

FOOD WHA+?!!

A YOUTH EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM



ANNUAL
REPORT 2013

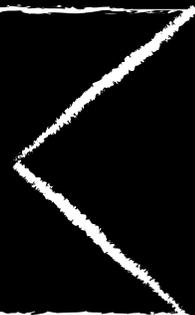


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Our Mission

MISSION

FOOD, WHAT?! is a youth empowerment and food justice program using food, through sustainable agriculture and health, as the vehicle for growing strong, healthy, and inspired teens. We partner with low-income and at-risk youth to grow, cook, eat, and distribute healthy, sustainably raised food and address food justice issues in our community.

Youth from Watsonville to Santa Cruz join the FoodWhat Crew through Spring Internships, Summer Jobs, Fall Business Management positions, and leading big community events on the farm. We create a safe space where youth engage in leadership development, personal growth, and job training. At FoodWhat, we inspire personal transformation by supporting teens in finding their voices and developing lasting confidence in themselves.

“Food, What?!” is a program of Life Lab.



A Note from the Director

Friends, Supporters, Partners...FoodWhat Family -

We had a very strong year in 2013, and it is our pleasure to share with you this end of the year report. In the following pages, you will not just read about FoodWhat, you will get the feeling, the “vibe”, of who we are and what we do.

At the close of 2013, FoodWhat completed our seventh year. (It's hard to believe.) And there are a few key highlights I would like to bring special attention to.

First off, if you haven't yet heard, we hired a rockstar of an Associate Director, Alex Carelli. She has successfully raised increased funds for FoodWhat, created an alumni network, started working with past and current youth on job applications and college financial aid, and most impressively, built meaningful relationships with each youth she has met.

After a number of big years of just primarily Abby and I, it also brings personal sustainability to us as staff members to have a third partner. Further, instead of just adding or expanding programming, we spent this past fall in strategic planning to discuss and analyze how to most effectively use this third position to deepen our programming and grow with intention.

Next, we are proud to say that we are now working with Watsonville youth *in* Watsonville. Instead of bussing multiple hours to access our programming, we have now officially brought our programming, to these youth that we serve, directly in their home community. The demand is high. The issues intense. And we are glad to have found a local farm to partner with to do this important work.

Lastly, two of our superstar youth, Vicky and Deonte, went into many high school classrooms this past fall and rolled out a new peer-to-peer Community Education program. They were hot. Talking real talk with their peers in an engaging and empowering way. They educated and inspired. Powerful stuff.

My preference would be to have an hour with each one of you reading this to walk around the farm, introduce you to the youth, eat a farm fresh meal together, and share. I hope to have the opportunity to do so over this next year—2014 is going to be robust at FoodWhat and we will keep you posted.

Until then, I thank you for being a part of the FoodWhat Family. Feels great to know you're in the mix.

All the best,
Doron Comerchero
Director



Grace

“I feel like I accomplished my goals. I did a lot better than I thought I could. I feel like I made new friends. I’m more confident in speaking to people and I feel like I’m making a difference not just in my life but other people’s as well. I got more confidence in myself. I’m not so worried about being judged as I was before because I realize people want to hear what I have to say.”



