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Middletown FFA uses \$2,500 grant in community garden

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MIDDLETOWN -- A \$2,500 Future Farmers of America grant awarded to the Middletown High School FFA has blossomed into a garden project designed to help fight hunger in the community.

Middletown FFA, the largest in Maryland with approximately 100 members, is one of two chapters in the Free State to receive the new FFA Food For All grant that supports year-long service-learning projects. The grant develops and implements sustainable agriculture education programs while helping fight hunger.

The local FFA collaborated with Seeds of Life Nurseries -- a Community Supported Agriculture program managed by local landscaper Michael Dickson -- to grow fruits and vegetables for needy people on 10 acres.

"We decided to apply for the grant because Mike Dickson was already working on this project, and we were able to help make it bigger," said Sarah Shriner, Middletown High School agricultural educator and FFA adviser.

To date, the project has produced more than 40,000 pounds of produce and assisted 55 local families.

FFA members helped plant potatoes, onions, kale and lettuce, and weed the crop rows. This fall the students will help to harvest the crops and maintain the acreage.

"We also built a chicken coop and will be filling it with chickens shortly," Shriner said.

The project has been successful so far, Shriner said.

"We use as many people as possible and have had as few as four, and as many as 20 in a workday," Shriner said. "This is a fun, hands-on way to extend the classroom into the community, and I am very proud of the students."

The students have shown enthusiasm for the project, said Dickson, who works with other groups to tend to the land.

Shriner wants to see the project continue and include additional FFA chapters and Middletown student organizations, even without grant funding.

"We can continue to support the project through labor if we do not receive a future grant," Shriner said. "We would love to see it grow in the future."

Middletown High School Principal Denise Fargo-Devine is proud of her students.

"Any time we can get students and young people involved in community service, it has a positive impact on community and on those who serve," Fargo-Devine said. "The impact carries throughout life."

The FFA students involved with the project have shown contagious enthusiasm and have ideas to expand the project, Fargo-Devine said.

View additional photos:  



Photo by courtesyPhoto

Students shown building the chicken coop, from front to back, left, are Laci Daly, Roni Giles and Skylar Weddle; and on the right is Amber Keeney.

"They are excited, and that makes me excited; I am so proud of our Middletown High School students," the principal said.

Middletown FFA reporter Emily White said the chapter "not only tries to help the less fortunate, we also try to educate those that don't know about the everyday struggles right in their own county, let alone their hometown."

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