

# Thurston County Food Bank School Gardens Projects

**How do we grow farmers** in Washington state?

It starts by educating our youth in the basics of cultivating, harvesting, and processing food! Connecting kids to where their food comes from is the main focus of the School Garden Project (SGP). "We are not only educating our next generation of farmers, we're also teaching the next generation of consumers," SGP manager, Michaela Winkley explains. The program aspires to teach kids that food security is a life skill to learn early. Along with AmeriCorps staff and college interns, you can find Michaela in local schools and community gardens. Her passion is teaching children to observe the wonder of nature and love of locally grown food.

The Thurston County Food Bank (TCFB) School Garden Program (SGP) has been serving low-income students by providing them with fresh, nutritious produce since 2010. There are at least five schools that participate, focusing on schools that have a larger population of kids on reduced lunch.

Michaela consults with each school on their goals and the outcomes they want to achieve. Some schools focus on growing food for the food bank while others prioritize teaching kids about how to grow food. The program grows with the children as they grow. Just as a seed themselves, they start at the elementary level, building basic garden knowledge and skills. This prepares students with a deeper level of learning and understanding when they take horticulture classes in middle school, high school, and beyond.

A collaboration with Mountain View Elementary, St. Mark Lutheran Church (SMLC), and the SGP is a great example of this type of learning through the years. Since 2010 the SMLC has grown 13,000 pounds of produce annually for the food bank on a one-acre plot in Lacey.



Photos courtesy of Thurston County Food Bank School Gardens Projects

**"A school garden can be a great place for a brain break or a free field trip. It's a place to visit and enjoy."**

-Michaela Winkley, SGP Manager

The entire school helps plant the garden. Kindergartners start by planting the pumpkin patch, each grade level planting a different crop, ultimately learning about their vegetable starts and gaining a little more responsibility in the garden each year. The school does a total of 30 school garden field trips over the course of 6-8 weeks.

TCFB hosts evening programs that facilitate the next generation of parents/families to continue the program's success. One program involves families in meal preparation using garden harvests. It provides an opportunity for the kids to show their parents what they have been learning. Occasionally the parents jump in and are part of the learning and teaching. "What I love about this program is that it is not just about kids," Michaela continued, "We're all learning together; students, parents, and teachers."

TCFB offers many programs for the community including the Emergency Food Assistance Program, a Mobile Food Bank System, Holiday Meal Boxes, and more.

They prioritize kids through the FORKids program, Summer Lunch, Baby Day, SNAP-ED Nutrition Education, and the School Gardens programs. The new Lacey location has a farmstand with a variety of produce from their on-site garden and other growers, including home growers that have an overabundance. During the growing season, Saturday mornings are a great time to drop off veggies.

Visit their website at [thurstoncountyfoodbank.org](http://thurstoncountyfoodbank.org) for more program and donation information.

2022 marks the 50th anniversary for the Thurston County Food Bank. More than 67,000 individuals were served in 2020, with 20% of those never needing services before. Food banks are critical in addressing food insecurity in our communities and we are lucky to have this resource in our community for all these years. Celebrate their 50 years of service by joining the "Giving 50" campaign this year. Donate 50 lbs of food, a \$50 contribution, or 50 hours of volunteer service.



[thurstoncountyfoodbank.org](http://thurstoncountyfoodbank.org)

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**1972 – 2022**  
celebrating 50 years of working to eliminate hunger in our community



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