

Coalition-Based School Gardening and Nutrition Education through SNAP-Ed



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Objective: To implement coalition-based gardening and nutrition education with tasting activities to increase willingness to eat fruits and vegetables to address youth obesity rates.

Use of Theory or Research: Studies show children are more likely to eat fruits and vegetables when they participate in growing and harvesting. Increased intake of fruits and vegetables has been shown to be associated with reduced risk of weight gain and overweight or obesity. A plan was created to use gardening and nutrition education with tasting activities to increase willingness to eat fruits and vegetables.

Target Audience: Students in SNAP-Ed eligible schools.

Program Description: University of Arkansas, Division of Agriculture, Cooperative Extension Service (UACES) and Cleveland County Childhood Obesity Prevention Committee collaborated to implement nutrition and gardening education with tasting activities to encourage increases in student willingness to consume fruits and vegetables in two school districts totaling 510 students. Arkansas Farm Bureau funded raised beds for each elementary grade. Master Gardeners helped with installation. UACES provided Whole Kids Foundation School Garden Lesson Plans. UACES Agriculture and FCS Agents developed Constant Contact newsletters for teachers containing schedules, recipes, photos, and success stories. UACES assisted with hands-on education in the garden. School cafeteria staff implemented UACES Arkansas Foods curriculum, which provides lessons, tasting activities, and parent newsletters for Arkansas-grown foods. Students planted strawberries, cabbage, sweet potatoes, collard greens, turnip greens, mustard greens, kale, and Irish potatoes. In 2019 and 2020, students grew



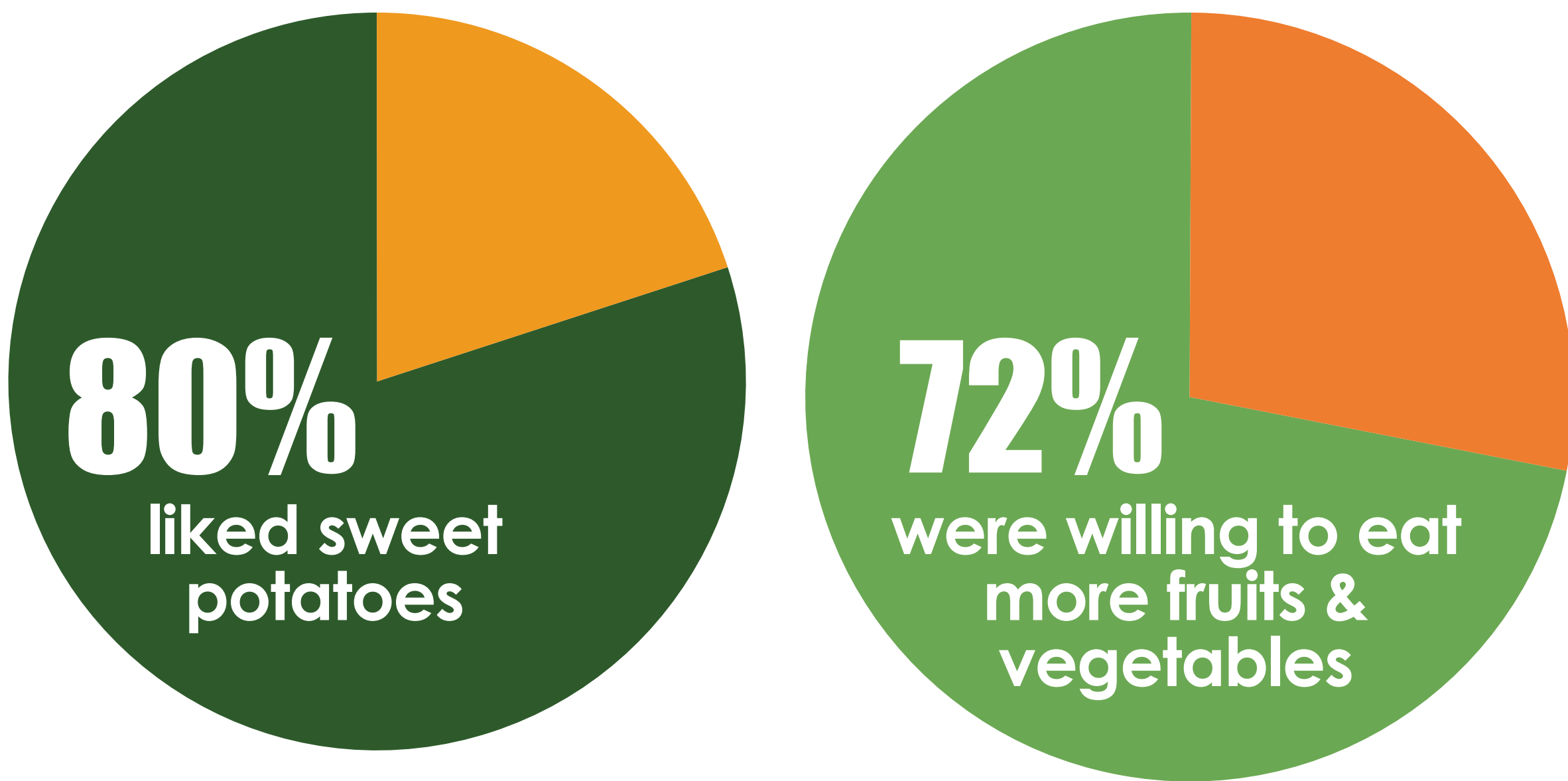
more than 300 pounds of sweet potatoes at one school. Students allowed the sweet potatoes to cure and then tasted the sweet potatoes prepared by cafeteria staff. Students also entered prize sweet potatoes in the local county fair.

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Evaluation Methods: Students completed tasting surveys. Teachers were surveyed on student behaviors.

Results: Eighty percent of students surveyed reported liking sweet potatoes they tasted. Teacher surveys show 72% reported increased student willingness to eat fruits and vegetables.



Conclusions: Students increased willingness to eat fruits and vegetables, based on student tasting surveys and teacher observation of student behavior. Programming will continue in future years to sustain behavior change, with the goal of decreasing obesity rates.



“This curriculum is allowing students to experience gardening, and many of them would never get this opportunity!”

