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Civic agriculture and community engagement activities on knowledge and recipe development of heirloom vegetables for nutrition students

Clemson University

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Objective: Undergraduate nutrition majors participate in project and evaluation of the dynamics of agroecology, regenerative agriculture, civic agriculture, and the roles they have played in the food system across time.

Method: Students (n=21) led research at the University in a two- semester interactive investigation on the local produce supply. The civic agriculture project included research, lectures, and discussions with those involved locally in the areas of: agroecology as an investigation into ecological-based factors that encourage advancements in agriculture; regenerative agriculture to review how eating and farming practices influence soil health, and biodiversity as well as sustainable food systems. The beneficial relationship formed between local farmers, buyers, and the resulting community network was also included. Students spoke with local community members, chefs, sustainable organizations, and farmers. They participated in discussions and conducted research on a specific locally grown heirloom vegetable in order to apply a recipe they created to the topics such as: agroecology, biodiversity, sustainable food systems, relationship between farmer and buyer, relationship between farmer and the community network and specifics on that heirloom within their in-depth presentations.

Results: The student recipes and presentations were evaluated. Students demonstrated that they gained knowledge in 10 of 11 focus areas. In 90% of the projects students created recipes from the heirloom item as assigned that satisfactorily aligned with the competencies established within the agroecology, regenerative agriculture and civic agriculture course topics.

Conclusions: Through discussions with local community, recipe development of heirloom vegetables, and lectures on civic agriculture nutrition students enhanced their knowledge and provided in-depth presentations. Overall attention to culinary sciences and community engagement enhances student performance. This course could be replicated by others interested in ways to engage with and improve the health of the public and the food system.