

Education In Our Community

Agriculture Takes Root In Classrooms

(NAPSA)—Teaching budding minds about agriculture may help cultivate a lifelong love of learning. That's the idea behind a national initiative geared toward bringing agricultural education into the classroom.

The program, called Agriculture in the Classroom (AITC), has grown popular with educators across the country. Its supporters say learning about farming and science not only provides easy-to-understand examples of how botany, biology and chemistry affect our lives, it also helps spark an intellectual curiosity in kids. Students involved in AITC are encouraged to consider where food and fiber comes from and what goes into producing it.

"As Americans are further removed from the farm and production agriculture, we need to show them that food comes from farms, not from their local store," says Kevin Daugherty, Education Manager, Illinois Farm Bureau.

AITC dates back to 1981, when the USDA established the initiative. The program is run in every U.S. territory and state, and state organizations decide on the most appropriate way to bring AITC into communities. In New York state, for example, the AITC program awards grants to create Kids Growing Food gardens at schools.

"We use the garden not only for our math and science classes, but other classes, too. The art teacher is creating a garden mural. Another teacher built us a wooden structure to hold our growing number of planted containers," says Felloy Gallanis, Science Coordinator at P.S. 60 in Brooklyn.



Educators say teaching students about agriculture is a smart idea.

Experts say the strength of AITC comes from its grassroots organizations and the fact that educators are deeply involved in the movement.

In some cases, AITC is run by an all-volunteer network that provides teacher education and materials distribution. States have also formed educational nonprofit organizations to push the initiative forward.

Contributions and corporate gifts help AITC thrive as well. For instance, agricultural biotechnology company Monsanto recently donated a \$50,000 gift to help fund AITC initiatives. The money will be used to finance three projects per year through 2007.

"The education efforts undertaken by AITC state programs are as important as they have ever been," says Kerry Preete of Monsanto. "Science education is fundamental to fully appreciate the contribution agriculture makes in our society and we believe AITC is committed to educating the next generation of consumers and opinion leaders about this issue."

For more information, visit www.agclassroom.org/consortium/ace.htm.