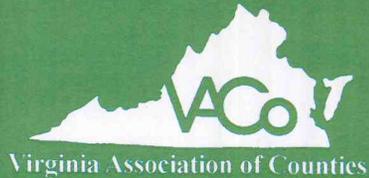


Recognizing the Best in County Government Programs!



# 2014 Achievement Awards



## 2014 VACo Achievement Awards

Deadline: June 2, 2014

### Application Form

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. **Deadline: June 2, 2014.**

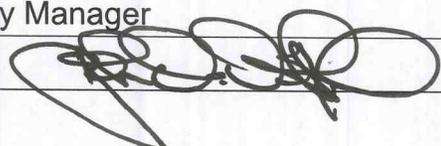
#### Program Information

Locality Henrico County  
Program Title Community Garden and Fresh Market: Growing a Service Learning Initiative  
Program Category Health and Human Services (Youth, Elderly and Others)

#### Contact Information

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#### Signature of county administrator or chief administrative officer

Name John Vithoukas  
Title County Manager  
Signature 

## Call for Entries

**Program Category:** Health & Human Services (Youth, Elderly and Others)

## **1. Overview of the Program**

The Fairfield Middle School Community Garden and Fresh Market is an innovative, student-centered, community-driven urban agriculture project. It is aimed at increasing student achievement by providing opportunities for academic and life-skills integration while meeting an identified community need for more security in the availability of food. The garden and fresh market service-learning program gives students a chance to apply cross-curricular classroom knowledge in a hands-on, real-world environment. The garden encourages students to learn the importance of fresh, locally produced food and its relationship to health, culture and community impact. It promotes environmental stewardship and civic engagement. The youth-led farmers market allows students to increase 21st-century skills, reinforce academic content, promote financial literacy and give back to their community. Achieving our goals of student growth and community impact requires an ongoing effort. We accomplish it by building and sustaining partnerships with local businesses, universities and government agencies; by maintaining the support and involvement of school faculty through professional development; by expanding community support through outreach workshops; and by continuous reflection and adaptation.

## **1. The Problem/Need for the Program**

Fairfield Middle School (FMS) is an urban school serving around 960 students in grades 6-8. Most FMS students – 62 percent – receive free or reduced lunch, based on financial need. Of families residing in the school’s ZIP code, 27 percent live below the poverty level. More than 4,000 homes in the area receive monthly food assistance, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, or both. Academically, FMS has not met minimum numbers for state standards of learning for the past several years. In 2013, 43 percent of students scored a passing rate for the math standards, and 64 percent scored a passing rate for language arts. At FMS, we believe that academic achievement is linked to our students’ social well-being and the stability of life outside of the classroom.

To address these needs, we developed the FMS Community Garden and Fresh Market program as a creative way to meet the academic needs of our students while also meeting the food security needs of our community. Through empowerment, engagement and a sense of ownership, we want our school to become the cornerstone of the community and provide far-reaching benefits.

## **2. Description of the Program**

The Fairfield Middle School Community Garden and Fresh Market is an innovative student-centered, community-driven urban agriculture project. Its

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ambitious goals are:

- To provide the students and residents of eastern Henrico County increased access to an affordable mix of locally produced organic vegetables and fruit, including the opportunity to use SNAP benefits for food purchases.
- To provide students and the community with knowledge and resources about the importance of food in health, wellness, culture and community.
- To give students an opportunity to apply classroom content in an experiential learning environment.
- To offer students experience in areas of responsibility, leadership, financial management, organization, teamwork and entrepreneurship.
- To increase student achievement through increased student engagement, increased parental and community involvement and increased student empowerment and confidence.
- To offer all community members an opportunity to invest themselves as stakeholders in sustainable food access and success for local youths.

These objectives are being met in many ways:

- Weekly educational programs for students through cross-curricular, standards-based lessons, both in the classroom and in the garden. These focus on areas of STEM – Science, Technology, Engineering and Math. Programs also encourage proficiency in environmental awareness,

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Henrico County, Virginia

language arts, agriculture and civic engagement.

