

# USU Agriculture in the Classroom Partners to Provide Utah School Garden Program

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Students in 11 elementary schools in Utah will have the opportunity to strengthen their understanding of where food comes from by participating in a hands-on school gardening program, thanks to a grant from Tractor Supply, the nation's largest rural lifestyle retailer. Utah State University Extension's Utah Agriculture in the Classroom (AITC) program and the National Agriculture in the Classroom Organization (NAITCO) were recently named partners with Tractor Supply's "Dig It" garden program designed for students in kindergarten through fifth grade.

Tractor Supply launched the program last spring in Tennessee and New York to provide schools with an enriched, hands-on curriculum that would reinforce responsibility and teamwork while deepening students' understanding of the food supply. Through its partnership with NAITCO and its state affiliates, Tractor Supply developed a curriculum guide and awarded 120 schools in the country with a \$500 grant to start or sustain a school garden program.

"Utah Agriculture in the Classroom is delighted to partner with Tractor Supply in bringing the Dig It program to Utah schools," said Denise Stewardson, AITC director. "The benefits to students who participate in garden-centered learning environments are numerous, both inside and outside the classroom. Also, gardening experiences provide unique opportunities for teachers to contextualize science, social studies and nutrition standards using engaging, interactive learning. Utah AITC is excited to support the Dig It program and witness its positive impacts on Utah students."

The Dig It lesson plans support what a majority of Americans believe to be beneficial when it comes to classroom learning. A recent survey of 1,000 Americans commissioned by Tractor Supply found that 75 percent believe hands-on learning is more effective than memorization; 96 percent believe hands-on learning activities help children have a more positive attitude toward learning; and 50 percent believe today's children know the same or less about sustainable living compared to 10 years ago.

"There's something so important about getting kids outside of the traditional classroom setting and allowing them to use their hands and minds in a different way," said Jessica Holmes, store marketing manager at Tractor Supply and creator of the program. "The value of a program like Dig It was reinforced by its success in New York and Tennessee, and we're extremely excited to watch it grow in Utah, California and Pennsylvania."

Participating schools in Utah include: Lapoint Elementary, Uintah County; Athenian eAcademy, Sanpete County; Hurricane Elementary, Washington County; North Summit Elementary, Summit County; Cleveland Elementary, Emery County; River Heights Elementary, Cache County; Ashman Elementary, Sevier County; Thunder Ridge Elementary, Utah County; Excelsior Academy, Tooele County; Valley View Elementary, Weber County; and Odyssey Elementary, Davis County.

NAITCO is made up of AITC programs in 48 states and six territories. Its mission is to educate teachers and students in kindergarten through 12th grade about the importance of agriculture by providing materials and programs that use agricultural concepts to teach reading, writing, math, science, social studies and more.

For additional educational resources, visit <http://utah.agclassroom.org/>.

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