

Garden Build Deep Dive Workshop



Hands-on Workshop

Impact Report

GROWING SCHOOL GARDENS SUMMIT

February 19–22, 2026
Phoenix, Arizona

HOSTED BY

SPROUTS HEALTHY COMMUNITIES FOUNDATION

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

LIFE LAB

SGSO NETWORK

OUR WHY

The Growing School Gardens Summit is a gathering designed to inform, inspire, and invigorate the nationwide school garden movement.

Sprouts Healthy Communities Foundation, Life Lab, and the School Garden Support Organization (SGSO) Network united to host a first-of-its-kind Summit in 2022. Since then, the Summit has connected 1,000+ school garden professionals, uplifted practitioner voices, and empowered school garden leaders.

The third Summit, held February 19–22, 2026 in Phoenix, Arizona, built on this foundation while expanding its focus to movement building. Participants were invited to explore what they can do collectively to change systems and advance opportunities for all children and youth to have vibrant, resilient school garden programs.



Student docent at Manzo Elementary School in Tucson, Arizona sharing a Tohono O'odham calendar of Sonoran Desert seasons

All in for school gardens

A school garden is more than a place to grow food. It's a place where youth grow and flourish. That's why we're all in on school gardens, and why we bring this movement together for a Summit. Here's what research reveals about the power of school gardens:

- **Academic Learning:** Youth show higher achievement in science and stronger engagement with learning.[1,2,3]
- **Confidence and Connection:** Youth show more positive emotion, pride, and engagement during garden time.[4,5]
- **Health and Nutrition:** Youth gain nutrition knowledge and make healthier food choices through gardening.[6,7]
- **Environmental Literacy:** Youth build a stronger sense of care for the natural world.[8,9]

Explore more research: Children & Nature Network Research Library; footnotes on page 12

BUILDING THE MOVEMENT

The Summit serves a broad and growing community



Find school gardens and connect with colleagues in your region using SGSO Network's new National School Garden Map.

550 participants

45 U.S. states plus Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico, and Canada represented

19,000 schools supported

10M+ students engaged

Committed to thriving school gardens



Sprouts Farmers Market Team

"Seeing how Sprouts has [the] same commitment is truly inspiring and always leaves me feeling hopeful that I can find and create partnerships just like Sprouts has for so many communities."

Patrick Evans
Greater Newark Conservancy, New Jersey

INVIGORATED AND READY TO LEAD

To understand the Summit's ripple effects, we designed an evaluation to learn how the experience is shaping participants' perspectives and their work as school garden leaders, both right away and over time. We did this through an interactive postcard writing activity plus a post-Summit survey that asked about immediate outcomes, near-term intentions, and changes sparked by past Summits.

Participants felt connected, confident, and prepared

- **90%** Felt more confident communicating the value and impact of school garden programs
- **88%** Felt recharged
- **86%** Connected with peers they feel comfortable reaching out to for advice or support
- **86%** Felt more confident sharing their ideas, experiences, or leadership with others in the field
- **83%** Identified potential opportunities to collaborate with others to advance the school garden movement
- **80%** Gained skills that will strengthen the quality of their school garden programs
- **77%** Learned where to find tools, curricula, funding, or other resources to support their roles
- **75%** Learned practical ways to integrate garden-based instruction into school systems
- **70%** Felt more equipped to influence decisions that sustain school gardens over time at multiple levels

Percentages represent participants who experienced each statement to a large extent, selecting "quite a bit" and "a great deal" on a five-point scale. The number of respondents ranges from 226–250, not including those who selected "N/A."


Hands-on Workshop

"I have grown in confidence. Constantly advocating for the importance of our work in our locality can be exhausting. The Summit bolstered my voice. I was reminded that I am part of the movement, that the change I want is aligned with a community, and that this work is critical to our youths' development."

Zach O'Donnell
Edible Schoolyard New Orleans, Louisiana

INFORMED AND INSPIRED TO ACT



Peer Networking Meet-up

Participants set actionable and strategic intentions

When asked about their post-Summit plans, participants frequently described actions that clustered into the following six categories.

Top action areas	In their own words
Follow up and stay connected	"I created a robust garden group that includes many classroom teachers. It feels like it does not include just myself anymore!"
Implement specific lessons or activities	"I have already implemented trauma-informed edits to our current year's kitchen curriculum as a result of one of the sessions I attended."
Build and formalize local partnerships	"I connected with our city university to begin building pathways for student internships and volunteer hours in school gardens. I'm excited about the possibilities these collaborations can create for both garden programs and students."
Engage school and district leadership	"Meeting with our district child nutrition director to discuss small lifts that we can support for improving the lunch menu in addition to our regular integration of local garden veggies."
Improve storytelling and marketing	"We came home from the Summit and immediately started to create our grant application to continue the building of our gardens at our school. […] The Summit made a huge difference in our confidence and ability to communicate benefits and mission."
Carry forward personal renewal, inspiration, or a mindset shift	"Estas sesiones y estar rodeado de personas que comparten mi visión y misión me fortalecen en un mundo donde hay mucha desconexión humana." [These sessions and being surrounded by people who share my vision and mission make me stronger in a world where there is a lot of human disconnection.]

