

School district to develop gardens

Sonoma Valley Unified School District has embarked on a program to develop school gardens at every public school in Sonoma Valley with support from the Sonoma Education Foundation.

The goal is to establish gardens in schools that don't have them and enhance those that exist, develop a basic garden curriculum and create a culinary/agricultural/viticulture program at Sonoma Valley High School. These gardens will provide outdoor hands-on experiential learning; a chance to integrate nutrition, science, math and healthy life-styles education; delicious and nutritious food for students' snacks and supplements to school meals as well as a possible revenue stream from garden sales; and a venue for curriculum on sustainable farming and environmental studies.

"We are very excited to have the support of the Education Foundation to help us accomplish these important goals for our children. The foundation's involvement is the crucial step that clinched this program going ahead," said Justin Frese, district assistant superintendent for finance. Fran Meininger, executive director of the Education Foundation, added "The entire board is thrilled and enthusiastic to take on this tangible project that will positively affect the lives of all of Sonoma's children.

Kathleen Hill, Food & Wine Editor of the Sonoma Index-Tribune, has been working with the school district's SNAC committee for more than two years to make the garden project a reality.

"We are forming a community steering committee that will work with the SVUSD leadership, teachers and garden coordinators to provide supplemental funding, garden installation and maintenance," Hill said. "We already have enthusiastic support from restaurants and other community leaders including Les and Audrey Ayers, Mike Benziger and Colby Eierson of Benziger Family Winery, Sondra Bernstein, Suzanne Brangham, Cornerstone Gardens, Roger DeClercq of Sonoma Gourmet, Gary Edwards of Slow Foods Sonoma Valley, Fairmont Sonoma Mission Inn & Spa, Wild Thyme Catering, Jens Hoj of El Dorado Hotel and EDK, Virginia Hubbel, Saddles Restaurant, Ann Teller and Paul Wirtz of Oak Hill Farm, and John Toulze of the Girl & the Fig."

For more information or to offer help, call the Sonoma Valley Education Foundation at 935-9566. .