



# CLASSROOM GARDENS GROWING HEALTHY CHILDREN



## Veggie U Case Brief

### At a glance/mission:

- The mission of Veggie U is to educate children about the connection between growing food and making healthful eating choices. Veggie U engages in charitable and educational activities dedicated to providing standards-based, experiential teaching materials to promote science and nutrition education for children.
- A unique, in-classroom, gardening and nutrition experience, Veggie U's standards-based lessons require no outdoor space. Teachers can reach children in an engaging and interactive way to inspire them to take responsibility for their own good health regardless of the season.

### History and programming:

- Founded in 2003, Veggie U is a national 501(c)3 non-profit that supplies Classroom Gardens and a five-week science program for elementary and special needs classes.
- Veggie U Classroom Gardens include seeds, soil, root view boxes, grow lights, a worm farm, and Teacher Lesson Guide, allowing students to see, feel, taste, and experience the process of planting, growing and harvesting a crop in their classroom.
- Veggie U supports teachers with a turn-key program of 25 lessons (broken into 5 weeks of units) and hands-on activities to engage and excite their students.
- Veggie U created, piloted and launched Veggie U A+, a classroom garden program for special needs students and those with Autism Spectrum Disorder.



### Impact:

- Veggie U has placed gardens in 7,500 classrooms in 36 states, including Hawaii and Alaska; and has “graduated” 187,000 students since its start in 2003.
- Veggie U has placed Classroom Gardens in every Cleveland Metropolitan School District elementary schools for the past nine years and in Akron and Canton public schools for the past eight years.
- Veggie U helps parents continue the discussion at home through take-home literature, with recipes, games, suggested readings and conversation starters on the topics the children are learning in the classroom.
- Veggie U asks teachers to survey participating students (Veggie U tudes) at the beginning and end of Veggie U lessons to determine the change in their attitudes toward choosing vegetables and healthier eating.

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## The process:

- Veggie U Classroom Gardens are prepared and packaged by volunteers (who have logged 9,000 hours since 2003).
- School superintendents, principals, curriculum directors and teachers are contacted to learn more about the program and consider garden placement. But, more and more, educators are reaching out to Veggie U and securing gardens by applying online.
- Gardens are then shipped to classrooms locally and around the country. Complete Teacher/Guide is available online.
- Veggie U staff is always available to answer questions and assist teachers with program implementation.
- Gardens are refilled as needed each year and new gardens placed in new locations.



## Leadership, staff and board:

- Veggie U is headquartered in Oberlin, Ohio, and features a fulltime executive director, education manager, autism program coordinator, marketing manager, and a part-time bookkeeper.
- A 10-member board of directors provides governance, policy oversight, program support, and resource development and marketing assistance.

## Facts about obesity and nutrition:

- One in three children - 23 million - are considered overweight and will struggle with their health and well-being.
- One in six children – 12.7 million - are considered obese, may face a shorter life expectancy and are more likely to experience heart disease, Type 2 Diabetes, certain cancers and osteoarthritis.
- Food deserts – places where it's difficult to access fresh food – are more prevalent in urban and rural areas, and poor nutrition is more prevalent in low-income households.
- Typically, elementary students receive an average of only 3.4 hours of nutrition education in school yearly.
- According to the American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine, interactive garden-based curricula can help increase preference for and consumption of a variety of vegetables and fruits.



## The Need

- Veggie U's largest single program expense is the production and placement of Classroom Gardens (\$450 for new) and (\$225 for refills).
- Currently, only 13% of Classroom Gardens are purchased by schools.
- Other expenses incurred are: day-to-day operations, program evaluation and promotion, and volunteer recruitment and training.

## How you can help "grow" and sustain Veggie U:

- "Purchase" a garden (\$450) or refill a garden (\$225).
- Buy and help sell tickets to our Annual Fundraising Event.
- Donate cash online or by mail.
- Provide grants for specific needs and operations.
- Underwrite the annual Fundraiser event with an event sponsorship, or operations with an annual corporate sponsorship.
- Recognize Veggie U in an estate or trust agreement or other planned giving vehicle.
- Volunteer to prepare Gardens for shipment, promote Classroom Garden placement in your school.