



GOVERNMENT SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL ORGANIC GARDENS AND CURRICULA

OVERVIEW

This policy summary provides recommendations on why and how to provide support for establishing and maintaining organic school gardens and related curricula. It outlines options for providing this support, followed by examples from various countries.

SUMMARY OF POLICY OPTIONS

Approaches to implementing organic school gardens and related curricula may be either top-down or bottom-up. However, governments at various levels can and should take the lead in providing appropriate political signals and resources for developing school organic gardens and curricula.

National Governments, possibly in cooperation with international developmental agencies and other NGOs, may:

- develop model curriculum modules for various grade levels and educational topics, and make them available to both public and private schools nationwide;
- co-sponsor teacher training programs;
- Fund regional and local governments to provide financial assistance to schools for gardens and garden-based education.

In general, Ministries and Departments of Education take the lead on these measures with support from others e.g. Agriculture, Health, or Environment.

Regional and Local Governments can:

- dedicate some of their own financial resources to support implementation and maintenance of school garden programs;
- facilitate the provision of national government resources and training programs to schools;
- facilitate networks of school garden practitioners and other stakeholders.

RATIONALE

School organic gardens and curricula have strong potential not only to teach fundamental lessons about biology, ecology, food and nutrition. School gardens and curricula can also start the developmental pathway for acquisition of vocational skills in agriculture: in countries which are mainly agrarian, school gardens can play a direct role in training the future growers and farmers. School gardens can be tied to school meal programs, supplying a portion of the ingredients for the meals.



Finally, school gardens and garden-based education have the potential to shape the values and expectations of children and their families about organic agriculture systems and food supplies. Because the vast majority of school gardens use organic gardening systems, supporting them can help to increase awareness and demand for organic products. Government support at all levels from national to local to school organic gardening and education initiatives is among the effective options to support development of the organic sector in the country and help to create many other public goods.

SCOPE

Supporting school gardens is relevant in all contexts regardless of the state of organic sector development, and whether or not it is regulated. It does not constitute a market intervention on the part of government.

POLICY OPTIONS

Supporting school gardens is an appropriate policy measure for all levels of government. Initiation of school gardening programs can be driven from top down or from bottom up.

National governments can provide important political signals and allocate resources for the development of model curricula and training programs that are available to all the

nation's public and private schools. This can be done either through legislation or through decisions and budget allocations within the current mandates and frameworks of key ministries/department. Typically, these support measures are housed in ministries/departments of education, but others, such as agriculture, environment and health should play a role. **Regional and local governments** can provide financial support and infrastructure such as teacher training programs closer to the level of implementation. At some point the implementation will have to be at local level, but governments may identify ways to motivate schools and local leaders and enable their gardening programs to succeed.

The FAO publication, *A New Deal for School Gardens*, outlines a 12-point program for how national governments can lead a top-down approach and offers an explanation of bottom-up approaches by local governments, schools and community. There are many good resources worldwide that could be purchased or freely acquired and adapted.

Beyond organic gardening, some governments have promoted organic theoretical education in schools through the financing and dissemination of educational materials and toolkits (e.g. France). Another model for on-farm learning is the partnership between schools and organic farmers. In Denmark, for example, there are 30 such 'organic



school yards', whereby organic farms take in groups of schoolchildren for farm visits. The government has provided funding for compensating the organic farmers for their time in showing the farm to children.

COUNTRY EXAMPLES

Costa Rica: The government has long-established policies of associating school gardens with school food and improving children's nutrition and eating habits. The Food and Nutrition department within the Ministry of Education runs a program entitled "Programa Nacional del Huertas" which provides financial resources, capacity building and advice for schools to initiate their own garden projects, with a strong focus on environmental practices including organic gardening. The program is managed by the Ministry of Public Education with participation from the National Institute for Learning and the Ministry of Agriculture. Schools can seek organic gardening advice from several technical staff people in the central government and/or the extension staff of the Ministry of Agriculture.

Rwanda: The Ministry of Education implemented, in 2005-2006, the Rwandan school garden pilot project, funded by FAO with a grant of about EUR 300,000. Implemented in 20 schools, it

aimed to make schoolchildren and their local communities aware of the importance of good nutrition, to develop their garden skills, and to supplement children's diets. The pupils and their parents at the pilot schools have identified environmental protection through organic gardening as one of the advantages of the gardens.

Belize, an NGO-led program assisting some 50 schools in developing organic school gardens is tied to the government school-feeding program. FAO's Telefood Report 2005 described the scheme as "a working model worthy of replication".

Bhutan: The Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Environment collaborate on an organic school agriculture program, involving 200 middle schools where school children on the agricultural club grow organic vegetables and sell to the school kitchen. Organic agriculture is now also included as a chapter in the agriculture textbook for high schools.



USA: California has school garden movement since 1995, starting with a public-private initiative, Garden in Every School initiative. In 1999, the state established the Instructional School Gardens Program offering information to support garden-based learning. Over time the program evolved to a funded piece of soft legislation, State Assembly Bill 1535, which was passed in 2006. It provided around EUR 12 million in non-competitive grants to support public schools in setting up or maintaining school gardens over a period of three years. The funds could be used for equipment, supplies, garden-related professional development. Administered by the CDE, grants from USD 2500 - 5000 were available to schools according to school size. Nearly 40% of California schools applied for and received grants during the funding cycle and about USD 11million was awarded. State budget cuts in 2008-09

prevented legislative renewal of the support program. However, private sector associations and companies with a stake in food and agriculture have stepped in to continue support with modest grants and information resources.

France: The national organic action plan includes raising the awareness of schoolchildren, their parents and their teachers in conjunction with Ministry of Education program through school gardening, visits to organic farms, taste education classes, school activities, etc. Some of those activities have been organized by regional chambers of Agriculture. Agence Bio, the public agency in charge of organic agriculture, has produced a pedagogic toolkit (with a pedagogic guide, a set of activities and some posters) for educating school children about organic farming.

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