

Title

GemüseAckerdemie (Vegetable Academy, Acker meaning field)

Short description

Children seem to have lost their contact to nature and therefore show a fundamental lack of knowledge about their food's origin. The GemüseAckerdemie, meaning Vegetable Academy, aims to re-establish this lost contact and knowledge between children and the nature. The project started as a pilot in 2013 and since then, has expanded its operation to multiple co-operations with schools and kindergartens. The program involves training for teachers, as well as lessons for the children on the theory of growing food, followed by practical implementation of the knowledge. Children were responsible for tilling the school garden, including sowing, fostering, and harvesting. The project is meant to engage not only the children, but also their teachers and parents, who are included in the learning process and are hopefully inspired through their children's experiences. The annually conducted impact reports clearly show that the initiative has a significant impact on participants' way of thinking and acting; they feel more involved with nature and value their food more, now that they have experienced how much work it can be to grow crops. Aside from the evidence showing the Vegetable Academy's success, the acknowledgements and prizes that the project has been awarded in the last couple of years speak also to its success.

Topic

Consuming – food / Living – Green spaces

Characteristics (type, level)

Local/Regional Intervention, neighbourhood

Country/Countries of implementation

Germany

Aims and Objectives

Children are less and less aware of where the food they consume every day comes from. The education programme aims at re-establishing the relationship between children and nature. By growing organic vegetables and learning about the necessary natural processes and the workload that needs to be put into seeding and harvesting, food should be more valued. Through that, a healthier diet is promoted and food waste should be reduced. Additionally, little green spaces are created close to the schools or day-care centres.

Target Group

Intergenerational learning is an aim of the project. Even though children in day care centres and schools are in the focus, all generations (teachers, parents, experts...) are included in the concept and teach one another. Besides the children, kindergarten and school teachers are the core target groups.

Status

Ongoing

Start and Completion dates

2014-today

Lifestyle and Behavior Change

Learning where food comes from, how it is grown, and how much effort and knowledge must be put into it creates an awareness of the toil it takes until we can buy supplies in the supermarket and with that, more appreciation and awareness for what we eat are created. In the best case (and very likely) scenario, children who participated in the program will develop a new view on the food they eat and, depending on their diet, realise how unhealthy and artificial their food is/was. The program motivates the children to also grow their own food at home, to eat more vegetables and to waste less food. It is more than likely that these insights lead to a rethink and a lasting behaviour change.

Effects on:

Health and Wellbeing	Especially to children and youths, the project will show how tasty self-grown fruits and vegetables – or fruits and vegetables in general – can be. By that, a healthy diet is strongly supported and in the long run, obesity and diabetes can be reduced by teaching children about what they eat and what their food contains. The feedback showed that children participating in the program eat more vegetables. The fact that the project produces the food in organic standards supports these impacts. Also, the children spend more time outside and with physical activity due to the project.
Vulnerable populations	Children all work together in the program, giving them social competencies. It can be seen that children who might not be performing well in the classroom are very good in gardening. With this, certain social mechanisms within the groups of children are redefined.
Environment	As the project is supposed to teach valuing food it is likely that people taking part in it will take better care of what they buy and also pay more attention to how much they throw away. Children also develop an understanding on which vegetables are in season and grow in the region. It may also occur that families start growing their own vegetables and therefore avoid buying food from supermarkets. Apart from that, more green spaces are created in cities, enhancing the urban climate. Additionally, one part of the supporting education material that is

	<p>taught to the children as part of the program, is about the global value chains of food and their environmental impacts. Here, a solid basis for a deep understanding of these issues is created.</p>
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Initiated and/or implemented by

The practice was initiated by Christoph Schmitz who grew up on a farm and realized that children nowadays show little value for food and a healthy nutrition. He wanted to change that, so he initiated a project to bring children closer to nature again.