Recent Growth



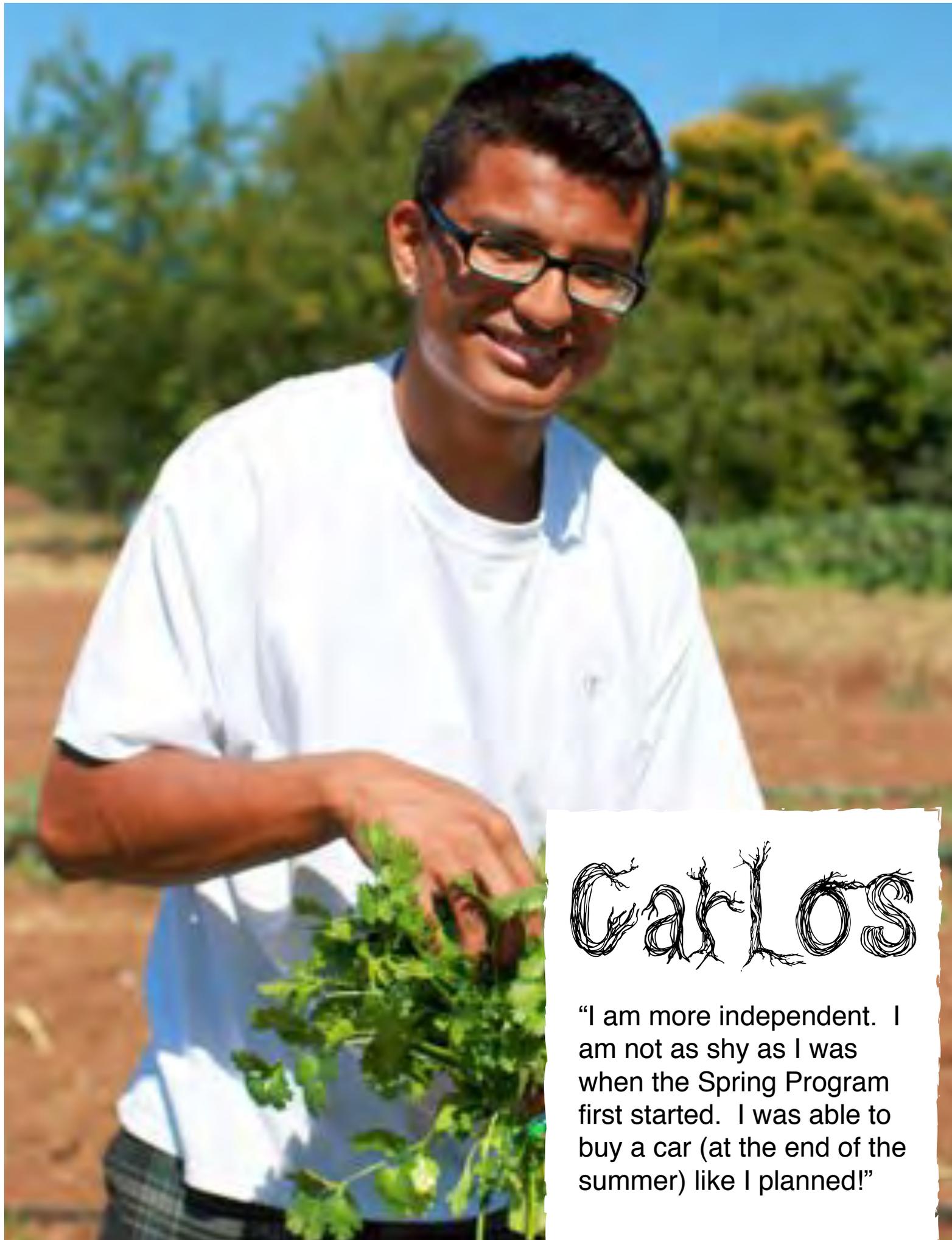
NEW STAFF

Just over a year ago, FoodWhat welcomed our third official staff member, Alexandra Carelli, to take on the role of Associate Director. The program had been totally run by Abby and Doron for the past seven years, so adding another person was a huge lift in terms of capacity building and organizational sustainability. Right out of the gate, Alex had great success in writing some of the largest grants FoodWhat had received to date. She has been able to cultivate new funding opportunities, connect with community volunteers, and continues to maintain a strong FoodWhat presence locally. In addition to her fundraising prowess, Alex also stepped up to address an outstanding need of the program—to create an alumni network. We are stoked to be growing our team and look forward to many new initiatives and successes as we continue to plant seeds and harvest change.

NEW SITE

We are proud to say that we have answered the years of requests of bringing our programming deeper into Watsonville. Many of the youth we serve are from Watsonville, and for the past number of years have bussed upwards of two hours to be a part of FoodWhat. It's often the lowest income members of our communities who face the greatest obstacles to access resources and this is certainly the case with our Watsonville Youth. We saw this as a justice issue and reached out to find a partner site where we could operate part of our Spring Internship and Summer Job Program. We landed at Live Earth Farm, a fifteen minute ride from Pajaro Valley High School and the local Alternative Education High Schools. We look forward to continuing to grow our service of the Watsonville Community and its youth.





Carlos

"I am more independent. I am not as shy as I was when the Spring Program first started. I was able to buy a car (at the end of the summer) like I planned!"

Spring Internship Program

In January and February we went into the local alternative education and traditional high schools to do recruitment for our Spring Internship. We received over 200 applications for 60 positions. We work with low-income youth from the urban, suburban, and rural farmland areas of Santa Cruz County. Youth in the Internship come once a week (in groups of 12) for three hours for 12 weeks. Upon completion they receive 2 credits in school (and almost all our crew is behind in credits) and a \$175 stipend.

