FoodCorps: Growing A Nation of Healthy Kids

FoodCorps is the leading national service organization working to provide a healthier future for our nation’s children. Our AmeriCorps leaders transform schools into places where all students—regardless of class, race or geography—learn what healthy food is, fall in love with it, and eat it every day. Building on this foundation of direct impact, FoodCorps develops leaders, forges networks, and pursues policy reforms that in time have the potential to improve all of our nation’s 100,000 schools.

The Crisis of Child Health

A staggering one in three of our nation’s children—one in two children of color—are on track to develop type 2 diabetes in their lifetime. Children and adults who suffer from diet-related disease miss more days of school, score lower on tests, advance less in their careers, and raise children who repeat the same cycle at elevated rates. Children aren’t the only ones who pay the price of poor nutrition: by 2030, diet-related disease will cost the nation an estimated $1 trillion each year in medical costs and lost productivity.

The Dietary Guidelines for All Americans outlines the scientific consensus that eating more fruits and vegetables is critical to improving our nation’s health. But an estimated 90 percent of children don’t eat the recommended level of vegetables, and an estimated 60 percent don’t eat enough fruit. The lack of healthy eating habits, fueled by limited access to healthy food and poor nutrition education, is a primary cause of the epidemic of diet-related diseases, including heart disease, diabetes and hypertension. Left unchecked, these trends will result in shorter lives, heavy financial burdens, and a future where far too many children fail to fulfill their potential.
The FoodCorps Solution

Since launching in 2011, FoodCorps has been changing the way children eat by turning their schools into oases of health. We’ve coalesced a nationwide network of partner organizations, recruited hundreds of leaders to join our AmeriCorps team, and rallied thousands of volunteers to create a trajectory for America’s children that is hopeful and healthy. FoodCorps has averaged 35% annual growth in our program since our inception, and today 225 full-time FoodCorps members are on the ground making change in 350 schools across 17 states and Washington, D.C.

The FoodCorps program is built on the foundational principle that schools are the most effective points of intervention to improve child health. Schools are where kids come to learn, and where they spend the majority of their time. And for our most vulnerable students, schools are also where they eat the majority of their calories.

FoodCorps members serve in high-need schools, using a three-ingredient recipe that research has shown drives increases in fruit and vegetable consumption: delivering hands-on gardening and cooking lessons that inspire students to fall in love with healthy food; making changes to the cafeteria that improve offerings and steer students toward smart choices; and encouraging buy-in from teachers, parents, administrators and food service teams by fostering a school-wide culture of health.

Our Impact

An external evaluation by Columbia University found that students in FoodCorps schools with more hands-on learning activities are eating triple the amount of fruits and vegetables as students who receive less of that hands-on learning.

Also at the child level, FoodCorps achieves and measures progress in children’s preferences for vegetables, one of the strongest predictors of a healthy diet. Last year, 6 in 10 students taught by FoodCorps members improved their attitudes toward vegetables, tried new ones, or maintained their high regard for vegetables if they already liked them.

At the school level, FoodCorps tracks the transformation of the whole school environment, using a scorecard to set goals and achieve lasting improvements across the three focus areas of hands-on learning, healthy school meals, and school culture. Last year, 75% of schools with a FoodCorps presence were measurably healthier places by the end of the school year.

Looking beyond our direct program, FoodCorps leaders represent a powerful source of long-term impact. Our AmeriCorps members are a pipeline of diverse and talented leaders committed to lifelong careers in school food, public health, and education. 70% of FoodCorps alumni continue into jobs in the public or nonprofit sectors; 22% of them have been hired by one of our school or community partners; and at least 46 new jobs—roles like healthy food educators and school wellness champions—have been inspired by FoodCorps service.

Join Us

FoodCorps is building a future of healthy kids thanks to the generosity of corporations, individuals, foundations, and our partners at AmeriCorps. To learn more about FoodCorps, and to see how you can donate time, money or your voice to creating a future where every child is well-nourished and ready to thrive, visit www.foodcorps.org.