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## Poland

**Post:** Warsaw

### Polish People's Gardens Promote Healthy Food and Communities

**Report Categories:**

Administrative

Agricultural Situation

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**Report Highlights:**

FAS Warsaw launched “Garden Projects” in 2010 and 2011 in cooperation with several partners: the “*American-Polish Youth Vegetable Garden Project 2010*” and “*School Garden Project 2011*.” The ‘2010 Vegetable Garden Project’, initiated with the American School in Warsaw to promote physical activity and healthy nutrition among school children, was spurred on by the dedication of 2010 by the First Lady Michelle Obama and U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack to fight against obesity among youth. The “2011 *School Garden Project*” expanded on the 2010 program concept and scale by through partnering with the Polish 4-H Foundation. The National 4-H system enabled more youth to become involved in developing and managing school or community gardens, to learning about environmental friendly garden practices and biodiversity issues. To tweak interest among the clubs, the list of project eligible plant varieties was expanded to include: vegetables, fruits, herbs, flowers, trees, and shrubs. The 2011 program involved 30 4-H clubs and 520 children across Poland.

**General Information:**

The People's Garden concept revolves around conveying information to enable people and communities to nurture, maintain, or develop a healthy lifestyle and to protect our environment. Working with different partners, FAS Warsaw introduced the concept locally in 2010 then broadened the target audience nationally in 2011.

**“American-Polish Youth Vegetable Garden Project 2010”**

In 2010, FAS Warsaw cooperated with the American School of Warsaw and the Botanical Garden - Center for Biological Diversity Conservation (Polish Academy of Sciences), initiated “*American-Polish Youth Vegetable Garden Project 2010*” to develop a vegetable garden in line with that envisioned by Michelle Obama, First Lady of the United States of America, and Tom Vilsack, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, who dedicated 2010 to fight against obesity among children and youth. Vegetable Garden in Warsaw was created to promote physical activity as well as teach about healthy nutrition and healthy lifestyle. The American School students created a vegetable garden at the Botanical Garden and cultivated it from March to October 2010. Harvested vegetable and fruits were consumed in the school’s cafeteria and at the After Harvest Festival hosted by the school for the participants. For the classroom, a short curriculum was developed in collaboration with the Warsaw School of Agriculture and the American School of Warsaw. Students were taught about different agricultural systems, such as conventional, integrated, ecological, and biodynamic agriculture. While gaining knowledge about various methods of food production, students become more aware about challenges confronted by farmers, such as water management, biodiversity preservation, climate change, environmental pollution and many more. Students were given responsibilities with garden caring with adult advisors who helped them translate classroom information provided on plant biology and growth process, nutritional benefits of different plants and their uses through practical experience. Participants learnt the secrets of vegetables and fruits, their essential ingredients, and the basis for a healthy diet.