The Spring Internship is the first rotation of joining FoodWhat in a graduated leadership model that goes from Spring Intern to Summer Job-Training Employee to Fall Business Manager. Starting in March and stretching until the end of the school year, we had 60 stellar youth on the farm.

Each week we rolled out the same format with different content:

- Opening icebreaker to shake things up, build energy for the day, and strengthen teamwork
- 1 hour of farm work to get the farm up and running for the season
- 1 hour of youth development/youth leadership workshop
- 1 hour of cooking and eating a farm fresh healthy meal
- Closing with “triumphs” where each youth shares what they are most proud of from the past week

60 Teens Successfully Completed the 12-week FoodWhat Spring Internship!





[LEFT] Strawberry Blast Organizer Damian Prentice conducts the Fast Food Jeopardy workshop.

[RIGHT] Local teens show off their strawberry tarts with fresh crusts made by FoodWhat youth.



[LEFT] Youth fill up blenders with fresh strawberries from Driscoll's, vanilla yogurt and milk from Straus Family Creamery, and other local fixings to make bicycle powered smoothies.

Strawberry Blast

This year, the Strawberry Blast was organized and led by FoodWhat Alumni Victoria Pozos and 2013 Youth Damian Prentice. They put together an incredible event that was attended by over 250 students from all over Santa Cruz County. Read the article about the event from the Santa Cruz Sentinel to get a feel for what it was all about!

"FoodWhat hosts sixth Strawberry Blast at UCSC farm Monday"

SANTA CRUZ -- While eating quesadillas stuffed with vegetables and mixing smoothies with bike-powered blenders may seem satisfying enough, a healthy lunch was only the beginning for teens at the UC Santa Cruz farm on Monday.

Food, What?!, a local food justice organization, hosted its sixth Strawberry Blast on Monday morning, where about 250 local middle and high school students participated in 13 workshops on healthy food and farming at UCSC.

Damian Prentice, who helped organize the event, knows how "Food, What?!" can change students' lives. In just a few years, the 19-year-old has gone from skipping school for three months at a time to working for the organization, which partners with low-income and at-risk youth to grow, cook, eat and distribute sustainably raised food.

"This job really turned me around," said Prentice, who graduated from Costanoa High School. "I'm not necessarily where a 19-year-old should be, but I'm on the right track because of this job."

Prentice first heard about "Food, What?!" three years ago through his high school. While the idea of a paid summer internship initially lured him in, he's stayed on to opt out of working "inside a kitchen or behind a cash register."

Curious to hear some of Monday's presentations, Prentice walked over to his friend Connor Williams' table, where he discussed how teens can use social media as a tool for activism.

Williams, 18, has a similar relationship with "Food, What?!" Last year, Williams was first introduced to the organization at Costanoa High School. He said he was on probation and looking for activities that would keep him out of trouble.

