Alaska Teacher Scholarship Program

Project Summary

Teachers in Alaska are excited to engage their students with new curriculum focused on Alaska Grown specialty crops but lack the funding to do so. The purpose of the Alaska Teacher Scholarship Program (ATSP) is to expand the agriculture knowledge of both teachers and students in Alaska. The Alaska Agriculture in the Classroom (AITC) program has been widely successful at educating those it reaches. However, one common complaint is that it is hard for teachers to secure funding to implement the programs that they learn about through AITC training. The agriculture education scholarships will allow teachers to implement specialty crop education into their curriculums; this program will expand the awareness of and appreciation for Alaska specialty crop industries, leading to increased demand, sales and support. The projects implemented must focus on Alaska Grown specialty crops. No applications considering ineligible crops will be accepted and this is clearly stated in the program description, application, etc. that are released to teachers. The funded projects will only use pictures and narrative describing specialty crops. Students, teachers, and subsequently parents, will be learning solely about Alaska Grown specialty crops as a result of this project.

Project Approach

The 2012 Alaska Teacher Scholarship Program was announced in March; staff gave presentations at multiple conferences, in teacher newsletters, and held a webinar. Fourteen applications were received; 10 projects were granted. Projects include development and enhancement of school gardens, gardening classes for students, a hydroponic station for a school and others. Projects were conducted throughout 2012. The following is a brief summarization of each project.

Birchtree Charter Elementary used scholarship funds to create a school garden to teach 50 students about seed starts, composting and harvest techniques.

Chinook Elementary used scholarship funds to create a school garden, focusing on raised-bed production, soil preparation, cover crops and using compost. 73 students participated in the project.

Delta-Greely Elementary used scholarship funds to take 30 students on a tour of a U-Pick farm, harvest potatoes, and then host a "Potato Extravaganza" for students and their families. Students learned about the economic benefit of shopping locally as well as exploring unique potato recipes.

Eagle River Elementary used scholarship funds to develop their school garden curriculum. Their project focused on 91 different students learning about transplanting seedlings and recipe development. The students hosted a school-wide potluck and was featured in a newspaper article raising awareness in the community about the project.

Fairbanks Montessori used scholarship funds on a summer garden project. 50 students learned about soil testing, appropriate watering, thinning plants, plant types and characteristics such as whether you eat the roots/leaves/flowers of certain types of plants.

Pacific High School and Sitka Boys & Girls Club used scholarship funds to grow a summer garden to supplement the summer food program. 52 students learned gardening basics, composting and harvesting techniques.

Pearl Creek Elementary used scholarship funds for students to develop a school garden. 75 students learned about the life cycle of specialty crops and practiced different cooking techniques.

Ryan Middle School used scholarship funds for students to learn hydroponic vegetable production. 64 students showed a dramatic increase in awareness, with the average survey results increasing from 29% to 79% over the course of the project.

West Homer Elementary used scholarship funds to enhance their school garden. 60 students conducted soil tests and focused on scientific objectives; learning what specialty crops grow in the Alaska climate was a highlight of the project.

College-Gate Elementary used scholarship funds to go on a grocery store field trip. 22 students learned about healthy food choices, how to create healthy snacks from raw vegetables and how to tell what products are Alaska Grown versus non-Alaska Grown in the grocery store.

Goals & Outcomes Achieved

The original goal of the project was that eighty percent of the students reached through the grants would have an increased understanding of Alaska Grown specialty crops, demonstrated through pre and post tests. This was 100% achieved.

Each teacher was allowed to develop their own pre/post survey questions for their students; this allowed for flexibility due to the wide variety of age groups, teaching styles and classroom settings where projects took place. A few examples of questions asked follows.

1. Circle the products listed below that are Alaska Grown specialty crops:

   Lettuce bananas broccoli pineapple potatoes peonies

2. List two things that you can grow in Alaska to eat
3. Name three Alaska Grown specialty crops
4. Name one place that your parents could buy Alaska Grown specialty crops
5. Plants need what to grow

With the 10 funded projects, 567 students were reached. Pre and post surveys indicate an average pre "passing" grade of 35% and an average post "passing" grade of 85%.

Beneficiaries

The beneficiaries of this project include the 567 students and ten teachers who participated in the grant projects. It is assumed that the specialty crop industry will also indirectly benefit from these projects as well.

Lessons Learned

With future grant projects involving teachers, more of the pre/post survey work will be standardized and use an online tool, such as survey monkey, where available. This will allow for easier tracking and data comparison across projects.