



Growing lettuce and student interest with our Fork Farm



AmeriCorps
Wisconsin

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Arbor Vitae - Woodruff School had received a grant award from Marshfield Clinic for a Fork Farm a few years back. Upon the start of my service year, I was given a little bit of history about the Farm. Previous F2S Specialist have maintained it. Also, one of the teachers maintained it, and as I found out, the janitors help and the food service team too.

I was nervous to take on the project of this "farm" because I have never grown anything hydroponically before. It was also expressed that I need to get started on it right away so that it matched the curriculum with 5th grade science. So, I did my reading and started the farm. Fork Farms has very good support and learning materials. Our Food Service Director Maggie ordered all our supplies we needed. I taught a wide variety of lessons involving the farm, from seed planting and harvesting to comparing Hydroponic farming to conventional methods. I planted seeds with kindergarteners and 5th graders.

Staff loved "the glow" or the calming sound of flowing water and the smell of fresh lettuce. Our maintenance team always helped clean up any spills and was adding water before I would ask for any help! Mrs. Sevel who was in-charge previously, would pop into my room and check on progress offering advice and compliments. When it came time to harvest the lettuce, the Food Service Staff provided all equipment needed, washed, and prepped the lettuce for salads and tacos for school. They were so excited to get the fresh lettuce as they lost their local lettuce producer about 9 months ago and have not been able to find anyone to replace them. One staff member, said "we just need to 3 more of those farms and then we would be able to produce all of our own lettuce!"

The students were excited to plant the seeds for lettuce even though most had never grown lettuce before. One teacher said during Student Conferences, a student brought their parents over to see the seedlings. I would always "catch" students coming in and looking at the lettuce growing and changing which at times seemed like if you watched it long enough you would see the lettuce grow! When we harvested most of the lettuce, the students listened with intent to the directions about sanitation and proper handling. I heard one student say, "I never thought I would like harvesting lettuce." Another student quickly figured out how long it took to grow the farm full of lettuce and how many we would need to always have fresh lettuce in a salad bar. It brought pure joy to my heart.

The Farm had its ups and downs just like any garden. One morning, I thought I was going to lose all the lettuce due to clog, but I was able to fix it. Another time I was worried that we would not be able to harvest before Holiday break, but we were able to do so and use all the lettuce in either nutrition lessons, pre-packed salads, or tacos for school lunch.

The Fork Farm has shown students and faculty the flexibility of growing produce in the middle of a Wisconsin winter for a start to finish during the school year. It has been exciting and educational all while being hands-on. The support I received from all the staff at AV-W has made it so easy to learn something new for me as an AmeriCorps member and for me to include the students in the process.