



Farmfork



Farmfork Program

Farmfork is our year-round hands-on urban agriculture and culinary arts program that provides youth with valuable life skills through learning how food is grown and prepared into meals. Students become more self-sufficient by caring for our garden projects, our triple-plot at Alice's Garden, "Lot of Respect" pocket park, and "Garden of Respect" production gardens. In the winter, we will transition indoors to focus on culinary arts. Each week, youth will create a new recipe from start to finish. We will provide trips to local farms, farmers markets and restaurant kitchens, along with the chance to cater for special events.

Farmfork's purpose is provide opportunities for youth to become more physically and financially healthy. According to The Center for Urban Population Health's Milwaukee Health Report, 43.5% of people who live in the zip codes we serve are obese, 28.9% are overweight, and 69.7% have inadequate fruit and vegetable intake and the numbers are rising. Census data states that between 41.1-49.6% of the households we serve are below the poverty line. Our youth need the opportunity to become more financially stable, learn more about nutritious food and gardening, and learn healthy habits they can take with them into adulthood; Farmfork aims to fill this need.

Farmfork participants also focus on our garden projects. The breadth and depth of learning youth can experience

through urban agriculture is outstanding. In the months before planting, youth will learn about crop rotation, organic pest control, gardening zones and frost dates, and when to plant and harvest each crop they grow. They will use garden planning software on growveg.com and create an excel spreadsheet of each crop they choose to grow.

Youth will be responsible for starting and caring for seedlings indoors before planting outdoors. In addition to starting their own plants, they will also grow flowers to plant in our neighbors' yards during our "Pay It Forward" Community Service Week in August, when we help our neighbors out with household projects free of charge.

In the warmer months, youth will be responsible for planting, watering, fertilizing, weeding, and harvesting the gardens. They will learn how to treat common plant illnesses and pest problems using organic techniques. Youth will visit and volunteer at local farms to learn from expert farmers. Youth will also learn ways to extend the gardening season through using cold frames and low tunnel hoop houses.

The majority of the fruits and vegetables we grow are used in our weekly meals and sent home with our youth and families to enjoy, and the rest are prepared to use in the later months. Youth learn how to freeze, can, pickle, dehydrate and preserve produce in order to use it in our



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daily snacks and weekly dinners during the colder months. They also are introduced to storage crops, and how to properly store these crops to keep them fresh for the winter months.

As the growing season comes to a close, Farmfork youth transition indoors to focus on the culinary arts. Each week, youth choose and prepare recipes from start to finish, while learning a new cooking vocabulary, and trying new foods. They gain experience in proper cooking techniques, seasonal cooking, knife skills, food safety, along with the art of planting and presenting food. Each participant are provided with a binder with all of the recipes we prepared to share with their families. In addition to this class, youth will also assist in preparing a weekly healthy dinner for the youth at Main Site, using minimally processed sources of dairy, protein, and grain provided by Feeding America.

Youth are introduced to careers in the food industry by visiting local restaurants and working with chefs throughout the year. Youth are also hired to cater specific Neu-Life events and meetings. In October, the youth are responsible for our annual "Farmfork Feast," where we invite 20 people to tour our gardens and enjoy a three-course meal using our produce. Youth give the tours, prepare and serve the food at the event. This event acts as a showcase of the knowledge learned through participating in Farmfork.



Farmfork NeuVue Expansion:

Currently, Neu-Life does not have their own commercial kitchen space in which to operate Farmfork. We graciously have space provided by our partner, Bethel Baptist Church, which owns the building in which Neu-Life operates the after school and summer programs. In NeuVue, Farmfork will gain their own commercial kitchen culinary space in which we can have more youth involved in the program while learning in a culinary arts classroom. We are modeling our space after the current MATC (Milwaukee Area Technical College) Culinary School space.

Next to the Farmfork Culinary Arts Program space in NeuVue will also be a café space that can be used for a pop-up café/restaurant experience, be rented for meeting space or serve as an event space. Farmfork can use the café space and related events to practice the culinary and hospitality skills they gain.

In NeuVue we are also incorporating additional garden spaces- on the rooftop- that the Farmfork Culinary youth will maintain. These are additional garden spaces to our existing garden space, providing more healthy food growing spaces and opportunities.

In addition to the café space on the first floor, we also will have a rooftop special event space that could be used as a restaurant when we find the right partner. The restaurant partner could use Farmfork Culinary Youth within their model, a true real life work experience for our culinary students. This is considered a future expansion of the Farmfork Program, and a very exciting one. This would be an expansion of the workforce development program that Neu-Life and Farmfork have cultivated over the past decade.

