

FARM & FOOD TEEN TRAINING PROGRAM EVALUATION

2018 Report

rural resources



connecting farms, food, & families

Report Prepared By:



**RURAL
SUPPORT
PARTNERS**

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Executive Summary

Purpose of the Evaluation Report

The purpose of this evaluation is to identify what the Farm & Food Teen Training Program has done well, ways in which the program can improve, and to understand the impacts the program has on the teens, their families and the community.

Evaluation Summary

The Farm and Food Teen Training Program was developed in 2008 as a response to the need to keep our connection to food and farming. The program envisions a hopeful generation of young people who have ties to the land and food and a personal vision for their own well-being and that of the community.

In 2017 and 2018, the program enrolled 44 and 49 teens respectively in gardening, cooking, and business plan development classes. Following an evaluation process that gathered quantitative and qualitative data, this report summarizes the impact and effectiveness of the program in the following three areas:

What Was Accomplished?

- Classes held: 192, or 507 class hours
- Total weight of food produced: 5,562 lbs.
- New home gardens since 2017: 15
- Pork sold: \$374, or 77lbs.
- Meals catered by teens: 9

How Well Was It Done?

- Teens feel safe at Rural Resources - both physically and safe to be themselves.
- Teens and parents were highly pleased with how the program is run.

What Has Changed?

- Increased skills and knowledge in gardening, cooking, and business plan development.
 - Teens enroll in the program because they're excited to learn skills.
 - Teens learn how hard work pays off.
 - Teens' confidence grew as a result of the program as did their grades in school.
- Increased leadership, teamwork, and communication skills.
 - Teens understand the importance of respecting others.
 - Good communication skills help teens practice respect and teamwork.
 - Teens come out of their shell and make friends more easily.
 - Parents see their teens growing into good leaders and team players.
 - Alumni continue to use and benefit from their leadership and communication skills.
- Increased food security and healthier eating habits.
 - Teens exhibit independence in the kitchen.
 - Teens understand and feel the positive impacts of a healthy diet on their well-being.
 - Parents are grateful for the increased food security and help in the garden.
 - Alumni have continued to make good decisions about what they eat.
- Increased career aspirations and opportunities.
 - Teens have more purpose and direction.
 - Teens are confident that their skills make them more employable.
 - Parents see their teens mature and aspire to go to college or run businesses.
 - Business and social skills helped a number of alumni get jobs.
 - Alumni understand how essential it is to work well with coworkers and clients/customers.

Farm & Food Teen Training Program Overview

Rural Resources is a 25-year-old nonprofit committed to celebrating the agricultural heritage of East Tennessee, connecting youth and families to where their food comes from, and promoting the health and well-being of the community it serves. Since 2008, Rural Resources has run the FFTT Program with a vision for a hopeful generation of young people who have ties to the land and food and a personal vision for their own well-being and that of the community.

The Farm & Food Teen Training (FFTT) Program targets economically at-risk teens and teaches key concepts related to every stage of the farm-to-table process, as well as critical business skills, in a four or five-year comprehensive educational experience. Cohorts of teens participate in a multi-year program, which begins with learning to grow vegetables and raise small livestock at the Rural Resources Farm. In year two, teens train with local chefs to learn cooking skills and gain catering experience. Finally, in years three and four, Rural Resources supports the teens to choose and develop a farm- or food-related business where they learn business planning, organization, and leadership skills. Once teens complete the four years of training, they have an opportunity to intern at Rural Resources, with a local farmer, or chef in the community. Throughout the entire program, teens earn a modest sum of money from their work on the farm, catering, and implementing their business plans.



Evaluation Methodology

The purpose of this evaluation is to identify what the Farm & Food Teen Training Program has done well, ways in which the program can improve, and to understand the impacts the program has on the teens, their families and the community. Using data collected from both quantitative and qualitative methods, this report presents findings in four areas:

- What was accomplished?
- How well was it done?
- What has changed?
- What could be improved?

The 2017-2018 evaluation was conducted with teens, parents, and alumni of the Farm & Food Teen Training Program. On December 8, 2018 the moderator from Rural Support Partners held focus groups with four groups of teens and one group of parents. At each focus group, each attendee completed a written questionnaire. In total, 22 teens and two parents attended the sessions. Fewer parents than expected attended the focus group due to inclement weather during the evening of the focus group. As a result, the evaluator asked parents to complete an online survey; two additional parents completed it. The participants in the focus groups and online survey respondents represented teens and parents that are currently active in the program.

