

Vegetables

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JERRY SCHICKELMIZ
PO BOX 39093
LAS CRUCES NM 88003-8003

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NMSU Ag Science Center's Harvest Yields More than Vegetables

The first garden at New Mexico State University's agricultural science center at Las Vegas Memorial Middle School yielded more than fresh vegetables. The harvest included students learning about eating healthy snacks and giving food to less fortunate people.

Despite planting late last spring and having a late freeze and hail damage the plants, the garden has produced a variety of vegetables. Many students, teachers and community members are enjoying the vine-ripened produce.

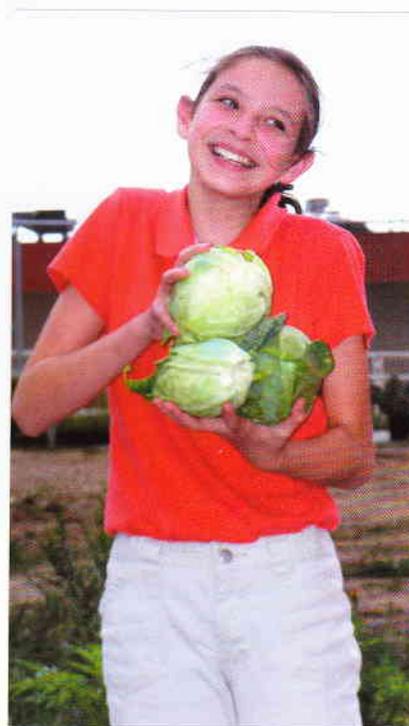
"We established the garden through a service learning grant from the New Mexico Public Education Department with the idea of getting students

involved in a service project in their community," said Peter Skelton, NMSU assistant professor assigned to the agricultural science center. "Since Las Vegas is an underserved community with an average income \$10,000 below the state average, I thought it would be a good idea for our students to grow produce and then give it to those in need."

Last spring sixth grade students planted the garden, and plants loaded with produce were waiting for the students when they came back to school.

Seventh grade students involved in the Math, Engineering and Science Achievement (MESA) program recently picked peppers, green onions, cabbage,

Las Vegas Memorial Middle School Math, Engineering and Science Achievement students Daniella Montano, left, and Elena Garcia pick chile peppers while Sara Lopez, in background, looks at a pepper she has picked.



Samantha Martinez has her hands full with freshly picked cabbages. She was one of the Las Vegas Memorial Middle School MESA students who picked vegetables at the NMSU Agricultural Science Center greenhouse on the school's campus.

squash, cucumbers and sweet corn and delivered it to the Salvation Army food basket program to be distributed to 135 families in the Las Vegas area.

"Each year our students need to do a project that gives back to their community," said sponsor Lucinda Martinez. "I explained to the students that the little things you do here and there help out everybody, so they were real excited about being able to pick the vegetables to be given away. We had 20 of our 22 members come and pick the vegetables. It was a good experience for them, not just as a service project, but because it gave them a chance to see how the vegetables grow."

Student Elvis Flores summed up the experience as "fun." He agreed with the other students that it felt good to help give food to needy people.

Carmen Gress, director of the Salva-

tion Army food distribution program in Las Vegas, said she was happy to receive the vegetables, which weighed approximately 100 pounds.

"The people love it when we have fresh vegetables," Gress said. "Whenever we receive a donation we try to divide it up amongst all of the people who come each Wednesday for food baskets."

Gress told the MESA students that her program is run by two or three volunteers each week, and that, now, the students are among the many people from the community who donate either food or time to the program.

Other produce, including carrots, radishes, broccoli and cauliflower, was picked by 53 students in April Ortiz's health classes while they learned about healthy snacks.

"One of the goals of the class is to teach the students to eat healthy snacks, so this was a great opportunity to have the students pick the vegetables, clean



Las Vegas Middle School MESA students deliver a shopping cart full of vegetables to the Salvation Army food bank after picking the produce at the NMSU Agricultural Science Center greenhouse on their school's campus.

them and then get to eat them. It brought the health lesson alive," Ortiz said. "Also, Dr. Skelton came to the class and talked about how the vegetables

are grown so they have an understanding and appreciation of how the food they purchase at the grocery store gets there."

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