

# Healthy Life Community Gardens: Serving Spalding Youth by Creating a Community of Growth and Gardening

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## Situation

The Healthy Life Community Gardens (HLCCG) in Griffin provide an opportunity for residents in underserved areas of the community to learn about the benefits of gardening. The gardens not only serve as an area to grow food for the surrounding community, but also encourage exercise, healthy eating habits, and hands-on learning.

Spalding County is an economically diverse community. As of 2017, the poverty rate in Spalding County stood at 21.6%, exceeding the state-wide average of 16.9% and the percentage of children living in poverty was 32.5%, exceeding the state-wide average of 21.5%. Access to fresh fruits and vegetables by means of a community garden would offer residents a healthy alternative to processed (“fast”) foods and provide a key educational opportunity for at risk children.

## Response

This summer the Spalding County Extension team members from 4-H, Agriculture and Natural Resources, and Family and Consumer Sciences presented the Junior Master Gardener program, “Learn, Grow, Eat, Go” curriculum, combined with guest presenters and hands-on activities to engage community youth at the HLCCG. Youth who attended summer programs grew in their understanding of where food comes from, tried new fruits and vegetables, and gained knowledge for a healthier lifestyle.

Popular youth and adult programs at the HLCCG included: Honey Harvest, Fall Festival in the Garden, Vegetable Soup Day, Garden Clean Up Day, Arbor Day, “Bugs in the Garden”, Weekly summer “Learn, Grow, Eat, Go” program, and Home Depot Day reaching a total of 750+ adults and children from the community and utilizing over 80 volunteers.



## Results

During these programs, youth were able to explore the garden, hear from community garden workers about health and nutrition, and sample the harvest of crops. Through the focus on healthy lifestyles and agriculture in an urban setting, the HLCCG exposes youth and adults to the importance of fresh fruits and vegetables grown locally to provide for underserved individuals.

## Impact

A long time community member of the HLCCG stated in a local article that “the garden is open and welcoming to everyone. A place where you can come as you are. It is a place to learn and grow.” Her four children have been involved in the summer programs at the HLCCG and she says, “it’s a way for me to get them involved in how to grow healthy vegetables... learning to live off the land.”

Youth who are involved in programs this summer enjoyed learning about seasonal fruits and vegetables, were exposed to healthier eating practices, and engaged in physical activity. Participants verbally agreed at the end of the “Learn, Grow, Eat, GO” series that the information presented to them would change their eating habits at home.