Each group completed a short survey before participating in a semi-structured focus group conversation. Focus group conversations were taped, after the moderator explained that the tapes would be kept confidential and secured verbal permission from all participants. Participants were given the opportunity to ask questions about the purpose, structure, and context of the evaluation. Each focus group lasted between 30 and 45 minutes.

The evaluator had also planned to hold a focus group with alumni on December 11, 2018, however no alumni made it to the dinner, possibly due to the time of year and work schedules. The alumni were given the opportunity to complete an online survey that included open-ended questions; five individuals did so

This report was created from compiled survey data and multiple reviews of the audio files. The moderator synthesized the audio files from each conversation, highlighting themes that developed across the groups and identifying specific statements and examples provided by participants. All images in this report are used with permission from the participants.

Results & Discussion

What Was Accomplished?

Over the past two years, the FFTT Program carried out the following activities and accomplishments.

- In 2017 and 2018 respectively, 44 and 49 teens enrolled.
- In 2017, 91 classes, or 240 class hours, were given, worth 1,240 individual training hours.
- In 2018, 101 classes, or 267 class hours, were given, worth 1,557 individual training hours.
- Total weight of food produced over two years at Rural Resources and home gardens: 5,562 lbs.
- Fifteen new home gardens since 2017.
- In 2017, \$374 worth of pork sold, or 77lbs.
- Two interns served a total of 140 hours – one at Rural Resources, and one at Julie Ibanez Alpaca Farm.
- Teens catered four meals in 2017 and five meals in 2018.
- Teens served thanksgiving dinner at Plaza Towers, a retirement home in Greeneville, TN.
- Community demonstrations held each year on food preservation, cooking, and container gardening.
- One trip to Berea College and one teen retreat held each year.

How Well Was It Done?

This section presents an assessment of how satisfied teens and parents were with the FFTT Program overall and the individuals who carry out program components.

Teens feel safe at Rural Resources. Teens feel respected by all the people they come into contact with through the FFTT Program. In each focus group with the teens, participants remarked at how safe they feel at Rural Resources – both physically and safe to be themselves with no fear of teasing.

Teens and parents were very pleased with how the program is run. On a five-point scale where one was “very dissatisfied” and five was “very satisfied,” teen responses averaged between 4.73 and 4.95 out of five. Parents were overwhelmingly in agreement that they were very satisfied with nearly everyone their teen encounters in the program.

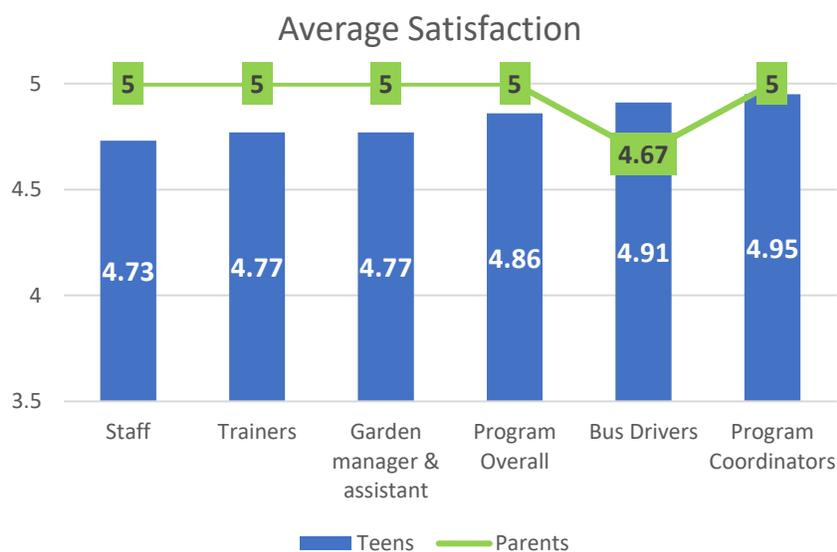


Figure 1: The questionnaire, taken by 22 teens and four parents, assessed respondents' level of satisfaction with the overall program and people with whom the teens worked; this graph displays their responses.

What Has Changed?

