

# Snowballing Sustainability through Schools

## Skilling Students to Grow Food

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**W**EAVING sustainability in different aspects of school life is an impactful way to address our current environmental issues. It involves acceptance of the issue and designing the measures to be adopted. Schools can be very instrumental in making children learn and adopt sustainable lifestyles. The school garden is where students are taught to grow and nurture fruits, vegetables and flowers. Teaching sustainability through setting up school gardens helps encourage environment stewardship in students. They are able to understand the intricate relationship between food, well-being, nutrition, clean farming methodology, soil and water health, economy, and happiness index.

School garden is not a new concept. The earliest reported was from the US, which dates back to the early 1900s. Miller (1904) published a manual on cooperative gardening for school children. It encouraged children to become producers from consumers. The manual listed all the techniques to raise the plant. In 1906, the USDA ascertained the number of schools with gardens to be 75000. The review of such schools indicated that the main objective of setting up such gardens was educational, touching various aspects of their lives.

### Snowballing Impact of School Garden

School gardens have a multi-dimensional and multi-stakeholder impact. It influences different facets of student's lives and has a multiplier effect on different community segments. Following impact is observed or envisaged:

- Homes and schools are 'microsystems' which are highly instrumental in developing lifelong relationship of children towards food. Worldwide, school gardens are considered

as public health intervention systems. A study conducted by Wells *et al.* 2023 studied the impact of school gardens on the consumption of Fruits and Vegetables (FV) by students of elementary school. They conducted pre- and post-analysis of the lunches eaten by students before the garden started and at three intervals after setting the same. The study revealed a mixed response. However, it showed a modest impact on fruit consumption vis-à-vis vegetables. Setting up vegetable gardens pushes children to upward FV consumption. School gardens empower children to become informed eaters by having healthy food choices as children would govern production world-over. It also ensures food and nutritional security by empowering school children with the necessary farming skills. Food choices expose children to the challenges farmers face in the wake of climate change, as well as existing technologies and future scenarios.

- School gardens/community gardens also act as detox for children from gadgets as they help in their emotional and physical well-being. Spending time outdoors doing physical activity has become a thing of the past. With increased digital connectivity, most children are hooked on to online resources and refrain from spending time outdoors. This is also leading to a high incidence of obesity and other lifestyle diseases due to lack of physical activity, high consumption of comfort processed food and nutritional deficiencies, including vitamin D. Gardening involves physical labour, which helps control excessive body weight. Through school gardens, students are nudged towards healthier eating habits. Such outdoor activities also stimulate five senses, which is not possible indoors.
- School/community garden is a community activity. Hence, it brings people together and builds camaraderie and happy communities. Most of the school garden programmes also involve parent-teacher fraternity and thus provide intergenerational learning opportunities. Taking this initiative beyond children to parents, teachers and other members of the community would help garner support for sustainability issues and ensure sustainability of the initiative. Influencing or mobilising their local community also instils leadership qualities and good articulation skills in children.
- School gardens provide experiential learning to students and have a lifetime impact. Experiences gained through