

Important Note: This activity was developed for the original Green Lunchroom Challenge program, a voluntary pledge program for K-12 schools to improve the sustainability of their food service operations. The project was coordinated by the [Illinois Sustainable Technology Center Technical Assistance Program](#) with funding from US EPA Region 5.



The following page(s) represent the content of this activity as it appeared on the original project web site, complete with available points and instructions for submitting documentation. **The project is no longer funded and as of June 2018 schools may no longer submit activity documentation to earn points and recognition as described.** The activity is presented for your information to guide your organization's sustainability efforts.

If your school or district implements the suggested activity and wishes to share its experiences, please email [Joy Scrogum](#). Your story may be incorporated into a blog post on this web site, the main ISTC site, or shared on social media to foster networking and inspiration among peer institutions.

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Expand an existing on-site garden to provide fresh seasonal produce on demand

Activity Category: Food Sourcing

Activity: Expand an existing on-site garden to provide fresh seasonal produce on demand

Rationale: Studies have shown that school gardens can increase interest in and preference for eating fruits and vegetables among students. That's important to the overall goals preventing and reducing food waste in school food service operations because fruits and vegetable offerings make up a large portion of food wasted — for example, [a study of middle school students in Boston showed students discarded 47% of their fruit and 73% of their vegetables](#)¹. A [USDA Economic Research Service analysis of school plate waste](#)² found that salad, vegetables, and fruit were among the most wasted items.



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School gardens also provide opportunities for experiential learning and host of other benefits including increased respect for nature, increased science achievement scores, and improved social skills and behavior to name a few. If you are purchasing local and/or organic produce for use in your operations, you may also realize cost savings by growing some of that produce on-site (be sure to consult the "[Food Safety Tips for School Gardens](#)" document in the Resources list below when serving garden produce to students). Additionally, having a garden will support other Challenge activities (e.g. a garden will provide a place to use compost if you choose to compost organics on-site).

Activity Description: This activity is for schools that have had a garden (for food, not exclusively flowers) on-site prior to signing up for the Challenge. All other schools should see the "[Establish an on-site garden](#)" activity within the Food Sourcing category. Expand your garden by adding space for additional crops. This may take the form of new traditional garden plots in the school yard, container gardening (indoor or outdoor), window boxes, or a rooftop garden. Use items from the garden in preparation of food for students. If

possible, involve students in the care and maintenance of the garden as part of classroom or club activities.

Earn Challenge Points (75 points): To earn points for this activity, document your garden as it appears prior to expansion efforts. Take 1-3 photos of the “before” state of your garden. In addition, write a brief description (1-3 pages) of the garden expansion, describing new spaces, if students are involved and how, how produce is used to serve students, and any evidence you have on impacts on student food consumption. Also take 1-3 photos of the new growing spaces added say when these spaces were added. If possible, include images that show students and staff working in the garden. Send your photos and descriptions together in one PDF or Word document (photos don't count toward the page limit for your description) as an email attachment to Joy Scrogum at jscrogum@illinois.edu. Your submission will be checked for completeness; you must include the description plus before and after photos to earn points.

Resources:

-  [Food Safety Tips for School Gardens](#)
-  [Research Supporting the Benefits of School Gardens](#)
-  [School Lunch Waste Among Middle School Students: Nutrients Consumed and Costs](#)
-  [Plate Waste in School Nutrition Programs: Final Report to Congress](#)
-  [University of Illinois Extension: Garden at School](#)
-  [Serving School Garden Produce in the Cafeteria](#)
-  [Illinois Farm to School Network: School Garden Resources](#)

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