In the questionnaires and focus groups, questions prompted discussion on how confident current and former teens are in the skills taught through the program, whether they exhibit leadership skills and independence, what has changed as a result of the program, and how the program impacts the larger community. Parents responded from their perspective seeing their child grow as a result of being in the program. When the questionnaire and focus group responses were synthesized, the following five results emerged, and are unpacked on the next several pages:

- Increased skills and knowledge related to content areas
- Increased leadership, teamwork, and social skills
- Increased food security and healthier eating habits
- Increased career aspiration and opportunities
- Benefits extend to community

Increased Skills and Knowledge Related to Content Areas

Teens feel more confident doing the activities they learned about in the program and their parents see their confidence and independence grow. Overall, the skills they learned helped them develop a deeper understanding of what it takes to grow, cook, and sell a value-added product.

Teens keep enrolling in the program because they are excited about the skills they learn. Teens cited that learning new skills is among the top two reasons why they joined the program in the first place and why they keep coming back (the other reason they cited was the friendships they've made). One teen eloquently summed it up: “Ever since coming to Rural Resources, I've made all my friends here. It's the perfect way for kids to get to learn how to garden, how to cook, how to cater, how to do businesses, and all the things you might need in life. But more importantly to learn and make new friends.” Additionally, a parent shared that reading recipes and measuring food has helped with her teen's dyslexia.



Teens learn how hard work pays off. The way the program gets teens to learn by doing has shown them what is possible when they put in the work. The teens indicated that they actually enjoy working hard because they see the tangible results growing in the garden, cooked in the kitchen, or sold to the community.

Teens' confidence grew as a result of the program. Confidence grew in teens' ability to manage money, grow vegetables, cook with fresh produce, perform business skills, and care for livestock. On a four-point scale where four means "very confident" and one means "not at all confident," the figure two shows the average confidence that the teens rated themselves to

have, and that parents noted seeing in their teens. The average overall confidence rating from both teens and parents was 3.63 out of four.

Teens report making better grades thanks to the program. Thirteen out of 22 teens reported improvements in their school grades. On average, of those 13 teens, grades have gone up by 1.5 letter grades.

