

"Teaching the Harvest: How to Start and Sustain Food-Based Education in Your Community."

*A research project in its formative stages,
now looking for ideas, suggestions, and input.*

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On farms, schoolyards, and urban plots everywhere, educators of all stripes are building a movement to reconnect our society with the origins of its food. While it takes many forms in adaptation to the needs of many communities, this "food-based education" generally fits into four categories:

- Working farms, both private and not-for-profit, who develop educational programs for the general public.
- Schools and universities that develop gardens and farms for educational purposes.
- Community garden projects in urban areas that practice outreach as a critical part of their missions.
- Stewards of open space, such as land trusts and municipal conservation commissions, who seek to add value and public outreach to their holdings.

Responding to a deep societal need for reconnection, food-based education has grown by leaps and bounds over the last few years. For instance, in the Northeast, the number of farms running educational programs has grown from 29 to 136 in the past thirteen years! School gardens are enjoying similar growth as the formal education community jumps in. And urban farming initiatives such as the Food Project in Boston have grown so successful that they are spawning similar projects in nearby cities.

The Knowledge Gap

But as they share a common mission, so too do food-based educators face common problems. Responding to the needs of their particular communities, many food-based educators have developed their programs in isolation from each other. The result is that many of the best intended programs have stumbled on the nuts and bolts of

implementation. Developing food-based education means integrating the need of many stakeholders, including farmers, educators, administrative staff, board members or business owners, schools, parents, and children. This is a complex process, fraught with potential conflicts and pitfalls. In addition, when financial matters are not attended to, the best programs can run out of money.

My proposed book, *Teaching the Harvest: How to Start & Sustain Food-Based Education in Your Community*, will plug that knowledge gap. I propose to write a pragmatic resource manual to provide educators, farmers, and concerned citizens of all stripes with the knowledge they'll need to get food-based education up and running. Drawing on practical examples gleaned from those in the field practicing, the book will address the following topics:

- Building a diverse core group of stakeholders to sustain the vision.
- Understanding the needs of your community and developing the right programs to match them.
- Integrating curriculum with farmwork and the rhythm of agricultural seasons.
- Securing access to land
- Funding and finances
- Staffing

Scads of literature has already been written on potential curriculum for farm education – the library at our Farm is full of it. Likewise for books on gardening with kids. While I will reference these materials, I don't intend to recreate them. Instead, I will maintain focus on the practical implementation of food-based education – what's working, what isn't, and why. I will do this by collecting survey and interview data from farms and schools across the country, and weaving this information with clarifying text.

Your ideas and input needed!

This project is still very much in its formative stages. I am committed to seeing it through. I have one publisher interested in it and am actively soliciting interest from others. If there is anyone who like to contribute any input, experiences or suggestions for this project, please let me know. My email address is beach.jed@gmail.com.

Sincerely,

Jed Beach