



RCRE Youth Farmstand Program

What is the Youth Farmstand Program?

The Youth Farmstand Program is an interdisciplinary, multi-faceted program designed to support local farmers, increase workforce readiness skills and life skills in at-risk youth, and build healthier, stronger communities.

How does one program do all that?

Synergy! Youth operated farmstands are the centerpiece of this program. They provide a unifying framework for youth, farmers and communities to achieve success. Each needs the others' support to grow and prosper, so everyone wins!

Who benefits the most?

That's a tough question, because this program increases opportunities for all targeted groups. The following outcomes are expected.

Youth will increase:

- Workforce readiness skills
- Entrepreneurial skills & attitudes
- Knowledge of agriculture & food systems components & processes
- Awareness of entrepreneurial & employment pathways available in agriculture

Local farmers will:

- Open new markets
- Increase sales via distribution and *Jersey Fresh* promotion
- Identify specialty or "niche" markets within local communities
- Have access to pool of "certified" farmstand workers via youth completing program

Communities will:

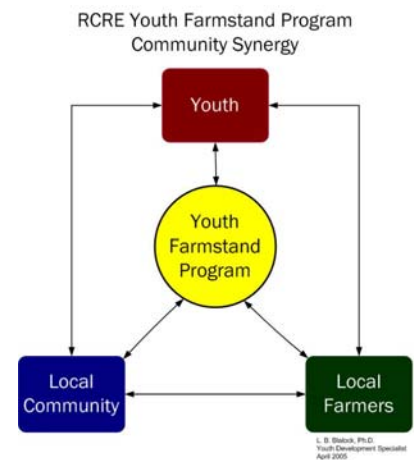
- Have access to affordable, high-quality produce in convenient locations
- Increase redemption rates of WIC & Senior Farmers Market Vouchers
- Expand "work ready" labor pool
- Increase tax base

How do Youth Farmstands "work" for youth?

The Youth Farmstand program provides hands-on entrepreneurial experience to youth in the mechanics of owning and operating a small business, based on the premise that experience really *is* the best teacher. There are four (4) major components: pre-farmstand training, farmstand operations, supplemental activities and experiences, and Youth Farm Camp.

1. Youth participate in a week long intensive (and fun!) training prior to the farmstand opening. Topics include:

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| • customer service | • marketing |
| • cash register operation | • nutrition |
| • produce identification | • weights and measures |
| • Jersey Fresh | • farmstand safety |
| • WIC/Senior Voucher handling | • workplace expectations |
| • making change | • purchasing & inventory |



2. Youth operate the farmstands throughout the summer months for an hourly wage. Participants are primarily responsible for management decisions (purchasing, pricing, display, etc.) and are eligible for a share of any profits at the end of the season. Each farmstand is overseen by an adult supervisor. These individuals are called “instructors” to emphasize their role in the learning process.

3. Supplemental activities and experiences include weekly education sessions. Speakers and agriculture-related field trips are also part of the educational experience during the season. Topics include:

- agriculture and food systems
- career planning
- entrepreneurship opportunities
- character education
- goal-setting & decision-making
- resume writing and interviewing

4. **New** in 2005, the RCRE Youth Farm Camp will provide youth in good standing with a true-to-life agriculture experience. Youth groups will participate in the daily activities of a host farm or ranch and engage in experiential learning workshops led by RCRE faculty and staff. Each session lasts 3 days and 2 nights.

How do youth feel about their experiences?

Youth participants continue to express strong positive feelings about the program. They enjoy the training, operating the farmstands, and the speakers and field trips.

Are you achieving your expected outcomes?

Yes! We have created several assessments to document results for youth, farmers and communities. In 2004:

- 72 at-risk/special needs youth participated in the RCRE Youth Farmstand Program.
- All youth demonstrated increased workforce readiness skills and attitudes at the close of the selling season.
- \$50,000 in combined wages were earned by youth participants.
- \$2592.90 in profits were distributed among the youth participants, based upon stand sales and hours worked.
- Over 1000 cases of produce were purchased from local farmers.
- Suppliers indicated they were satisfied with the program, eager to learn how to access local niche markets, and looked forward to broadening our relationships.
- Over 3500 customers in economically disadvantaged areas purchased \$15,780 in *Jersey Fresh* produce.
- Individual sites reported up to 80% of their customers were low income and/or elderly.
- Community residents reported increased access to fresh, quality produce, and that they understood (and felt good about) their contribution towards supporting local farmers *and* youth workforce readiness training.
- The majority of customers who redeemed WIC or Senior Farmers Market vouchers reported using vouchers exclusively at the Farmstands.
- Over 33% indicated they had no other accessible outlet for voucher redemption.

How can I learn more?

Please direct all inquiries to your local Rutgers Cooperative Research & Extension office, or contact:

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