- Weekly fresh market sales led by students and open to the community
- Seasonal market training for students
- Annual professional development for teachers
- Volunteer training for community members and multiple volunteer opportunities throughout the year
- Seasonal and summer student market internship opportunities for area middle and high school students
- Educational programming and events for area elementary schools
- Monthly community outreach workshops
- A student-run garden and market website
- Monthly community dinners hosted and prepared by students and free to the public

This program benefits all students at Fairfield Middle School, area elementary and high school students and community members. A continued commitment of sustained partnerships and dedication of faculty, students and parents will lead to the greatest impact. Approximately 10 hours per week is required to maintain the garden, facilitate the weekly market, solicit and sustain partnerships and provide reflective feedback on the outcomes of the program.

As this is a program built upon the strength of community partnerships, the role

of Henrico County in implementing the program is minimal. The county provides no funding for the program yet logistical support is a necessary component of the program's success. Fundamental for the program's success are: space for the actual garden and market; time allotted for teacher, student and volunteer training; and support of the program initiatives. Since community partnerships are the cornerstone of the program, sustained support in volunteers, materials and monetary donations are key. Partners include educators, area universities, nonprofit agencies, local businesses, federal and state agencies and local and national grant providers.

### **3. Response to Economic Downturn**

Given continued school budget constraints and the economic impact felt by our families, our goal is to provide teachers and students with creative, hands-on alternatives to outside field trips or costly programming. Instead, the garden program brings the field trip and educational programming to students, with weekly educational and project-based lessons that promote STEM principals. These alternatives to field trips and expensive programs incorporate problem-solving and critical thinking scenarios in an experiential, applicable setting. The program also attempts to ameliorate the effects of the economic crisis on our community. Community members are provided with a weekly supply of low-cost, fresh vegetables through our market. Our monthly "Fairfield Family Dinner" offers delicious free meals to the community. A monthly community workshop

about how to grow your own food and preserve it also addresses the economic needs of our families.

#### **4. Use of Technology**

- Websites
- Internet
- GIS
- Software

#### **5. The Cost of the Program**

The cost to implement this program will vary by situation; it is dependent on the scope and size required to meet student and community needs. For the Fairfield Middle School program, we invested nearly \$12,000 in grant funding and in-kind donations over a three year span to reach our current state of development and implementation. For annual implementation, this program can be sustained on a budget of \$10,000, which includes educational programming, garden and market maintenance and supplies.

#### **6. The Results/Success of the Program**

The program has increased student engagement, community support and parental involvement. In the program's first year, we had about 15 students volunteer to work in the garden. In 2013-14, we have 60. Garden event and

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workshop participation has increased from five participants at our first event to nearly 150 participants at our most recent event. We have formed sustainable and continued partnerships with Virginia Commonwealth University and the Eastern Henrico Business Association, as well as numerous local government and civic organizations. Fresh market outcome measures will include the number of community members that attend the market each week, the amount of produce sold each week and the revenues generated. Academic outcome measures will include increased achievement on content related to garden programming, with desired achievement increases in math and language arts. Another success has been the grant funding the project has received. The project has gone from \$2000 in grant funding in the project's infancy, to more than \$7000 in grant funding in year three. We have received impressive coverage from local media outlets, and have been recognized as metro Richmond's premier model of sustainable school-garden service learning.

### **7. Worthiness of an Award**

The Fairfield Middle School Community Garden and Fresh Market is an innovative program that meets the needs of both its students and community through sustained partnerships. The model provides the necessary components for a true grassroots service-learning initiative. Because the project includes both education and community outreach in a comprehensive, holistic approach that elevates everyone involved, we believe it should be awarded a 2014

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Achievement Award.

**8. Supplemental materials**



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**Program Category:** Health & Human Services (Youth, Elderly and Others)

**Submitted By:** Amanda Hall