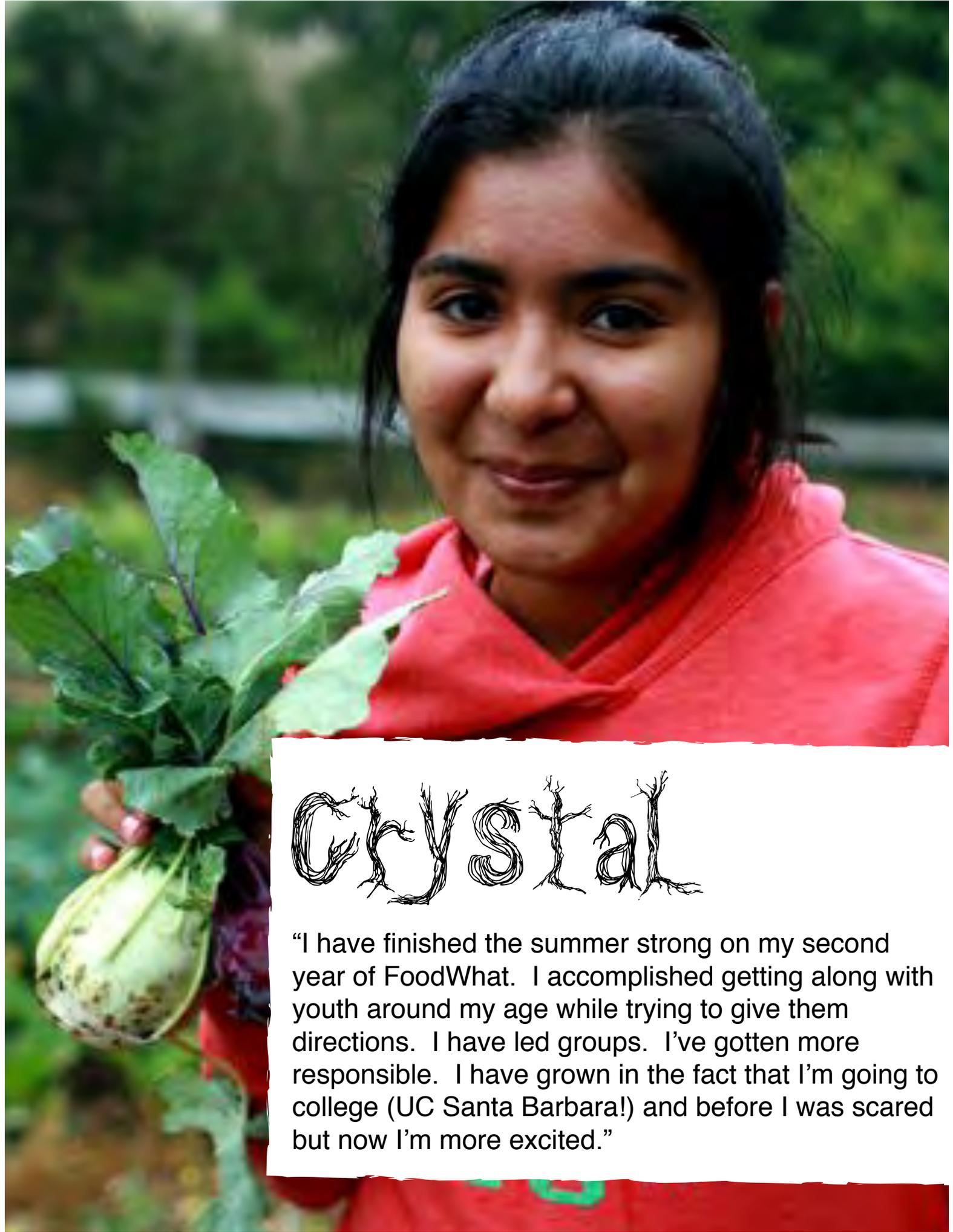
"I always had a problem with coming home and not having enough to do," Williams said.

Since then, Williams has interned, worked and created an alumni association for "Food, What?!", hoping to attract other teens to the organization.

And while "Food, What?!" provides educational activities for teens, co-founder Abby Bell hopes it has an even deeper impact on their lives.

"We've worked to make it as educational as possible, while also teaching about food justice," Bell said. "We're looking to create a better world through all angles."

By Bonnie Horgos



Crystal

“I have finished the summer strong on my second year of FoodWhat. I accomplished getting along with youth around my age while trying to give them directions. I have led groups. I’ve gotten more responsible. I have grown in the fact that I’m going to college (UC Santa Barbara!) and before I was scared but now I’m more excited.”

Summer Job Program

From the 60 youth in the Spring Internship, 20 were hired on for our Summer Job Training Program. We also hired 4 of last year's superstars to come back as Junior Staff for daily peer-to-peer instruction. These 4 youth were strategically chosen to reflect the race, class, and geographic origin of our youth to provide tangible mentors and role models.

20 Youth Successfully Completed the Summer Job Program!

This is the biggest and strongest crew we've had yet! The Junior Staff, Interns, and Doron and Abby (Food-What permanent staff) met every Monday to go over the week and then the new crew came to the farm Tuesday-Friday from 9am-3pm for 8 weeks. This was a paid job-training program with a big focus on professionalism. Each day we were growing, harvesting, and cooking healthy, nutritious food from our farm. Each day some portion of the crew was cooking a hearty meal for all 27 of us further locking in valuable skills in farming, cooking, and healthy living. The summer program is our flagship program that builds job skills, engages youth in relevant and meaningful food justice activities, and is deeply transformative from a youth empowerment standpoint.

