



The Food Project



DIRT CREW IMPACT STUDY

2019 – 2020



Analysis & Report by
SEEDImpact.org

THE FOOD PROJECT

equips young people from diverse backgrounds to build a sustainable and equitable food system. Its nationally recognized approach to leadership development combines agriculture, enterprise, and service to create a rigorous experience. Each year, The Food Project employs 120 teenagers in its vital work on 70 acres of urban and suburban farmland across eastern Massachusetts. Youth grow 200,000 pounds of fresh fruits and vegetables. They use this food to enact innovative food system initiatives that increase access to fresh, healthy food in neighborhoods where affordability is a challenge. Youth advance through Seed Crew (summer), Dirt Crew (academic season), and Root Crew (year-round), developing as thoughtful learners and community leaders.



DIRT CREW

takes place during the academic year, expanding on the intensive summer Seed Crew experience. Dirt Crew members engage in more advanced workshops that deepen what they learned in Seed Crew. They lead volunteers on urban and suburban farms; support community events; install raised bed gardens for families, schools, and city-run housing complexes; support seedling and compost sales, and more.

Young people gain knowledge in areas of sustainable agriculture, food justice, and social justice. Dedicating Saturdays and after-school hours, youth build leadership skills in communication, public speaking, community dialogue, problem-solving, and workplace practices. Youth in Dirt Crew are held to high standards of performance and behavior, and earn minimum wage (\$12.75/hour in Massachusetts).

At the end of Dirt Crew, youth are invited to apply for Root Crew.

"I've never been a person to open up. The Food Project made me feel safe, like my feelings are valid."

"Each person has helped me become... someone who wants to initiate change. I am forever thankful."

"I am still blown away at how close our crew became; it was a professional setting and felt like a family."

KEY FINDINGS

Our study encompassed two parts.

Part 1. OBSERVING OUR PARTICIPANTS

Near the start and end of the school year, two Youth Development Specialists rated the competencies of **31 Dirt Crew members** on a scale of 1 to 5, in five program areas:

Sustainable Agriculture: Learning more about growing food, food systems, and food justice

Diversity/Anti-Oppression: Understanding deeply the impacts that oppression has on individuals and communities

Communicating Powerfully: Stating and elaborating with confidence on their viewpoints and effectively sharing their newly gained knowledge

Workplace Skills: Developing strong workplace practices in order to approach all work with rigor and responsibility

Social Change: Engaging actively in fostering food systems change, food justice, and equity in their own communities and in the region

Overall, the Youth Development Specialists observed youth competency gains at 150%.

Average Stage
October 2019

Average Stage
May 2020

Average Gain

1.7 3.2 86%

1.5 3.4 132%

1.1 3.4 211%

1.1 3.2 177%

1.0 3.0 186%

As shown above, the greatest gains in ratings were: Communicating Powerfully (211%), followed by Social Change (186%), and Workplace Skills (177%). In these three areas, ratings began low and increased considerably by May 2020.

I learned how to listen... to focus on tone, word choice, and the silence to understand emotions behind the words."

"I've lived in a bubble of people who look like me my entire life. Hearing people's stories of discrimination was really impactful."

"I learned about vulnerability, leadership, teamwork, agriculture, and how much effort goes into the vegetables that reach our homes."

Part 2. PARTICIPANT SELF-RATINGS

HOW MUCH HAS YOUR KNOWLEDGE, ABILITY OR VIEWPOINTS CHANGED SINCE YOU BEGAN IN DIRT CREW?

In late May, Seed Crew members self-rated on eight practices. They used a 5-level rating scale ranging from "Still weak" to "Strong."

Across all eight practices, 41 percent of Crew members rated themselves as "strong." An additional 43 percent indicated they were "almost strong."

1. FOOD SYSTEM KNOWLEDGE

58% 32% 90%

2. SKILLS IN GROWING FOOD

58% 26% 86%

3. WORKPLACE SKILLS

32% 61% 93%

4. ABILITY TO COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY

35% 55% 90%

5. ABILITY TO DISCUSS THE FOOD SYSTEM

65% 19% 84%

6. ABILITY TO USE THE VISIONS GUIDELINES

23% 61% 84%

7. UNDERSTANDING THE LEVELS OF OPPRESSION

29% 45% 74%

8. KNOWLEDGE TO IMPACT THE FOOD SYSTEM

39% 26% 65%

There were 31 complete responses. Interspersed throughout this report are brief narratives offered by youth to explain their self-ratings.

ALMOST STRONG

STRONG



As shown at left, crew members self-rated "strong" in **Workplace Skills** (61%) and **Using the VISIONS Guidelines** (61%).

Roughly half also self-rated "strong" in **Communicating Effectively** (55%) and **Understanding the Levels of Oppression** (45%).

"The Food Project really pushed me to look past my own existence, to be louder, and fight for those whose voices aren't being heard. I realized the importance of putting my all into seeking change. In the current state of our country, I couldn't ask for better skill to have."

"Advancing to Dirt Crew allowed me to form bonds with my coworkers that were different than in Seed Crew. Dirt Crew helped me realize things about friendship that I don't think I would have realized without it."

[See Appendix](#) for detailed crew leader ratings and correlations, sample stories, cumulative gains from Seed Crew to Dirt Crew, and conclusions. Summer [2019 Seed Crew report](#) may also be of interest.