

Good GRUB



Billy Cornish, a GRUB student with no previous agriculture background, proudly shows off the crops in the high tunnel.

It's early Saturday morning, and while most high school students are sleeping in, one group of at-risk teenagers gathers at the South Plains Food Bank (SPFB) farm.

The Growing Recruits for Urban Businesses (GRUB) is a program that allows students who need volunteer hours or community service hours an opportunity to work on the farm.

With the help of Roy Riddle (Farmer Roy), who passed away in March 2010, the teens began to work on the farm Saturday mornings. They help install irrigation systems, plant seeds, and harvest the crops.

Since the passing of Riddle, Jenifer Smith, the Farm, Orchard and GRUB Division Director at the SPFB, now monitors the program.

"The program was envisioned by Farmer Roy," Smith explained. "Farmer Roy was really good with youth, and he wanted to give them ownership of the farm so they could feel connected to something."

The students not only spend time at the farm, they also run a booth at the farmers' market.

"We have a farmers' market where the kids take produce to sell to the community," Smith said. "This is a great opportunity for them because they learn marketing and customer service skills."

The GRUB students learn more than life skills from the farmers' market. They are given educational classes with a wide variety of topics such as cooking and nutrition. The students learn recipes using vegetables grown on the farm, while learning how to properly cook and prepare a healthy meal.

"Cooking and nutrition are very important," Smith said. "When I first started working here, I asked the children what their favorite vegetable was, and the answers shocked me. One child told me his favorite vegetable was chicken."

Classes in money management, career exploration, and credit cards also prepare students for future financial situations. Anger management, goal setting, and conflict resolution classes help develop the students into respectable young men and women. Drug, alcohol and tobacco awareness and prevention courses are also presented to the students to encourage smart decisions pertaining to these substances.

"When they are here, they learn what it takes to live," Smith said. "They leave here with valuable skills to help them through life."

Zaquia Mackey, a former GRUB student, is now the intern for the GRUB program.

"The most important lesson I have learned from the GRUB program is leadership," Mackey said. "They helped me gain confidence in myself and become a leader."

Since the GRUB program began in 2000, more than 1,100 students, ranging in age from 10 to 20, have been taught these life skills.

"When we started the program, we found that a lot of kids really needed a home. The farm became a home for them, and Farmer Roy became their family," said Smith, with tears streaming down her cheeks. "He was really an inspiration."



Kenzie McLucas, a middle school student, checks the crops in the high tunnel.



High tunnels are for crop growth during the off season.



McLucas and Cornish pulling weeds from the garlic crop helps improve the yield.

Katie Schlosser | Plano, Texas