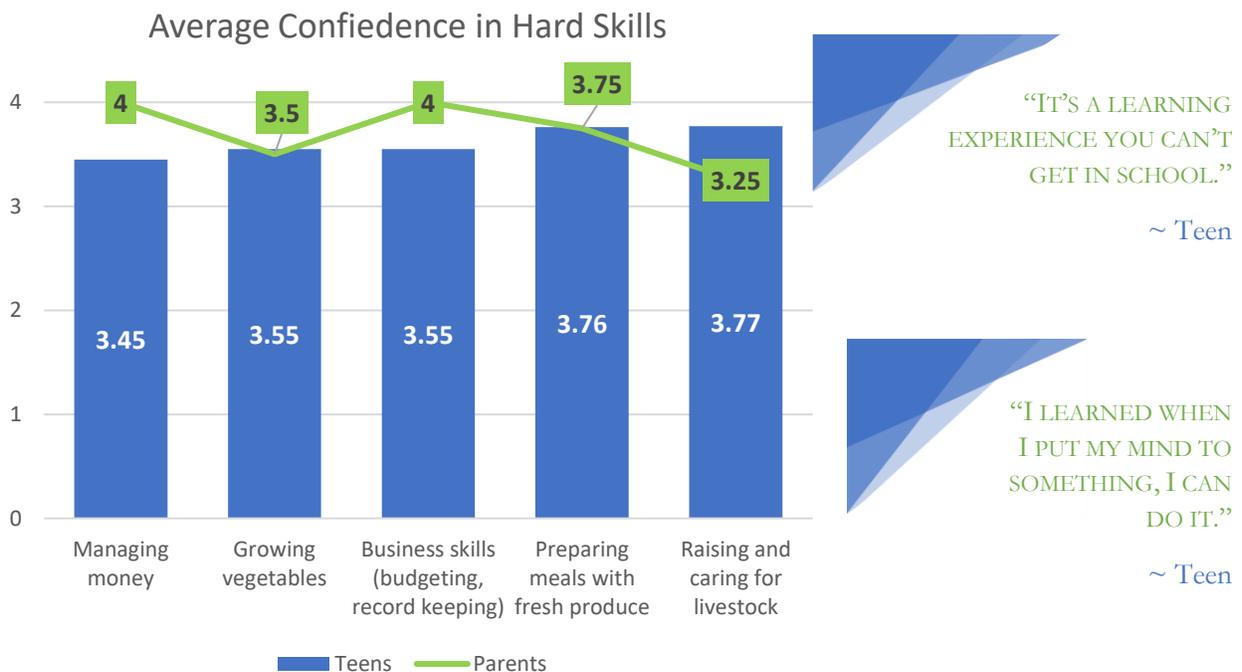


Figure 2

Increased Leadership, Teamwork, and Communication Skills

The FFTT Program teaches the sort of leadership skills that come necessarily from working together on shared goals. As a result, teens reported having more confidence in their communication skills, teaching what they've learned, being a leader, and using what they've learned in the to get a job someday. They often described a turnaround from being a formerly disrespectful or shy child to someone who shows others respect despite differences of opinion or who began feeling comfortable to put oneself out there.

Teens

Teens understand the importance of respecting others.

Each teen focus group shared how respect is a critical theme in their growth in leadership, teamwork, and communication skills. Some described that the trainers, staff and coordinators at Rural Resources stop any disrespectful behavior by teaching empathy and showing how words can be hurtful; those teens now speak of how important it is to respect people and be a good team player.

Good communication skills help teens practice respect and teamwork.

Teens learned communication skills that had them work better in teams to listen actively, respect team members' ideas, and come to solutions together. Figure 3 shows teens feeling more than likely (3.62 out of four, where four is "very likely") to work well in a team.

The program helped a number of teens come out of their shell and make friends that they otherwise would not have made.

One teen shared that the program helped her get over anxiety and depression after she moved to the area; another teen shared how she became more comfortable talking to new people thanks to an increase in her overall confidence.

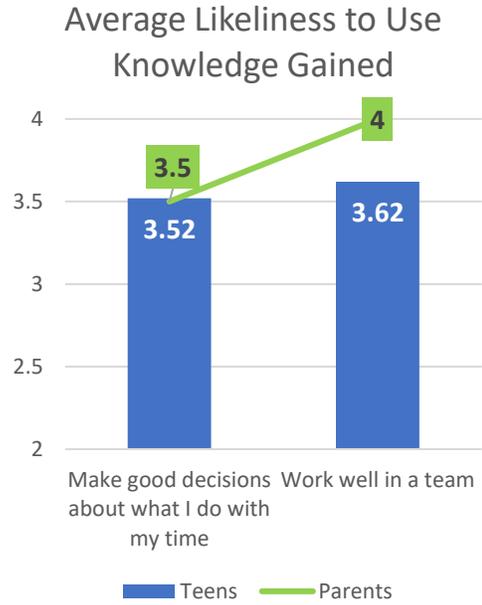


Figure 3

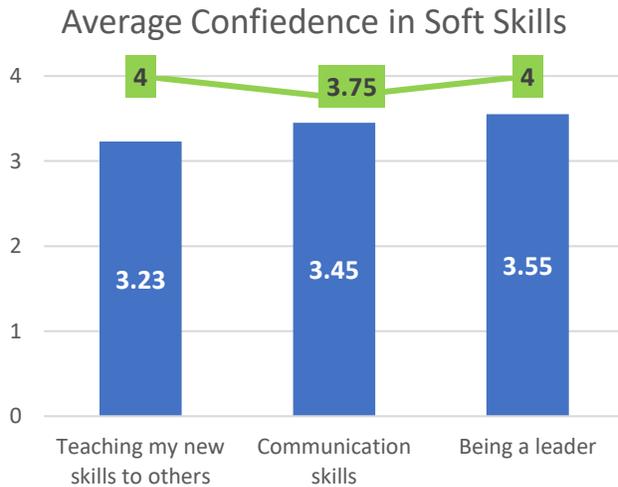


Figure 4

siblings. One parent shared how her teen loves to share what she learned at Rural Resources with her brother. Yet another parent shared that she sees her teen have more self-worth as a result of growing these leadership skills through the program.

Parents

Parents see their teens growing into good leaders and team players.

