

YOUTH PERCEPTIONS ON THE IMPACT OF THE FRESHFARM FOODPRINTS PROGRAM

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SUMMARY OF FINDINGS: Shared experiences of gardening, cooking, and eating with peers, teachers, and parents led to community building at school, greater interest and involvement in food choices at home, and a desire for a diet with more fruits and vegetables.

Positive shared experiences in FoodPrints led to students eating a greater variety of foods, especially after discovering they enjoyed many fruits and vegetables.

FoodPrints students learn about a variety of fruits and vegetables and how they are grown; learn cooking skills and recipes to prepare nutritious food; taste foods in a safe environment (with the expectation that others “don’t yuck my yum”); and learn about how to access affordable seasonal produce at farmers markets or CSAs.

- “I didn’t like salad as a kid, and I think that having to eat raw vegetables [in FoodPrints] helped me push through.” – Alumni
- “I’m definitely not as picky as I was before but I’m still picky, but **it’s definitely helping me to try new foods** that I definitely would not have tried.” – Current
- “You get to keep the recipes and so you can make them at home and ... **learning how to make food is really fun.**” – Current
- “I always feel better when I go for something **fresher with vegetables**, but...I feel like also...like ‘everything in moderation.’ I feel like I eat a little bit of everything.” – Alumni
- “The day you have FoodPrints, **come in with an open mind** because...sometimes you don’t know what it is, but also sometimes...you don’t think you’ll like it, but you actually end up loving it. So you gotta have an open mind.” – Current
- “...**learning to try things**, especially me being more of a picky eater - that was a big thing. When we would sit down at the end and it was like, OK... you don’t have to eat the whole thing, but... try it and it’s okay if you don’t like it. It was like **branching out and then discovering, ‘Oh, I actually like this thing that I would never have thought I would have liked,’** you know?” – Alumni



FoodPrints students have greater interest and involvement in food choice at home, even years after participating in the program.

In FoodPrints, students engage in critical thinking and discussion on topics including activism and food justice; understand and appreciate connections between plant science and food; cook and eat nutritious, homemade food that is delicious and replicable at home. Parents join in FoodPrints classes or school events and learn about do-able, nutritious, affordable recipes to make at home.

- "I think that because we started doing FoodPrints at such a young age... **it's kind of been ingrained into me**, like the type of foods that you want to be and should be eating, foods that are good for you and having a well-balanced plate." – Alumni
- "A lot of times me and my brother ask my mom to make FoodPrints recipes, and **we all help her make it in the kitchen. It's fun.**" – Current
- "I think that **that same excitement and joy that came from FoodPrints kind of has carried over into the way that I'm able to enjoy cooking now...** the prepping a meal, chopping up vegetables, those basic things. Learning those skills at early age and making it fun and interesting, I think was really important." – Alumni
- "I would be interested in FoodPrints teachers showing us how we could **[buy food on a budget] in a way that is practical and also best for my body.**" – Alumni

- **"It changed my ability to cook.** Because now, I come home and **my mom trusts me** without burning anything." – Current



FoodPrints provides unique opportunities to build community in school, which current and alumni students believe is an important part of the experience.

In FoodPrints, everyone who has prepared a meal or snack together takes the first bite together and eats together. Students try new foods and new skills with supportive peers and adults; learn to appreciate one's own and others' food histories and stories; discuss meaningful topics with peers such as environmental science and activism; and do real work together (caring for a garden, making food justice campaigns, and more).

- "Being able to **collaborate with other peers**, you know, with being able to, you know, work towards something that you're all going to eat...is good" – Alumni
- "I think the really important key part of it is **everyone... remembers it fondly**, you know, it was a very good experience for all of us, and I think that they should continue to make it that way." – Alumni
- "The thing that I love about FoodPrints is that we get to **make everything together**, not just one person by themselves." – Current
- **"You just really enjoy getting to work together."** – Current



Experiences of gardening, cooking, and eating with peers, teachers, and parent chaperones are memorable and meaningful.

In FoodPrints, students use real cooking equipment and recipes to prepare nutritious meals and real gardening equipment in large school gardens to cultivate and harvest crops—to learn real, life-long skills related to cooking and gardening.

GARDENING

- “I remember planting the Easter egg radishes and then when we pulled them up and that was really one of the things **that was very farm-to-table, we saw every aspect of it.** And I remember when we uprooted them, that was really exciting.” – Alumni

Background

FRESHFARM engaged with researchers from the George Washington University Milken Institute School of Public Health (GW) to conduct a series of focus groups in Spring 2022 with 78 current and former FoodPrints students. The goals of the focus groups were to gain a deeper understanding of how the participants themselves perceive and contextualize their FoodPrints experience and to investigate the most salient and enduring aspects of the program. Focus groups engaged 39 current FoodPrints participants in third and fifth grades across three DC public elementary schools and 39 FoodPrints alumni in middle school, high school, and post-high school. This focus group research provided preliminary findings on which we hope to build a larger research study to more comprehensively examine the impact of the FoodPrints program on students, families, and the community. For more information about FoodPrints, please contact Jennifer Mampara (jenn@freshfarm.org). For more information on this research, please contact Christine St. Pierre (cstpierre@gwmail.gwu.edu).

- “We helped put dirt in the garden, which was like, really fun because **you got to actually ... get [food] fresh from the garden.**” – Current

COOKING

- “I think most people kind of...we hadn't really been able to take the reins per se in the kitchen because we were kids, so it was kind of the first chance. It was like, ‘oh, **I can actually, do this myself?!’**” – Alumni
- “[FoodPrints] really helped you be independent because as you went on in grades, they gave you less and less support and help, eased you into being able to do it yourself. So it's not only teaching, **it's teaching you to be independent in cooking for yourself.**” – Alumni

EATING

- “I think a lot of parents...**had positive experiences seeing different kinds of food** that they were making there with their kids. And then they brought it home to their families.” – Alumni
- “**I love eating the food. I love making the food.** I love knowing what food we're making...I feel good knowing what we're doing then it feels like, ‘Hey, I'm excited to try this and I'm excited to do this.’ It makes me a bit more excited.” – Current