

# How We Can Grow the Next Generation of Urban Farmers

## Descripción

Arlingtonians young and old gathered at Ashlawn Elementary School on April 11th for Arlington Friends of Urban Agriculture's presentation on "Growing the Next Generation of Urban Farmers." We had an inspiring discussion on future urban farmers in the area and how children, students, families, teachers, schools, PTAs and communities can increase outdoor learning and local food production and consumption.

Our host **Joan Horwitt from Reevesland Learning Center and Ashlawn's Lawns 2 Lettuce 4 Lunch** led our panelists in a conversation about current school garden and outdoor learning programs in Arlington and Alexandria. Joan described how Reevesland Learning Garden started in 2011 in partnership with the community and Ashlawn Elementary School. The garden provides a space for the students to bring the classroom outside. Another partnership with the community is the Lawns 2 Lettuce 4 Lunch program where homeowners convert part of their lawns into garden to grow greens that are served at spring and fall special school lunches. Joan emphasized that one of the many challenges is the need to institutionalize programs like these that are primarily initiated and implemented by volunteer parents, teachers and school staff.

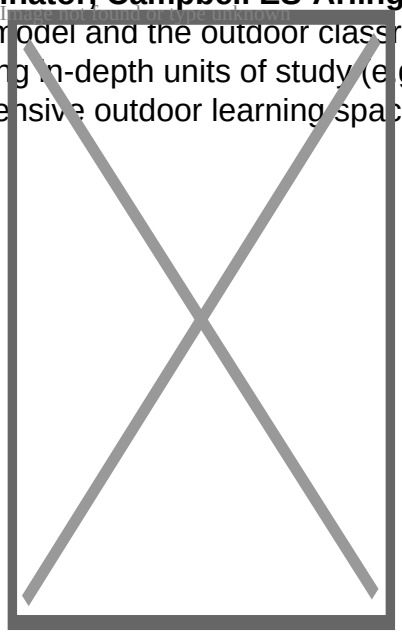
**Pamela Hess, Executive Director, Arcadia Center for Sustainable Food and Agriculture**, explained that Arcadia's mission is to build an equitable and sustainable local food system in the DC

metro region. Pamela emphasized that our cheap food system is very expensive in terms of public health citing some very disturbing statistics on diabetes. They operate training programs for veterans, a mobile fresh produce market, kids programs, a farm to school program, and a summer farm camp. They also provide outreach and assistance to school garden programs. Arcadia tracks several metrics to show transformation in kids (e.g. 42.5% increase in kids who like beets).

**Reggie Morris, Unit Coordinator Extension Agent, 4-H Youth Development, Virginia Cooperative Extension**, after leading us in the 4H Pledge, described the **Junior Master Gardening Program**. This program, in partnership with the Arlington Public Schools, meets once a week after school for six weeks. There is a similar program at Alexandria Public Schools. Virginia Cooperative Extension volunteers lead the students through the entire process of planning, planting and harvesting a vegetable garden.

**Raena Mitchell, Children's Garden Liaison, Alexandria City Public Schools**, explained that her position is new in the school system. Her role is to provide the training, curriculum and technology for schools and teachers to implement school garden and outdoor learning programs. Raena said that the program has been received well by teachers. She emphasizes that this is not an additional program, but instead it's bringing what they already do in the classroom to outside of the classroom. For example, art teachers bring students outside to draw.

**Christy Przystawik, Outdoor Classroom Coordinator, Campbell ES-Arlington**, described how Campbell has adopted an expeditionary learning model and the outdoor classroom is part of this approach. Two times a year they have 3 month long in-depth units of study (e.g. grow and harvest herbs and cook with them). In addition to their extensive outdoor learning spaces, they have access to Longbranch Park that runs adjacent to the school.



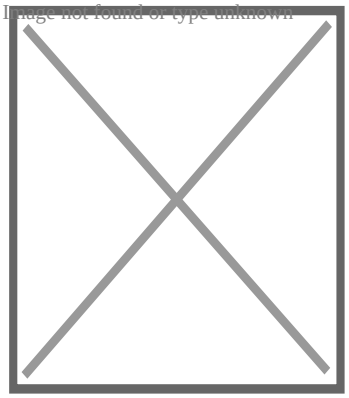

Panelists were asked about the challenges they face:

- Small staff and heavily reliant on volunteers. It's a challenge to find people who like gardening and working with students
- Funding – Arlington Public Schools provides zero funding so programs are reliant on PTAs, which means programs are not equitable across the school system. In DC, programs are well

funded through a tax on soda.
- Communicating the value of the programs and how they are connected to the curriculum. How do you measure exploration?
- Need to institutionalize programs into school system. These programs provide hands on learning, address the obesity problem, and students thrive outside. Need to understand that it's worth the money and it does not have to be an extra burden on teachers.
- Maintaining gardens through the summer months. Creative solutions include summer school, student, parent and neighbor volunteers, partner with community centers, career center students, and job programs.

Suggestions from the audience included:

- Get businesses (e.g. restaurants) to sponsor programs like they sponsor sports teams
- Engage across generations
- Set up a clearinghouse of lessons learned across schools. Check out APS's Green Scenes blog and these these resource documents:
  - School garden & outdoor learning resources – Arlington, 2019
  - Growing-Green-Schools-FAQ-April-2015




The panelists provided information and demonstrations at display tables. Additional groups that tabled included: **Greg Rusk from Discovery Elementary** displaying his hydroponic garden system, **Nancy Strinste** author of Nature Play at Home, the **Healthy Community Action Team,** and **Fresh Impact Farms.**

FOUA Board Member David Sachs concluded the gathering with a challenge to everyone – be the change. Our students are the next consumers as well as farmers and they should see that it's normal to eat local. We all should demand food that is grow in Arlington, support farmers markets and local farms, and share our passion with others.

**Categoria**

1. Events
2. Resources
3. School Gardens

**Etiquetas**

1. outdoor learning

2. school gardens

**Fecha de creación**
marzo 19, 2019
**Autor**
robinb