LAYING THE FOUNDATION OF CHANGE

Past Summits have supported participants and their programs in the years that followed

We asked people who attended the 2022 or 2024 Growing School Gardens Summits to share what was set in motion as a result of participating. From these stories, these themes rose to the top, shown below with an example story that brings it to life.

Movement building, network expansion, and belonging

"I attended the first Summit on my own, and the second one I attended with my Director of Elementary Teaching and Learning and one teacher. This conference has been so impactful in increasing the collaboration, excitement, and momentum of our farm to school program. It has also solidified for me that the nutrition services department does play a significant role in bridging this education for students."

Kaitlyn Scheuermann
Waukee Community School District and
The Utensil Drawer, Iowa



Cooking Classroom Demo Lesson

Personal renewal, leadership development, and career growth

"Each conference has been different, this one helped me [...] to remember why I am doing what I am doing! The first conference lit me on fire like never before, I came home with more ideas than minutes in the day, the second conference gave me motivation to do what I wanted to do and conviction that I could do it. This conference reminded me of my why!"

Jamie Mesman-Davis
Centennial Middle School, Washington

New pedagogy and practices, program growth and stability

"A huge piece that has changed for us is our confidence in advocating for our programs with the school district, and sustaining that connection. Last conference we learned a lot about how to share in goals, and reach administrators and district folks in a way that they can understand and be on board with. Now we finally have [a standard operating procedure] for maintaining school gardens with DISTRICT support, not just partner support from us."

Emily Büchi-Rhodes
Wasatch Community Gardens, Utah

SUMMIT RIPPLE EFFECTS

The Summit supports a movement over time

The **Summit is built around six goals.** We looked at what participants told us—in survey responses and in their own words—to see **how each goal plays out across three points in time**: what people experienced at the Summit, what they planned to do when they got home, and what actually changed in the years since a past Summit.

- Improve the caliber of school garden programming across the country
- Increase and strengthen collective action for school gardens
- Provide school garden professionals with resources needed to embed gardens into their schools' culture and purpose
- Bring more longevity to school garden positions
- Cultivate emerging leaders
- Develop a more resilient, interdependent, and collaborative field



During the Summit

At the Summit's close, at least 8 in 10 participants reported meaningful growth across five of six goal areas, especially related to **connection, practical resources, and confidence**. Equipping participants to embed garden programs in school systems was meaningful for the large majority, though it was the area with the most room to grow.



Soon after the Summit

As they left the Summit and in the weeks after, participants described plans that clustered around **improving programs, strengthening connections, and embedding garden work more deeply into schools**. Nearly half of participants shared plans to bring new curriculum, lessons, or resources back to their programs. One in three set intentions to take concrete steps toward institutionalizing their program.



2–4 years after a Summit

The enduring changes described by past Summit participants often centered on **becoming part of a lasting professional community and sustaining improvements to their programs**. Over half of participants described a durable sense of belonging and connecting to a national community of practice. Nearly one-third described concrete, lasting changes to their programs that they traced back to a past Summit.

LEADERS GROWING LEADERS

A diverse team of leaders engaged in a yearlong planning process to design the Summit for their peers



2026 Summit Planning Team

26 school garden leaders co-created the Summit

4 planning teams convened

172 participants presented

1/3 of presenters did so for the first time

1/4 of participants received scholarships

"The Summit showed me a whole new world: bigger, more abundant, and full of people contributing to this work in so many ways. I found alignment, community, and purpose. […] Finding this field of work has brought so much meaning and a sense of belonging that keeps me going. The Summit has become a space for expansion and growth."