This year, we were able to run one day of programming at the Live Earth Farm site in Watsonville to continue providing equal-access to programming for our South County youth. We also ran one day of programming at the Homeless Garden Project site in Santa Cruz to instill a sense of volunteerism in our youth.





[LEFT] Apprentices from the Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems created the “Unity Fist” to represent all of the leaders - from musicians and politicians to street activists - who have fought for food justice. Youth were encouraged to write their visions for food justice on pieces of paper and hang them on lines emanating from the fist.

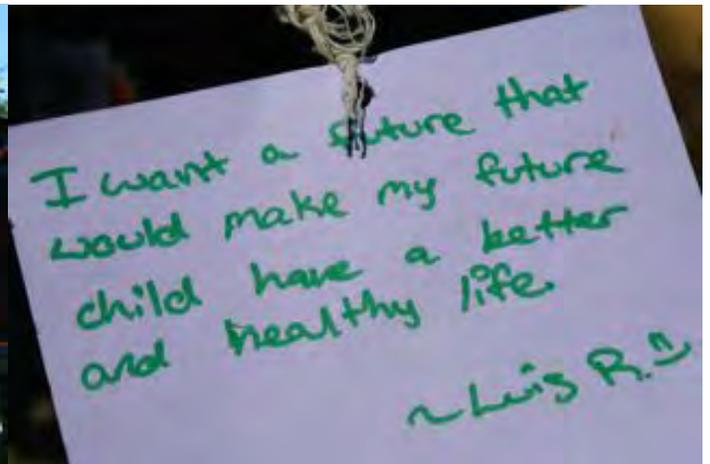
[BOTTOM] Youth gathered from partner organizations from all over the SF Bay Area, united by the common threads of youth empowerment and food justice. FoodWhat youth led the charge by directing ice breakers, leading workshops, and representing youth power in the food justice movement. This was an incredible opportunity for our youth to step up into their leadership potential and they did.



Youth Day

Over 120 youth from all over the SF/Oakland Bay Area converged on the FoodWhat Farm to spend the day building relationships through learning how to grow, cook, and advocate for fresh, healthy foods in their communities - and it was an incredible success!

Each year, FoodWhat partners with leaders from Rooted in Community (a national youth empowerment and food justice organization) and the UCSC Farm and Garden Apprenticeship to put on this movement building event that unites and educates regional teens about food justice. In addition to providing educational workshops and delicious fresh food, the Youth Day Summit event offers a platform for organizations statewide to share their voice with like-minded partners. Youth Day offers a profound experience across the urban-rural spectrum that creates unity between partner organizations and our youth. These influential young leaders take this experience and learning back to their communities, families and peers.



Fall Leadership Program

This fall we ran several successful businesses and projects in the community. In the Fall Program, the youth step up their leadership skills, solidify their professionalism, and take on assistant managing a piece of FoodWhat's projects.



FLOWER BUSINESS

Jaime and Sarah ran the Flower Business this fall. They came to the farm twice a week to harvest flowers and arrange bouquets for local businesses in Santa Cruz. They managed all aspects of the business, became familiar with the proper handling of each type of flower, and mastered the challenging art of bouquet making. They successfully earned their salary through sales.

HARVEST CREW

Eddie and Faith managed the harvest and post-harvest handling of all of the produce this fall. Each Tuesday they came to the farm to harvest, clean, and pack the food for the FoodWhat Farm Stand at Gault Elementary School. Over the course of the fall they harvested over 1400 lbs of produce that was then sold at affordable prices to the Gault community. Faith was also the Assistant Farm Manager this fall, weeding, planting, cover cropping, and preparing the farm for the winter.



FARM STAND

Eddie managed the Gault Farm Stand, learning all the skills it takes to manage that kind of business: display, sales, accounting, customer service, and responsibility. The farm stand provides fresh, affordable, organic produce to the mostly low-income families at Gault Elementary. Many kids even bought carrots or cherry tomatoes at our special "student rate!"



HARVEST FESTIVAL

Sammie and Luis did all of the planning and preparation for the 2013 FoodWhat Harvest Festival. They envisioned the event, prepared all the stations, did all the outreach, wrote press releases, and then executed day of. With their hard work, on Oct 29th, FoodWhat successfully hosted 225 high school and middle school youth on the farm to engage in health and nutrition workshops, harvest and carve pumpkins, shuck and pop popcorn, explore the farm on the hay rides, and eat farm fresh quesadillas with a rainbow of veggies.