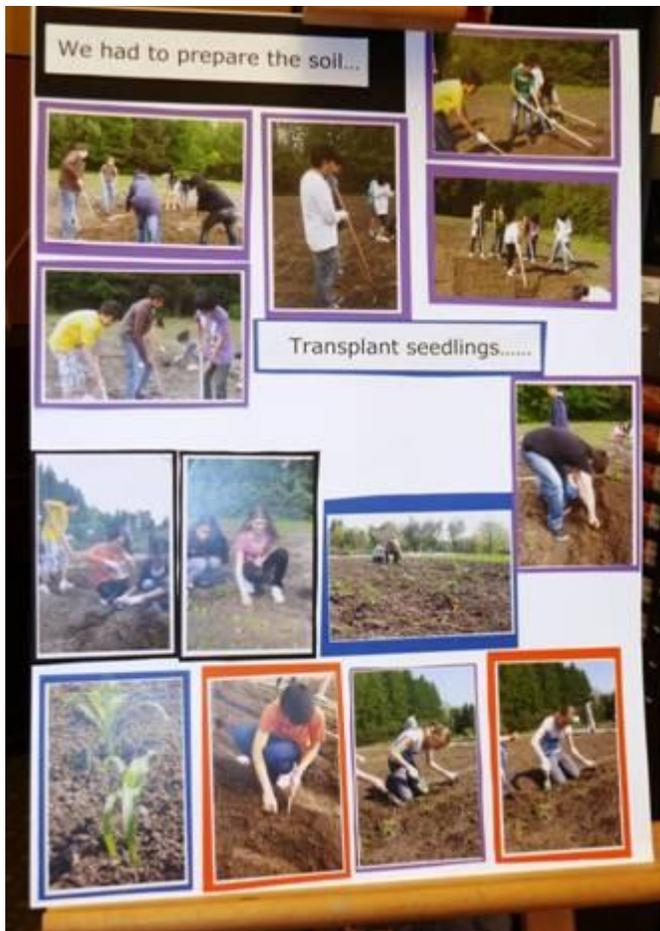
On June 8, 2010, William Heidt, Deputy Chief of Mission, and Eric Wenberg, Agricultural Counselor, formally dedicated the American-Polish Youth Vegetable Garden Project. On September 17, 2010 Michael Henney, incoming Agricultural Counselor, and Professor Jerzy Puchalski, Director of the Botanical Garden, had the pleasure of hosting the After Harvest Festival and thanked the participants, teachers and parents for their dedication to the “*American-Polish Youth Vegetable Garden Project 2010*”.



*ASW students (front center) with (back row left-right) Michelle Kaszuba, biology teacher, William Heidt, Deputy Chief of Mission, Tony Gerlicz, School Director and Eric Wenberg, Agricultural Counselor*



*Vegetable garden, July 2010*



Poster prepared by students (left). Harvested crops (bottom right). Food prepared by ASW students (top right).



Harvested crops (top). Food prepared by ASW students (bottom).

## **“School Garden Project 2011”**

The “*School Garden Project 2011*,” modeled after the “*American-Polish Youth Vegetable Garden Project 2010*,” held the main goal to involve more youth in developing and managing a school or community garden. Objectives were multiple but primarily for them to learn about the species of plants in their garden, environmental friendly garden practices, and about biodiversity issues revolving around modern cultivation practices. Projects were open to cultivation of vegetables, fruits, herbs, flowers, trees, and shrubbery with certain parameters applied. Fresh fruits and vegetables harvested were to be distributed to the needy or to be used for fund raising purposes. Trees, shrubs, and flowers could be planted to improve quality of soil, water, and air, to attract wildlife, and to enhance the community environment. FAS Warsaw developed the model and implemented the idea through the Polish 4-H Foundation with the objective to involve as many 4-H clubs and members as possible. The 4-H clubs in Poland are mainly located in rural areas and are involved with after school activities in primary, secondary and high schools, cultural centers, language schools. Many of these institutions became garden hosts and project participants as well. The 4-H clubs were responsible for finding project partners choosing from a list of Extension Service offices, associations, foundations, federations, universities, NGOs, schools, farmers, local activity groups, agricultural schools, agricultural chambers, and other entities.

As referenced previously, the objective of the project was for the participants to:

- gain knowledge on plant varieties cultivated,
- gain knowledge on environmental, agricultural and biological issues,
- learn how to apply environmental friendly practices that conserve natural resources for future generations and that make communities more attractive for both people and wildlife alike,
- develop skills in different aspects of community development creating a foundation for future collaboration on community projects.

As the project is based on the People’s Garden Initiative; the “*School Garden Project 2011*” had to contain the following three components:

