

4-H Youngsters Learn Value Of Generosity

BY JACOB L. GRANT
Staff Writer

LYNDONVILLE — Give a child some cucumbers and he'll eat for a day, but teach a kid how to grow his own and he'll be set for life.

Once he's set, he might even help some others.

That's one of the lessons a group of children at a Lyndonville 4-H Club learned when they delivered some of their garden products to a local food shelf.

Kristie Briggs, a 4-H educator, said it really hit home with some of the youths what generosity was all about when they were delivering their food and saw other kids standing in line at the food shelf waiting for it. It was humbling for them, Briggs said.

"It definitely hit home with a couple of the girls," she said. "They didn't realize that this was a problem in the community ... and they felt really great that they were able to help out."

The kids have delivered products to the food shelf in St. Johnsbury, the Darling Inn, and are trying to organize a drop at the shelf in Lyndonville.

"I felt sad that they didn't have any food," said Rylie Nichols, age 10. "I was glad that I was able to give them food."

Generosity is one of the elements that a 4-H Club strives to learn. According to Briggs, the garden

project has fully encompassed the essential elements of the 4-H program: mastery of a skill, independence and a sense of belonging — in the case of the gardening club they call themselves the "Weedbusters."

"It's been such a positive experience for them," Briggs said. "The kids have been so dedicated to that project. I'm very impressed at how much they learned."

4-H programs are cooperatively developed with input coming from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, local communities and the University of Vermont Extension.

The 4-H Community Garden Project even drew the attention of University of Vermont Provost John Hughes who spent the day Tuesday touring some of UVM's extension projects throughout the state. Hughes spent about half an hour with the kids touring their garden while the kids munched on freshly grown cucumbers.

"This gives [Hughes] a chance to see what's going on and it gives the people in the programs a chance to see him," said Doug Lantagne, dean of extension.

Lantagne also said that he finds such visits helpful because it allows him the opportunity to hear what people in the programs are thinking, what ideas they have and

what opportunities there are for improvement.

"It's great to see kids involved in a program like this," Hughes said, "and staying involved in the community."

The purpose of the 4-H Community Garden Project is to bring together 4-H clubs from around the area and have them work in cooperation toward a goal of growing a garden and delivering fresh vegetables to the local food shelf. They were able to construct their garden thanks to the generosity of the Caledonia County Fair Association, that donated a 30- by 40-foot area to the kids for the summer.

The program has had several "work days," some of which were spent in the classroom learning about types of gardens and vegetables, while others were spent outside in the garden on "weed, water and harvest" duty. The youngsters have spent the summer growing cucumbers, peppers, herbs, beans, tomatoes, squash, carrots, lettuce, corn, cantaloupes and a number of other veggies.

The clubs involved weren't specifically garden clubs either. Members of nearby dairy clubs helped construct and install a sign, while other members built a scarecrow. Participants have learned some valuable life skills

such as community service, volunteering, team work, organizing, healthy eating habits and responsible citizenship, according to Briggs.

4-H began more than 100 years ago and pioneered a "learning by doing," experiential method that remains successful even today. 4-H stands for "Head, Heart, Hand, and Health." 4-H programs teach subject areas and cultivate skills that promote success in life. In other words, 4-H helps young people learn how to present themselves, feel comfortable with others and make sound decisions.

According to www.4husa.org, 4-H programs are generally designed for youth between the ages of 8 and 18.

Participants become involved in the learning activities of one or more 4-H projects from a wide variety of subjects. Each project focuses on the thought, work and action involved in learning a specific subject.

The Vermont 4-H program is coordinated by volunteers and is supervised by a team of 4-H/youth faculty and staff.

For more information, contact the state 4-H office at 866-800-9944 (toll-free in Vermont) or your local UVM Extension.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE CALEDONIAN-RECORD

Photo above: University of Vermont Provost John Hughes tours the garden at the Caledonia County Fairgrounds in Lyndonville on August 14, 2007. The garden was built and grown by a group of kids from area 4-H clubs. Since spring, the kids have been cultivating a wide variety of vegetables and have been delivering their products to area food shelves.