"I worked very hard at event planning. I sent emails to people I didn't know which helped my leadership skills for the future and my confidence in public speaking was boosted. I grew in the way that there was a lot more responsibility doing this job and I did everything I needed to and everything I was responsible for."
-Sammie

CULINARY CREW

Estephanie, Anthony, Tyrelle and Noah ran all things culinary this fall. They cooked dinners for the rest of the FoodWhat Fall Crew, lunches for Life Lab workshop participants, assisted local chefs in preparing the meal for the FoodWhat Benefit Dinner, canned salsa for future use in FoodWhat programs, and ran a bike-powered smoothie station at the CASFS Harvest Festival.

"I definitely felt like this fall I stepped up my leadership skills 100%. I improved my cooking skills. Also for me I felt like I took the role as a learner 'cause half of the things we cooked I've never made myself so it was cool learning new things. Even though some bad things happened (in my personal life) this fall, I just stayed strong and finished the job that needed to be done." -Tyrelle

BLAST CREW

Each Friday Eddie, Luis, Thairie, Cy'rae, and Estephanie went to work in various school gardens. They tackled big garden maintenance and infrastructure projects to help the schools prepare to use their garden for their educational goals in the new school year. The transformation of these school gardens from the BLASTS were very striking, and the teachers and administrators expressed much gratitude for the work of our youth crew.

"During the fall at FoodWhat I enjoyed going out and doing the BLAST. It gave me a chance to get out and give back to the community while doing something that I love." - Cy'rae

A young man with dark hair, wearing a black beanie and a plaid shirt, is smiling and holding a plate of food. The plate contains a salad with green lettuce, tomatoes, and a sandwich or burger. The background is dark and out of focus.

Noah

“Yes, [at FoodWhat] I most definitely stepped up my leadership skills and gained more knowledge from this program than I ever imagined. During the Fall Job I accomplished 3 things. First, stepping up as a crewmember and becoming a more active leader. Next I improved my culinary skills, and finally, I finished strong in my work. I grew physically from all of the food and labor too.”

