs in the Pajaro Valley Unified School District. The vital third leg of this effort is dialogue with school and community leaders to develop long-term funding to sustain these programs in the future. We are currently raising money to augment a 4-year commitment of seed funding for this exciting new work serving the highest need portion of Santa Cruz County.

This summer 218 children from 3 to 14 years old had life-changing experiences in Life Lab day camps.

We increased our Garden Sprouts camp by 30 spaces to provide more opportunity for young children to make formative connections with the natural world and each other. Older kids in our Wildlands & Watering Cans and Farm & Wilderness camps learned about nature, plants, organic farming, food sources, and cooking and eating healthfully, while also building character and life skills through cooperative activities and games. One camp mom told us, “[My son] had another awesome two weeks at Life Lab. I think he learns more there than in any other part of his year. School is great, but he's passionate about what he learns at Life Lab camp.”



“Food, What?!” continued to grow healthy, strong, inspired teens in 2014 and is ready for the next stage of its growth in 2015.

In its eighth season FoodWhat welcomed 52 local high school students for its 12-week Spring Internship, through which they learned new communication and leadership skills, integrated healthy fresh produce into familiar foods, and gained basic work skills. Twenty youth went on to earn positions in the Summer Job Program, in which they worked on our farm at UCSC and at Live Earth Farm in Watsonville, cooked and ate lunch together every weekday, supported local food justice initiatives, and dove deeper into their relationships with themselves, each other, their food, the land, and their community. In the fall 14 youth continued into Fall Business Management Program, serving hundreds of their peers and local community members.



In 2015 FoodWhat will grow further as it becomes its own organization, while still operating at our site under Life Lab administrative sponsorship. We’re excited to see FoodWhat continue to grow, with strong youth and community support for its mission to build youth power through sustainable farming and food justice.



*Life Lab's workshop team trained 3,700 educators through our **professional development program**, impacting more than 90,000 students across the country.*

Our training program for educators **doubled** in 2014, providing 59 workshops, webinars and instructional presentations at our Garden Classroom and across the U.S. Our free *Common Core in the Garden* webinar on the edWeb.net Growing School Gardens learning community, which we co-host nationally, attracted over 1,300

participants – a broad reach to complement our in-person workshops with 30 educators at a time. Each educator we train works with 25 or more students per year on average – some many more than that – and the impacts multiply over time as teachers work with new students annually.

In a survey of the 1,500 teachers trained through our 3-year California School Garden Training Project, concluded in June with partners in Davis and San Diego, respondents reported that after attending our workshops:

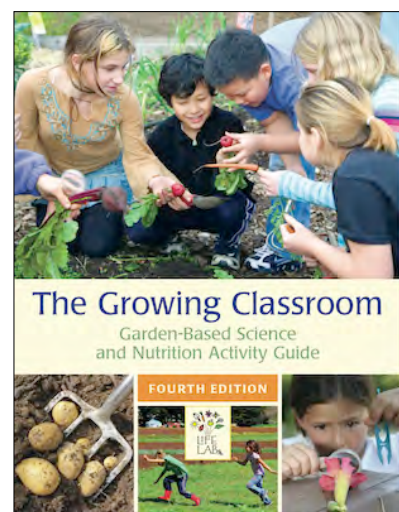
- 92% improved their effectiveness in implementing garden-based activities.
- 91% saw improvement in children's consumptions of fruits and vegetables.
- 76% noticed improvement in families' consumption of fruits and vegetables.

“After seven years with Education Outside and four years previous to that as a garden educator, I can say definitively that **Life Lab has been the most innovative and relevant organization in this field**. From providing the best curriculum resources to their cutting edge and exciting professional development opportunities, we have relied on Life Lab as our go-to organization for support, ideas, and collaboration.”

~ Rachel Pringle, Senior Director of Programs, Education Outside, San Francisco, May 2014

*Thousands of educators nationwide used **Life Lab curricula** to support garden-based science, nutrition and environmental education programs and connect them with educational standards.*

By cross-mapping *The Growing Classroom* to Next Generation Science and Common Core standards, we offered a timely resource for teachers struggling to implement the new standards and make hands-on garden lessons part of in-school class time. In addition, education director Whitney Cohen and advisors from the field revised overall content of the book and added a new chapter on nutrition education. The result was a new edition of *The Growing Classroom* this year, the fourth since its debut in 1982. Sales of Life Lab curricula have been brisk, with major



purchases from the school districts and health departments across the state and country. Curriculum distribution in 2014 impacted at least 50,000 students nationally.

*We advanced our mission locally and nationwide through **partnerships** to support garden-based learning, nutrition and environmental education.*

FoodCorps members work to advance healthy school food programs, school gardens, and nutrition education. The California FoodCorps program that Life Lab co-hosts with the Community Alliance with Family Farmers expanded to 15 service members across the state this fall, including two serving here on the Central Coast. Life Lab staff also provided pre-service training and mid-year mentoring for all 182 service members working in 17 states. All service members received a copy of *The Growing Classroom* this fall to support their work in hundreds of schools. This growing partnership is extending Life Lab's reach and impacts while supporting effective school garden and garden-enhanced nutrition education programs nationwide. We look forward to scaling our professional development program as FoodCorps continues to grow.



“Life Lab provides truly inspiring training. Their breadth of experience, joy for teaching, and commitment to sharing knowledge highlight the best practices in food and garden education. FoodCorps service members have been motivated by Life Lab's hands-on approach to modeling how to engage and nurture children in a garden and outdoor environment. It has been a pleasure to partner with such an inspirational organization.”

~ Erica Curry, FoodCorps Training and Professional Development Manager, January 2014

*We grew our **organizational capacity** to serve children now and for the future.*

Our programs have grown significantly in recent years, and we realized that our internal capacity needed to grow, too, in order to sustain them. In 2014 we trained three new workshop leaders, expanded our seasonal camp staff, added a part-time communications associate, and reorganized our development team to support more and deeper relationships with our community of supporters. This fall, we have begun work with an experienced facilitator on renewal of our mission and a 2015-18 strategic plan to maximize our impacts on the children we serve. We've also worked with experts to upgrade our accounting systems to ensure sound management of our growing budget. Finally, we are excited to welcome three new members to our board of directors this winter, adding leadership support for all of our program and organizational efforts. This behind the scenes work is vital to continuing to impact thousands of children for years to come.

We are grateful to our supporters and partners for making this work possible. We hope that you are excited about the positive change your investment is creating in the world and its long-term returns for children in Santa Cruz County and nationwide. We see the impacts grow every year.

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