Stakeholders and sectors involved

- Schools and Teachers, who carry out the program in the schools
- Day care centres and Kindergarten teachers, who carry out the program in the day cares
- Mentors – volunteers like students, parents or retired people – who support one of the gardens with external expertise

Financial support

- The German ministry of food and agriculture as well as the Brandenburg ministry of rural development, environment and agriculture and the Berlin senate administration of justice, consumer protection and anti-discrimination
- Several foundations (Stiftung Umwelt und Entwicklung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Software AG Stiftung, Deutsche Bank Stiftung, Heidehof Stiftung GmbH, Joachim Herz Stiftung, PwC-Stiftung im Stifterverband für die Deutsche Wissenschaft)
- ALDI S&D & Auridis
- Willi-Böhrmer Verpackung & Vertrieb GmbH & Co KG
- Rheinischer Landwirtschaftsverlag
- Meininger Hotel Group
- Brandenburger Landwaren (Hasan Kurtulan)

Evidence-base

Every day food is wasted in great amounts. About a third of all food products is thrown away, around 1.3 billion tons. In Germany, 30-40% of food is wasted, half of that being fruits and vegetables. Most of that food waste is created in private households: around 58% of consumers throw out foodstuff on a regular basis. Food is not sufficiently valued nowadays, leading to people buying too much and throwing away a significant share of their purchase. This not only has severe impacts on the environment and society – our wasteful and disrespectful eating culture apparently has negative impacts on our health, too. The number of children suffering from overweight, already at a young age, is continually rising and already reached 20% in Germany. This can be explained through a combination of malnutrition and lack of exercise. Children don't know or have wrong information about food and health, leading to unhealthy eating habits, which in turn lead to overweight and diseases related to that. (Source: Impact Report 2016)

Main activities

The program includes a theoretical part where children are being taught about nature and how things are grown, and a practical part where they actually grow things in the school garden. For this, dedicated education materials are available for the different age groups, which fit into the German education system.

For the practical part, gardens are created close to the schools and day cares, where small teams work on 25 different types of vegetables. In some cases, the children also promote and sell what they harvest, to additionally practice economic skills.

The concept of “learning by doing” is very central in order to implement the knowledge. By that, theoretical and practical learning processes are combined to achieve the best learning outcomes.

Usually, half of the costs related to running the program in schools or day cares is covered by them, the other half by GemöseAckerdemie.

Evaluation

The project leaders themselves conduct studies in order to evaluate the success of their project on a yearly basis since 2014 and see if any adjustments are necessary.

Main results

The feedback from parents, teachers and children was mostly positive. For the biggest part, children showed positive learning outcomes with regard to where vegetables and fruits come from and how exactly they are grown. They showed an overall high motivation to keep on being involved in the practice and also growing their own vegetable at home. Also, a rise in valuing food and visible behaviour change were observed. Furthermore, the children’s behaviour seemed to influence their parents as well: on the parent’s side, a sensitizing effect was visible – many also intended to start growing their own food (if possible), try out new vegetables and recipes and paid more attention to what where food comes from and how it was produced.

Key success factors and barriers

Success factors: The needs of the target groups were well known to the funders of the project and could be well addressed by the concept. The concept was developed and tested with one school before starting the upscaling process. During that first year, the GemöseAckerdemie team took part in all steps implemented by the school and kept improving the concept accordingly. The team working on the project is also interdisciplinary.

Barriers: No real barriers were encountered.

INHERIT Perspective

This project has been chosen for inclusion due to its potential benefits for health, wellbeing and health equity. Children learn about healthy food and nutrition and how to cultivate food. The feedback received from children and their parents demonstrates that it positively influences their eating habits. At the same time, the intervention improves the school/day-care environment by creating new green spaces. It also enables behaviour change by teaching children the capabilities for growing their own food, gives them the opportunity by physically installing the gardens and provides motivation by making it a fun part of the classes in school.

More information

GemüseAckerdemie web page: <http://www.gemüseackerdemie.de>

Impact report 2016:

http://www.gemüseackerdemie.de/fileadmin/content/pdf/Wirkungsberichte/GA_Wirkungsbericht_2016.pdf

Contact

Christoph Schmitz, info@ackerdemia.de