Harvest Festival

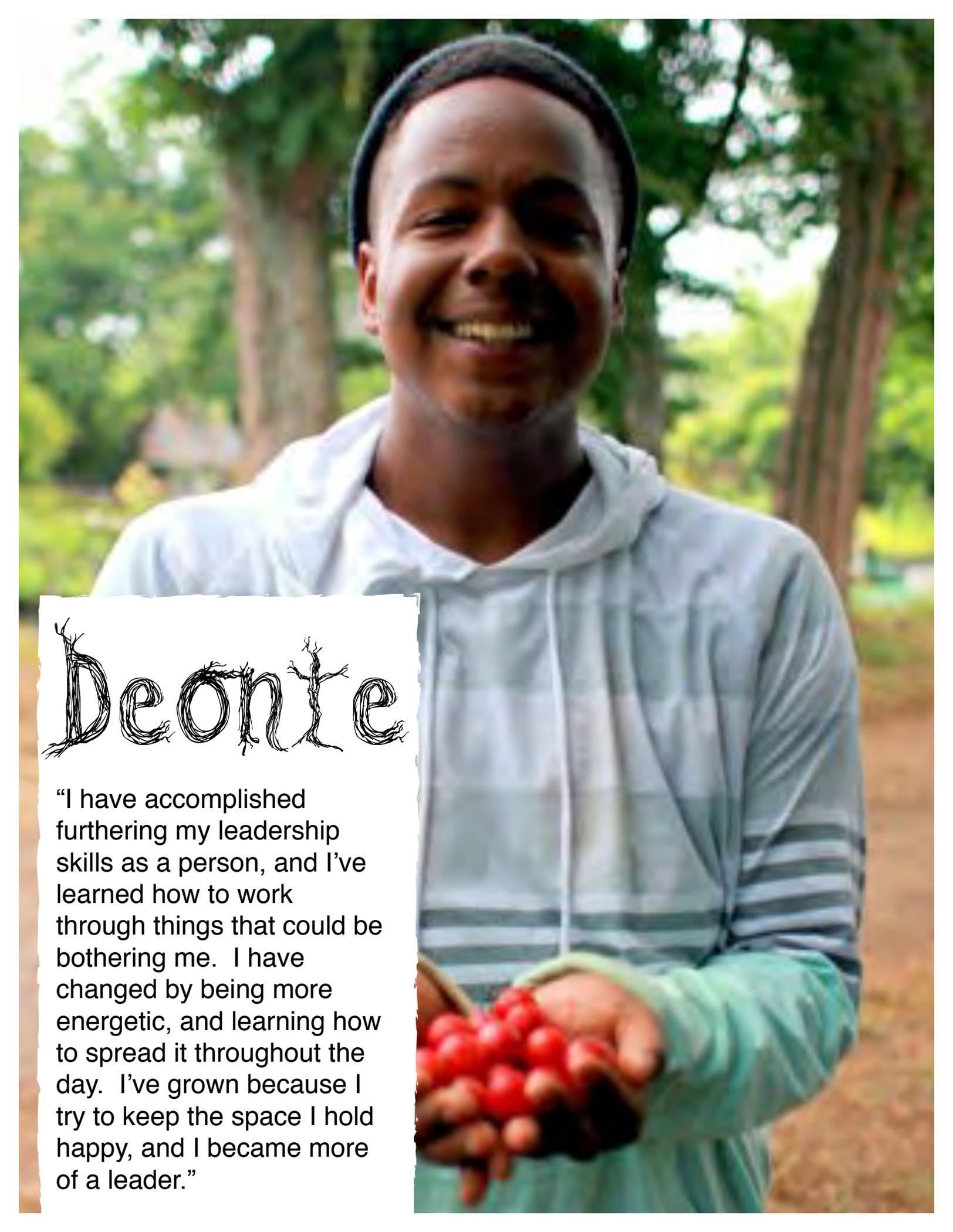


On Tuesday, October 29th over 225 students from Santa Cruz County middle and high schools converged on the "Food, What?!" Farm for a morning of food justice, health and nutrition, and youth empowerment education. The event was organized and led by two FoodWhat Youth, Sammie and Luis, our 2013 Fall Leadership Program "Event Planners". They planned and implemented a very successful day for all!

Santa Cruz City Schools and the County Office of Education invested deeply in this event by coordinating and bussing their students to the farm. We partnered with local organizations on workshops and activities to further create a community collaboration focused on raising awareness of concepts around nutrition and food justice in a youth-centered way. We popped youth-grown popcorn, discovered how much sugar is in popular youth drinks, learned about the power of our dollar, made apple pies, ate delicious quesadillas from the Food Truck packed with FoodWhat veggies, and much more! It was a super fun and educational day that truly demonstrated the power of collaboration between Santa Cruz teachers, administrators, and local organizations.

[RIGHT] We received great press on the event including this article from the Register Pajaronian in Watsonville.



A young Black man with a warm smile is the central focus of the image. He is wearing a light blue and white striped hoodie and a dark beanie. He is holding a woven basket filled with bright red berries, likely raspberries, in front of him. The background is a lush, green forest with tall trees and dappled sunlight filtering through the leaves.

Deonte

“I have accomplished furthering my leadership skills as a person, and I’ve learned how to work through things that could be bothering me. I have changed by being more energetic, and learning how to spread it throughout the day. I’ve grown because I try to keep the space I hold happy, and I became more of a leader.”

Community Educators

This year we rolled out a new peer-to-peer Community Education program. Two of our recent alumni, Deonte McClure and Vicky Pozos, went into a spread of high schools all across Santa Cruz County and delivered workshops on food justice, health and nutrition, and youth power. This is the start of something big at FoodWhat and Deonte and Vicky were incredibly effective and engaging. This was work that had previously been done by Doron, and it follows our youth empowerment model to move this body of work to be youth-led. Check out a blog post by Vicky to learn more about their experience!

"Peer-to-Peer Education in Santa Cruz County Schools"

Last Wednesday me, Vicky Pozos, and my partner Deonte McClure rolled out to Pajaro Valley High School in Watsonville to kick start the Community Educator Fall job. We arrived to Mr. Bentley's room nervous, but ready to present the "What you think, what you drink: Youth Dollar Power" workshop.

First, we started off the workshop with a quick ice breaker of Toe-to-Toe. In this game we called out a body part and the students connected that body part, like elbow to elbow, to another student. Then we asked a question like, "Would you live in the bottom of the ocean or on the moon?" Then they discuss the question with their partner. Since they were freshman, there was some cootie moments. It was a good game to wake up the kids and get rid of those few butterflies we had.