Parents saw an even higher increase in confidence around leadership, teamwork, and communication skills than the teens, rating 3.93 out of four overall, where four is "very confident." Likewise, according to figure 3, above, parents thought their teens were more likely to put their knowledge to good use than their teens did. One of the parents in the focus group noted how her daughter had never been a team player before the program, but has turned a corner since she joined to listen to and appreciate what other people can bring to a team or group. Parents, in both the focus group and open-ended survey questions described seeing their teen having more independence and showing leadership with their

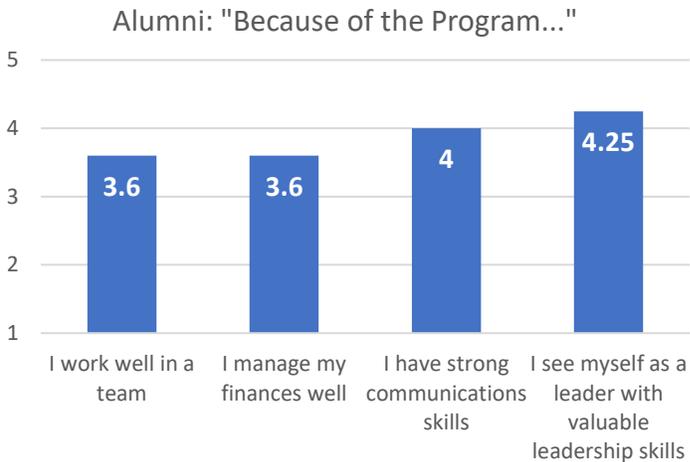


Figure 5

Alumni:

Alumni continue to use and benefit from the leadership and communication skills learned in the program. For the five alumni who completed the survey, their average agreement rating regarding life skills was 3.92 out of five, where five means “strongly agree.” Specific skills are detailed in figure 5. One teen elaborated on how she uses her leadership skills: *“I have gained great leadership skills to be able to take the initiative, to be a team player and to be able to be trusted to look after important things.”* Another teen shared that the program gave him the *“ability to listen to a group and develop plans based on group input.”*

Increased Food Security and Healthier Eating Habits

Current and past participants and parents spoke of improved food security and healthier eating habits as a result of understanding where different foods come from. Since 2015, the program has also built 15 new gardens in teens’ households, which has been especially impactful to encourage continued application of their skills and engage the whole family.

Teens

Teens exhibit independence in the kitchen. Instead of relying solely on parents for their meals and snacks, teens feel motivated to use what they’ve learned and get in the kitchen to cook meals for their families at home. Recall in Figure 2 that teens were fairly highly confident in their skills to prepare meals with fresh.

Teens understand and feel the positive impacts of a healthy diet on their well-being. One teen with an eating disorder finally understood the problems she was experiencing were because she wasn’t getting enough food. A number of teens expressed how much better they feel when they make good decisions about what they eat and they appreciate being able to recognize highly processed foods and how they can be unhealthy options. Additionally, the program helps give teens a variety of ideas on how to cook or prepare the produce in ways that they enjoy. *“If there’s a vegetable we don’t like, they give us ideas of new ways to cook it so we might like it more.”*

Parents

Parents are grateful for the increased food security and help in the garden. Not only do the staff and trainers teach the teens about gardening, but they also develop good relationships with the parents who glean helpful tips on how to improve yield in their home gardens. When asked how the program has increased their food security, one of the parents responded, *“By 10-fold! We freeze things now, and I garden much more. We live on food stamps so growing our own food and freezing it for over the winter is big for us.”*

Alumni

The FFTT Program still helps Alumni make good decisions about what they eat. According to the survey, alumni averaged a rating of 4.2 out of five, where five is strongly agree). The alumni were also asked a series of questions about their habits growing and using produce in their lives now. In general, they have incorporated the healthy eating habits they learned:

- Two out of five alumni reported growing their own vegetables.
- All five prepare their own meals at home with fresh produce.
- Four out of five buy local produce.

Increased Career Aspirations and Opportunities

Equipped with the skills, confidence, and leadership abilities learned at Rural Resources, teens are more motivated to choose jobs, colleges, and career paths that suit their skills and aspirations. Whether they intend to pursue a career in food, farming, or an unrelated path, teens, their parents, and alumni understand the value of having the skills that attract employers, like good customer service, communication, and leadership.

Teens

Teens have more purpose and direction. For some teens, they already knew that they wanted to work on a farm or in the culinary industry, and the FFTT Program launched them further down that path. For others, the program helped open up a world of possibilities in the food and farming sectors or in another sector altogether.

