

## SNAC offers fun, educational snacks



Story by Maria Counts, Photography by R. Chris Clark - Going Green on Delmarva

This year, the Southern Delaware School of the Arts in Selbyville, Del., has been testing a pilot program called School Nutrition Agri-Culture, or SNAC.

“It has been developed over the years through classroom teaching about nutrition, hands-on learning, that we focus on more than just the basics of nutrition but more on food quality and where food comes from,” explained Program Director and naturopathic doctor Kim Furtado.

“Over the years, the program has evolved, and last year we were able to fundraise and basically build a schoolyard garden and greenhouse,” she noted. “It is an outdoor classroom, and we are focused on administering a garden-based curriculum that is coordinated with the children’s school competencies, so that they coincide with what their teachers are teaching inside the classroom.”

SNAC, a program operating through the Wellness Foundation, is funded through a grant from the Chichester DuPont Foundation. In August 2011, 19 raised beds were constructed and installed in the school’s back yard, along with a greenhouse to allow for the school’s 406 students, grades one through eight, the opportunity to learn through their own garden-based curriculum.

“We come every two weeks to meet with the kids in the growing months, like the fall and the spring,” explained Furtado. “We get to teach first- through eighth-graders, so the program is serving the whole school on a regular basis. A lot of school gardens are used as an extra activity, like a recess, or if they have time. But we’re really focused on making sure the children have an integrated experience out in the garden.”

Furtado said the program’s goal is to help integrate garden lessons with lessons taught in the classroom. “I think school gardens are cropping up in a lot of places, but in southern Delaware we’re pretty unique,” she said. “Our program goals really have to do with integrating science and language arts and math core

competencies in an algebra-learning environment and also improve the health of children by exposing them to whole foods and teaching them the fundamentals of what it is to grow food and understand their health and how it's impacted by the foods they eat."

Furtado works closely with SDSA teachers to ensure that the curriculum in each grade's garden is helping to reinforce each teacher's goal.

"We sat down at the beginning of the year and worked through our plan of action. We have a lesson book that I've helped compile," she said. "It's really a prototype that I've developed that takes each grade level and integrates it to what the core objectives that that teacher needs to meet that month, and we pull garden-based lessons that correlate to those objectives.

"They learn to design experiments and observe plants as they grow," Furtado continued. "We do some lessons where they do some taste testing of different plants. We had a spinach taste-testing for third grade, and they designed the experiment. Then they had to tally up all their results. They tested the spinach they had grown themselves. There's spinach that was bought at the store, and then canned and frozen spinach. So they had four different things to test."

"The nicest thing about the program is it brings some aspects of the science curriculum to life — it's a hands-on program," agreed SDSA Principal Neil Beahan. "With this program, we can have kids in different age groups get to know things on a hands-on basis. Obviously, they learn better that way."

Furtado said that it's especially exciting to see young kids enjoying working together and growing healthy foods.

"We've been having a great time. They love it. I have two children that go to that school and they're always being asked, 'When is your mom coming?'" she said with a laugh. "And the little ones are very sweet, because they are very excited when they see me because they really love coming outside.

"We've done so many fun activities that they get to be very independent," Furtado added. "It really promotes independent thinking and teamwork and collaboration. The activities will often be a process where they have to find things in the garden and then they have to report to the group on what they observed."

She pointed out that it's also allowing young students the opportunity to be exposed to various kinds of vegetables that they may not have had the opportunity to try elsewhere.

"I've worked hard to try to create a program that will influence some of the choices that are made in the cafeteria. We've grown so much more beyond lettuce. The kids have been eating arugula and radish leaves and green chard, red chard and radicchio. They've been eating all kinds of things that they probably thought they would never eat, and they really like it. They come up for seconds! We hope, as we grow, we can see more integration in the cafeteria, as well."

"It teaches kids about wholesome eating habits, which is very important," agreed Beahan.

In the future, Furtado said, she hopes the program will be embraced and picked up by other schools in southern Delaware.

"One of my goals, if we can get further funding for the program, is to work with the Department of Education and to do a statewide Delaware-standard, garden-based learning program.

"Hands-on learning is really important. We're hoping that our outcome will show the positive effects of the program and that we'll be able to continue to get funding so that we can grow the program. Our hope is that as we continue to show how successfully we can integrate this type of learning, when it's supported by

being a program, rather than just being a fun thing.”

For more information on SNAC, visit [thewellnet.org/the-snac-program.html](http://thewellnet.org/the-snac-program.html) or call the Wellness Foundation at (302) 542-3400.