We started off the workshop with a quick brain storm on what processed sugar does to your body. Every class hit those key points, showing them that they already know about sugar. We then examined a nutrition label of an Arizona. When asked how many grams of sugar in an Arizona many students said 13 grams, but they were forgetting one crucial part of the math. They were forgetting to look at the number of servings. Once we taught them the equation 4 grams of sugar equals 1 scoop (tsp) we invited two volunteers to help us find the total number of scoops of sugar in these drinks and to scoop the sugar into a clear cup. We then compared by volume how much of the Coca-Cola, Monster and Juice Squeeze is pure processed sugar. Many students were shocked to see that almost half the Coca-Cola by volume was pure processed sugar. Deonte also pointed out that you can make Coca-Cola and Monster at home if you have carbonated water, sugar and a few chemicals/dyes.

It wouldn't taste the same, but it's possible to make them at home. (Even though it is not recommended to make at home). We went through every drink discovering that the first three ingredients in the Coca-Cola and Monster were carbonated water and SUGAR! Many students were surprised by the amount of sugar in each drink.

We wrapped up the workshop by asking the students, "How many of you vote?" Many students were confused by what I meant by vote. Many said, "like in elections?" Others said, "like for the Kids Choice Awards on tv?" A few raised their hands because of this reason, but in reality every single youth should have raised their hand because every single one of them votes everyday. They vote with their dollar. Every time anyone buys anything you are voting for what that product represents whether it's good for your body or not. You're saying, "Yes, I support you." An example is Arizona. Many people around the world buy it, but what would happen if everybody stopped buying them over-night?Right, the company would go out of business. The youth have a vote with their money, their vote is their power.

We wrapped up each class with a taste sample of some Juice Squeeze. Many students liked Juice Squeeze (70% juice with no added sugar) and a few said they would buy it instead of the other very sugary drinks. It was a great day and a great start to the Community Educator Fall Job. We gained confidence in presenting this workshop to youth in Santa Cruz County and teaching them about Food Justice.

By Vicky Pozos

Eddie

“I accomplished a lot this fall but one thing that really stands out is me taking responsibility for my own actions and being a better person overall.”



ALUMNI NETWORK

Over the past seven years we have served hundreds of youth. One of our great challenges has been to create the capacity to continue to have relationships with many of the youth who have stayed connected to us. Enter Alex, our newest team member who, with youth collaboration, created our FoodWhat Alumni Network to continue to connect with and support youth that have been a part of our program.

In early 2013 we had a number of past FoodWhatters join us for a fun night out at a local Warrior's basketball game and it was evident that the youth who have gone through FoodWhat continue to see it as a family. Then in April, we had our first annual "Dig Day" Alumni Reunion on the farm. Youth from every year of the program came out to help clear cover crop and double dig beds, and reconnect with each other over fabulous farm fresh food.

During the year, Alex also started fielding requests from current and past FW youth to support them with college and job readiness. No small task, Alex supported youth to write college essays, apply for financial aid, put together a resume, and more. From her efforts we witnessed youth successfully take the next steps in their academic lives and access competitive jobs needed for their financial stability.

With much inbetween, we ended the year with a FoodWhat Thanksgiving with each youth going around the table and sharing what they were thankful for. It was a positive confirmation to hear from so many about the critical and supportive role that FoodWhat plays in their lives.

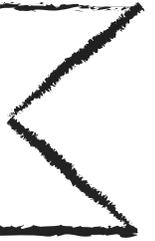




Faith

“I’ve accomplished getting a job and arriving on time every day and having a positive attitude. I’ve become so much stronger physically and emotionally. My anxiety has gone down in social situations and I’ve become much more tolerant and loving. I’ve also learned how to stand up for myself and what I know is right. I’ve grown in a way that now I feel more accountable and responsible. I am inspired by the work I’ve done.”

Thank You



All of this work and all of these profound impacts on the lives of local youth are made possible by the support of our community. Our families, donors, friends, and community ensure that we have the support in our personal lives and within the organization to put youth empowerment and food justice first. Thank you for continuing to work with us as a powerful ally and partner in serving our local community to create a stronger and more empowered future.





A YOUTH EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM



"Food, What?!" is a program of Life Lab, an independent 501(c)3 nonprofit located on the University of California, Santa Cruz Farm

1156 High Street
Santa Cruz, California 95064
www.foodwhat.org | (831) 459-2001 | www.lifelab.org