OHS students bring farming experience full circle

Students' plantings will become fare in school cafeteria

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GREEN GROWERS – Under the tutelage of Oconomowoc High School teacher and Future Farmers of America adviser Margaret Waite, students are growing plants from seed to be transplanted to the NuGenesis Farm Inc. (NGF) in the Town of Delafield. In the 2011-12 school year, the food service provider for the district, Taher Inc. will enhance its healthier lunch initiative by adding NGF produce. Pictured are (from left) Waite, OHS senior Dillon Cooper and junior Evan Shambeau.

Oconomowoc Area School District – Hands-on experience becomes quite literal as students in Oconomowoc High School's agriculture classes, as well as members of Future Farmers of America organization, help to grow produce that will be served this fall in the school's lunch program.

OHS teacher and FFA adviser Margaret Waite is working on a project with NuGenesis Farm (NGF), a nonprofit, 37-acre organic farm in the Town of Delafield that has partnered with ProHealth to grow produce that have disease-fighting properties. NGF Farm Manager Brian Gifford is working with Waite to enhance the current curriculum on organic farming principles. Their project is to grow transplants for the NGF production fields.

"Mike Barry (Assistant Superintendent of Business Services) emailed me and said ProHealth had this farm and seemed like something we should check out," Waite explained.

"I had couple kids in my summer school who volunteered to go out there and at that time the professor in charge of the project was talking about the cost of everything and how they wanted to outreach to all the communities and they were trying to see how they could connect with schools," she said.

Waite proposed the idea of the students growing seedlings for them, rather than the farm having to purchase them.

"Having OHS students involved in the NuGenesis Farm enhances our agriculture curriculum," Waite said. "The philosophy and spirit of volunteerism associated with NuGenesis is an invaluable experience for high school students. Last summer, our students volunteered to help harvest at NGF and wanted to do more this year. They made a special request that Brian Gifford work with them in the greenhouse, which has added a wealth of additional growing knowledge and positive energy for them," she added.

Gifford provided Waite with planting orders and a list of when things should be started and work began on the project on March 25.

One side of the OHS greenhouse and a back bench is dedicated to the farm produce.

"He (Gifford) has probably taken out this whole side three times," Waite said.

Waite said the scale of the operation is different from their usual.

"They will put this in an acre field to harvest for food production and we're growing for people who want to do personal gardening," she explained.

"The kids are getting an additional experience with a large quantity of plants used for commercial farming and a large quantity of plants also for retail sales, so it has enhanced the program.

"The kids are picking up a lot of what you call 'the eye of the master' — the more experiences they have the better," Waite noted.

Exposing students to this project helps provide options to students, the teacher said.

"That's our hope that doing it as part of a class project, it will perk an interest. The focus is learning other production techniques," she explained.

Working directly with the students is in keeping with the farm's mission regarding education.

"It was an unexpected surprise to not only be teaching about eating to prevent disease, but to train future farmers who will play a critical role in improving public health. This partnership adds a much deeper dynamic to the education these kids are receiving," said NGF President Kathy Bero.

As part of its healthier lunch initiative, Taher Inc., the food service company that manages the district's school lunch program, will be adding NGF produce to its menu, providing students with the opportunity to see the project come circle.

In addition, the produce will also be used to feed employees and patients at the Waukesha and Oconomowoc Memorial Hospitals, Angels-Grace Hospice and the Pro-Health corporate cafeterias,

"This partnership is an excellent hands-on experience for high school students," Gifford said.

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Kathy Bero
NuGenesis Farm President

FIGHT ILLNESS WITH FOOD

Waukesha County Technical College (WCTC) is offering a class on nutrition through NuGenesis Farm, Inc. with Registered Dietitian Betty Holloway from 6 to 8:30 p.m. Wednesday, June 9, in building A, room 194, at the Waukesha County Technical College Pewaukee Campus, 800 Main St.

The class will focus on what specific foods can help your body fight chronic illness. The most current research supports the benefits of certain foods in preventing disease and supporting the body when recovering from chronic disease. Students will learn easy ways to eat with the intention of preventing disease and staying strong during the treatment of a chronic illness. A cooking demonstration will be done in the second half of class. Recipes will be provided.

Cost: $49; limited to 25 participants. Register at nugenesisfarm.eventbrite.com/ or call (800) 969-3588.

NuGenesis Farm, Inc. is a nonprofit organization in the Town of Delafield working to prevent disease through education, sustainable organic agriculture and research. The produce fields serve as an outdoor classroom.