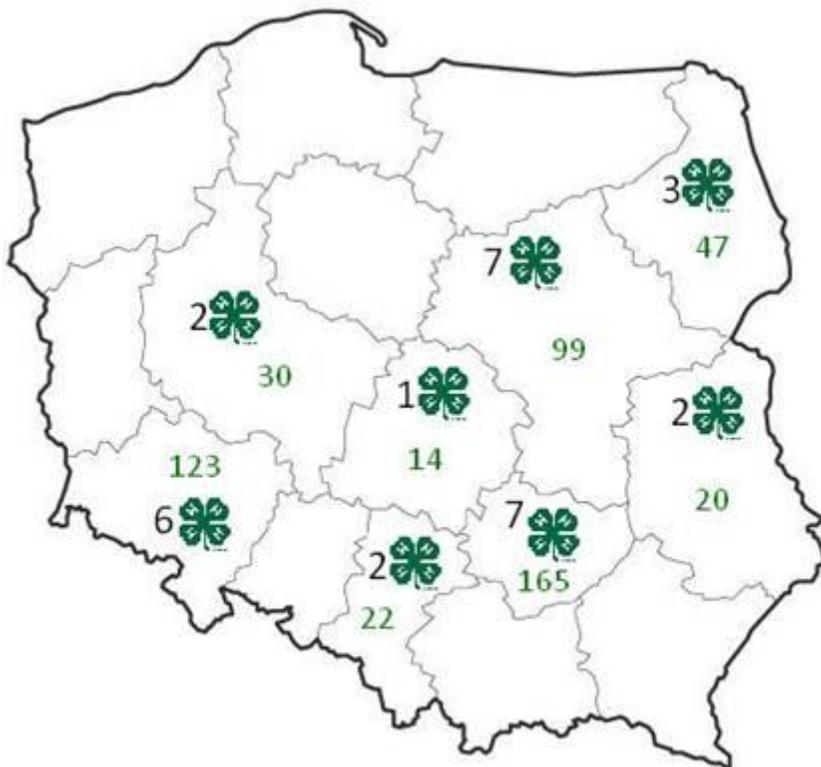
- Provides a benefit to the community: by creating space for leisure or recreational use that can be accessible by the public, donating harvest to a local food bank or shelter, designing a wildlife friendly landscape,
- Be collaborative: the garden must be a collaborative effort between other volunteers, neighborhoods, or organizations within the community,
- Incorporate sustainable practices: gardening practices must nurture, maintain, and protect the environment. Examples include: capturing rainwater in rain barrels, composting and mulching, planting native species, encouraging beneficial insects that feed on destructive pests.

## Summary of the project

A total of 30 4-H clubs involving 520 children participated in the 2011 program. Clubs were at liberty to choose type of plants to grow in the garden with choices to select from including: little known vegetable and herbs, little known fruit, flowers and ornamental plants. The majority of clubs chose flowers and ornamental plants with a few including herbs in their garden. 10 clubs developed gardens solely of vegetable and herbs. With their application, clubs provided their reason for participating in the project. While most clubs identified educational and environmental reasons as the basis for their initiative, 5 clubs identified fund raising as the reason. The majority of the clubs also stressed the importance of creating public space that could be used for leisure and recreation. Many clubs noted a desire to improve the image of the rural schools and their surroundings.

Clubs were also asked to define their plans concerning harvested crops. Among the answers sale (5 clubs), consumption at school (5 clubs), donation (3 clubs), and presentation during local Harvest Festivals and fund raising (17 clubs) were identified.

Many clubs indicated their plan to continue the project in the following year, especially these who created gardens in the public space and planted perennials.



Number of 4-H clubs participating in the project

Number of children participating in the project

**Photos from different gardens in Poland**



*4-H club from Radziejowice, Mazowsze region (garden 100 m<sup>2</sup>, planted ornamental plants and shrubs)*



*Agricultural Counselor Michael Henney with 4-H club leader and Town Hall representative.*



*Agricultural Counselor Michael Henney and Mrs. Irena Skowińska Director of the Primary School in Kulkówka Radziejowicka (Mazowsze region) in front of (10 m<sup>2</sup> garden with ornamental plants and shrubs)*



*4-H club ERA from Brzeź, Wielkopolska Region (192 m<sup>2</sup> garden; planted: magnolia, roses, azalea, conifers, rhododendrons, Sea Buckthorn)*



*4-H club Dzwoneczki from Skotniki, Świętokrzyskie Region (15 m<sup>2</sup> garden; planted: ornamental plants)*



*4-H club Horizon from Września, Wielkopolska Region (25m<sup>2</sup> garden; planted: pumpkins and squash)*