Kathleen Morales Perez
UF/IFAS Extension, Florida



Feeding the Future Winners from Barcelona Elementary School in Glendale, Arizona

ROOTED IN SHARED EXPERIENCE

Summit participants are educators, practitioners, and leaders from many backgrounds

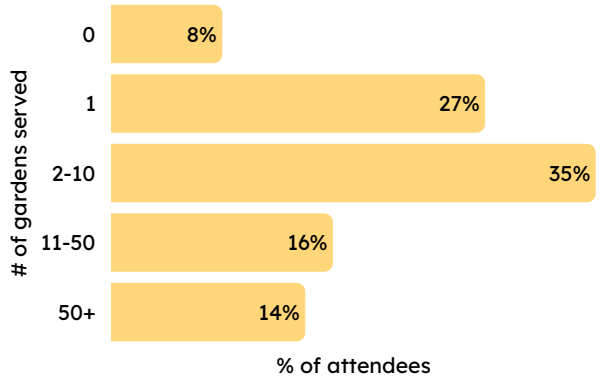
40% Garden or nutrition educators/teachers

22% Program or project managers

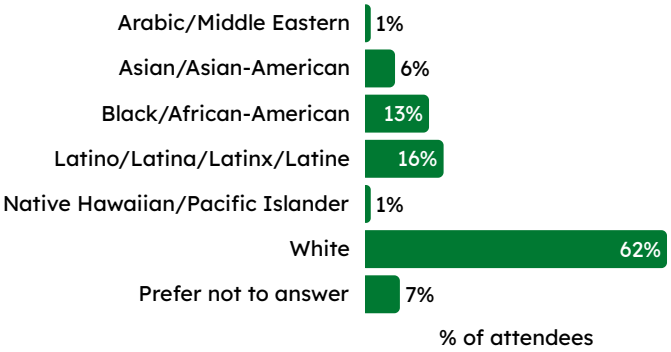
11% Executive directors or CEOs

Other roles include: school food service, academics and researchers, development/operations staff, gardeners/farm maintenance staff, community volunteers/Master Gardeners, health and wellness professionals, principals and school staff, farm to school coordinators

Summit participants represent garden programs with both depth and scale



Participants represent multiple racial and ethnic backgrounds



*participants could select more than one option



61%

of participants serve schools where the majority of students qualify for free or reduced-price meals



Outdoor Lesson Demonstration

A TIME TO LEARN, CONNECT, AND RECHARGE

120+ ways to learn and grow

- 34 workshops
- 22 peer networking meet-ups
- 21 cooking and outdoor lesson demos
- 21 peer-led extracurricular activities
- 10 field trips
- 5 peer lightning talks
- 3 deep-dive workshops
- 3 panels on embedding gardens into schools, districts, states, and beyond
- 3 main stage youth presentations
- 1 keynote speaker
- 1 movement-building deep dive with changemakers from across the country



96%

of participants were satisfied or very satisfied with their Summit experience



Cooking Classroom Demo Lesson



Movement-Building Changemaker Gathering

> "I love the rigor and camaraderie of this conference. What a wonderful way to gather garden educators and pamper and encourage them before seeing them out to do the rewarding and challenging work we all do!"
>
> Joana Whitnah
> Murfreesboro City Schools Farm to School Program, Tennessee

SETTING THE TABLE FOR FUTURE SUMMITS



SGSO Network Presentation

"I am grateful for the Summit and look forward to the next. It is truly unlike any other conference I have attended."

Alex Layshock
Larry C. Kennedy School, Arizona

Ideas for the 2028 Summit

2026 Summit participants, thank you for sharing your feedback! Here's what we heard:

You loved:

- The variety and abundance of interactive sessions
- Intentional networking sessions and affinity groups
- Sharing your expertise as presenters
- Field trips, cooking demos, and outdoor lessons
- The beautiful, relaxing location and delicious food

You have exciting ideas for future Summits, including:

- Expanding youth and local community leaders' presence
- Elevating focus on embedding gardens into schools and districts
- Increasing access to culinary content
- Adding more sessions on program sustainability and funding
- Featuring keynote speakers from food and garden movements
- Continuing to consider cost and financial accessibility



Las Aguilitas de Davis-Romero Youth Mariachi Band from Tucson, Arizona



Outdoor Lesson Demonstration

GROWING SCHOOL GARDENS SUMMIT

We look forward to gathering in 2028!

schoolgardensummit.org

@sproutsfnd
@sgsonetwork
@lifelabgarden

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Evaluation partner: Raindrop Workshop

Sources
[1]Williams and Dixon 2013; [2]Klemmer et al. 2005; [3]Walshe et al. 2024; [4]Pollin and Retzlaff-Fürst 2021; [5]Ohly et al. 2016; [6]Berezowitz et al. 2015; [7]Evans et al. 2012; [8]Skelly and Zajicek 1998; [9]Mayer-Smith et al. 2007

Images
Jenna Shea Photojournalism: pp. 1, 4–6, 9, 11 (top), 12 (top, middle)
SCHULTZDIGITAL: pp. 3, 8, 10, 12 (bottom)
Daniela Etchegaray Orozco: p. 2
Ashley Ali-Osman: p. 11 (bottom)

General Session