Teens are confident that their skills make them more employable. Several teens cited that the soft skills they were learning helped them get and keep their jobs by exhibiting behaviors like being on time, following directions, and providing good customer service. As shown in figure 6, most of the teens strongly agreed that the skills they've learned will help them get a job. Likewise, they think about possibilities of what they'll do after high school because of the FFTT Program.

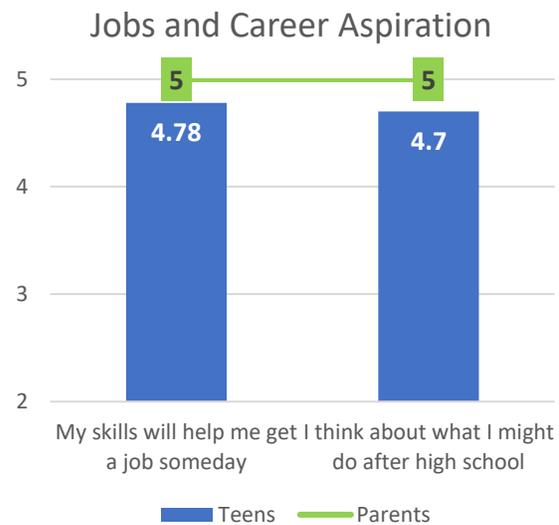


Figure 6

Parents

Parents see their teens mature and aspire to go to college or run businesses. Thanks to their external perspective, parents perceived that their children's aspirations for the future were higher than the teens. All parents indicated they "strongly agreed" that the skills their children are learning will help them get a job someday and that they think about what they will do after high school. Several notable aspirations parents described include:

- One teen now has college choices when he hadn't any previously.
- Experiencing the difference the program has made for herself, one teen dreams of running a summer camp for at-risk kids, incorporating horse therapy, animal husbandry, and farming into the program.
- Learning business skills sparked one teen's interest in running a business one day.

Alumni

Business and social skills helped a number of alumni get jobs. From resume building to budgeting, to customer service and rapport building, four out of five Alumni answered yes to the question, "did the skills you learned help you get a job?" The fifth alumni responded "maybe." One alumna credits the FFTT Program with inspiring and equipping her with the skills necessary to start her own catering business. Another shared that she was able to point to her time spent in the program as experience on her resume.

Several alumni came to realize how essential that working well with coworkers and clients/customers has been to their skillset. "It has given me amazing confidence and the drive to work hard and work well with others to accomplish my goals." Another alumna elaborated, "Without having been in the program I never would have managed to work well with people let alone do well enough to climb to my current or past positions."

Benefits Extend to the Community

During focus groups and described in survey responses, teens, parents, and alumni shared insights into the ways the Farm & Food Teen Training Program benefits the entire Greeneville community, both in the short and long term.

Short-term benefits

Activities in or for the community teach food security skills and serve people who are food insecure.

As part of the FFTT Program, teens put on community workshops or presentations where residents can learn how to garden and preserve food. They also cook and serve Thanksgiving meal at a local soup kitchen.

The FFTT Program’s artisan pizza business creates social value when they sell food that caters to dietary restrictions. Teens saw themselves providing a valuable service for people with gluten intolerance when they were the only place in the county that makes gluten-free pizza crust.

Long-term benefits

Traditions like farming and canning are passed on and preserved. Parents remarked how important it was for this generation to learn how to grow and preserve their own food, not only because it will save them money in the future, but because it sustains the traditions that dominated in Greene County generations ago. They thought it was important to celebrate that part of the region’s heritage.

The Program leaves a legacy of young people that aspire to continue giving back to the community.

A number of teens in focus groups shared how helping other people through the FFTT Program made a lasting impact on them. During the Thanksgiving meal they served at the soup kitchen, they saw first-hand how they can make a difference in the daily lives of people in Greeneville, and many teens agreed they hope to continue volunteering their time to help those in need.



“A LOT OF PEOPLE THINK OUR GENERATION IS RUINED, BUT THIS GROUP SHOWS THAT THERE ARE STILL SOME GOOD KIDS OUT THERE.”

