

Roma ISD Students Enjoy a Bountiful Harvest at R.T. Barrera Garden



It was the last day of school at Roma ISD, and R.T. Barrera Elementary School students enjoyed one final important lesson before being released for the summer.

“The students are harvesting fruits and vegetables from our school’s garden, which was established about two years ago; this is our second harvest,” explained Principal Olga V. Gonzalez. “Through this garden, the students are learning a variety of lessons, the most important of which are healthy eating and the value of hard work in preparing the soil, planting seeds, tending the seeds and watching them grow.”

Established through the generous support of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, in partnership with Long Live Texans and the Starr County Coalition for Working on Wellness, the R.T. Barrera Elementary School Eagle Garden is one of 16 community gardens across Starr County planted with the hope of changing the county’s wellness outlook.

“We want our children to see the importance of healthy eating and how it will lead to better health in the future,” said Yolanda Morado, county extension agent with Starr County’s Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Office. “Healthy eating habits can help prevent problems like heart disease and diabetes.”

“There is also the important component of exercise; the children love to come out and work in the garden. They are seeing what can happen through hard work and tenacity,” she continued. “We’ve even seen the children go home and start their own gardens; about 14 children are

tending their own home gardens at this point and that is really a blessing that they are so vested in what we are doing. In the end, this leads to self-reliance and sustainability because they can grow and eat their own food at a lesser monetary cost.”

In addition to the R.T. Barrera Elementary School Eagle Garden, Roma High School is also engaged in a large-scale garden project with Texas A&M AgriLife.

“It has been amazing the support we have received from Roma ISD,” added Morado. “We’ve had great experiences with the kids. Through the gardens the schools are able to use some of the ingredients in their cafeterias introducing the children to different kinds of lettuce. And in another instance, we showed the students how you can lightly bread and bake eggplant, then dip it in a fresh, natural marinara sauce that they can make at home. They loved it and now they know eggplant is a good, healthy and delicious option.”

In addition to using the garden’s bounty for teaching purposes, Roma ISD students have benefited from taking some of the food home to introduce it to their families, further spreading the seeds of healthy eating and sustainability in the communities served by the district.

For more information about Texas A&M AgriLife Extension and how it can benefit members of the Starr County community contact the extension’s Starr County Office at 956-487-2306.