~Teen

Teens graduate the Program as leaders. From learning teamwork and communication skills, to growing confidence and career aspirations, teens come away from the experience at Rural Resources with the type of problem-solving and collaboration-oriented leadership needed to address complex challenges of today and tomorrow. Many of the teens, in the third and fourth-year groups specifically, shared that they are more motivated to help where needed and think long-term about the future. Similarly, alumni noted that the program taught them how to think through the steps to achieve their goals.



“THEY’RE LEARNING HOW TO BE BETTER PEOPLE.”

~Parent



What Could Be Improved?

Since the last evaluation two years ago, Rural Resources has worked hard to make the changes recommended in that report. Notably, they moved into the new building at Rural Resources, where they now enjoy access to a commercial kitchen, meeting rooms, event space, and indoor bathrooms. Teens have also been able to go on more leadership retreats and field trips.

Teens and parents made new recommendations that revolve around program expansion and continuing to provide its compassionate, high-quality program operations so that it supports the development of more teens and serves the community.

- **Meet more often at Rural Resources.** Teens feel they can't get enough of their meaningful experiences at the farm. Often calling it their second home, they feel safe at Rural Resources and crave even more of the learning experience they get there.
- **Increase the program's presence in the Greene County community.** Conduct additional outreach to local organizations, businesses and schools in order to increase the number of teens learning about and joining the program and to become a more common household name in the community. Strategies could include presentations in schools or organizations about the program, partnering with a local business or a church on a shared public event, and distributing flyers to local businesses and churches about upcoming workshops and the FFTT Program.
- **Ensure trainers have the tools they need to do the foundational work to build trust and relationships among the teens in a group.** In one of the groups, the teens felt like they would have benefited from additional team building activities that would have served to improve the relationships among and respect for one another.

While expressing the highest appreciation for the Trainers, Staff, and Program Coordinator, teens and parents also see that the program needs more staff capacity for program coordination to incorporate the above recommendations. In a time of Program Coordinator transition, there is an opportunity to re-organize the coordinator role, possibly spreading the responsibilities across 1.5 or two staff to accommodate the growth in responsibilities of the role over the past several years. Like so many small nonprofits, Rural Resources staff go above and beyond the call of duty to ensure high quality and impactful programs for the people they serve. Access to adequate funding that supports programs *and* the people that make those programs happen is the single biggest barrier in most cases. In response, Rural Resources is innovating with social enterprise strategies to increase income streams through its artisan pizza business and renting out its building as event space. But they will continue to need grant dollars that recognize just how much the FFTT Program makes an impact on teens, their families, and the wider community.

Overall Impact and Conclusion

The Farm & Food Teen Training Program has operated for ten years making a difference in a community that has seen the loss of traditional industries, brain drain of educated youth, poor health of its citizens, and high unemployment. Yet, this program helps youth see and create a viable way to thrive in place.

The “learn by doing” style with which the FFTT Program operates is what grows teens into adults who have employable hard skills and the soft skills to accel, innovate, and lead. At the same time that teens learn employable skills like growing vegetables, preparing fresh produce, business development, and managing money, they learn about how to communicate well, problem-solve, and lead towards a collaborative vision. For more than a few teens, the program helped turn their life around in a positive direction. Overall, it has produced teens and young adults who are clearer about where their skills lie and more hopeful about what career path they want to pursue.

Impacts felt in teens’ families and the broader community include increased food security and a next generation of leaders equipped with the qualities needed in resilient communities. Teens bring their healthy eating habits home along with the skills to grow and cook food for their families and teach them to do the same. As the teens grow into independent adults, they can create their own jobs or take on leadership positions using the skills and values they learned in the FFTT Program. This is more than a teen development program; it is part of a long-term effort towards sustainable community revitalization.

Without the Farm & Food Teen Training Program...

- *“I would have no desire to go out and do anything”*
- *“We wouldn’t have made these friends”*
- *“I was a really depressed child –I wouldn’t speak to people, I wouldn’t eat...
Rural resources helped me overcome all those things.”*
- *“When I’m here, I feel like there is a place in this world that is fit for me.”*
- *“When I’m here, I can be myself; at school we can’t because people are going
to make fun of you for who you are.”*
- *“I probably wouldn’t have my job because I wouldn’t show up on time.”*
- *“[My daughter] would have had to leave from my house. She would have
gone from one residential setting to another... She would probably have
ended up back in the State’s custody.”*