



The Food Project



SPROUT CREW

IMPACT STUDY 2020-21



Analysis & Report by SEED IMPACT





The Food Project

For 30 years, The Food Project (TFP) has partnered with youth from diverse backgrounds to foster personal development while simultaneously building a stronger, healthier, and more equitable food system. Food and farming are the medium through which youth learn:

- ***The root causes of (and potential solutions to) food inequity and insecurity***
- ***How to work together across their differences***
- ***How to lead change in their communities***

The Food Project has roots in several communities across Boston, the North Shore, and MetroWest. Shortly after launching on a Lincoln farm in 1992, The Food Project established its first urban farm and office in Boston's Dudley neighborhood. Today, The Food Project operates four urban farms, two suburban farms, and greenhouse-growing operations in Dudley, Lincoln, Lynn, and Wenham.

Over The Food Project's history, over 1,800 youth, working together with numerous staff and volunteers, have cultivated over 5,000,000 pounds of produce, provided 100,000 hours of service at hunger relief organizations, and built over 1,400 raised-bed gardens for family homes and community spaces.

SPROUT CREW

The established sequence for participation in The Food Project is for youth to begin in the summer as Seed Crew members, then advance throughout the following academic year as Dirt Crew members. If they opt to continue, they step into Root Crew status. Unfortunately, due to the coronavirus pandemic, there was no summer program in 2020 and consequently no rising group of Seed Crew members entering Fall 2020 as Dirt Crew members.

To maintain The Food Project's youth leadership pipeline, and engage teens who were unable to participate in Seed Crew 2020, Sprout Crew was established for 2020-2021, as an ad hoc, entry-level, academic year program. Sprout Crew offered the most important elements of Seed Crew for North Shore and Greater Boston youth. Sprout Crew members spent one weekend day per week on The Food Project's farms during the fall and spring of the academic year.

Each crew member adhered to safety protocols as they weeded, mulched, and harvested produce for donation to community partners. Youth also engaged in workshops on race, income inequality, sustainable agricultural, and food justice topics—all deeply intertwined with their direct work within the food system.

“Outside of work, I have found myself giving explanations to those around me about not only what we do at TFP, but also why we do it and why it is important. I've talked to many family members and friends about it.”

-Mariana K., 16, North Shore



ASSESSING IMPACT

The Food Project seeks to empower youth to lead and engage others in creating personal and social change.

In alignment with empowerment theory, gains in confidence and awareness enable youth to then take action to change their environments (Zimmerman, 2000).

The Food Project applied empowerment theory to measure gains in confidence, awareness, and action using the following three domains:

THE FOOD PROJECT SEEKS TO EMPOWER YOUTH TO LEAD AND ENGAGE OTHERS IN CREATING PERSONAL AND SOCIAL CHANGE.

INTRAPERSONAL

Youth feel **confident** in themselves and in their ability to make a difference

INTERACTIONAL

Youth have a **critical awareness** that connects them to the communities in which they work

BEHAVIORAL

Youth can effectively **educate, motivate, and lead** others to create food systems change

“Doing farm work felt almost secondary to interacting with new people and learning about injustices together. It made the job feel less like a job and more fun and informative, almost like a friendly, welcoming social justice club.”

-Kiera P. 15, North Shore

FRIENDLY, WELCOMING
SOCIAL JUSTICE CLUB

“When we had ‘real talk,’ there was never a disagreement between me and my peers. Instead, we heard each other and took actions to improve ourselves.”

-Gabriella A., 16, North Shore

TOOK ACTIONS TO IMPROVE
OURSELVES



EMPOWERMENT FRAMEWORK

The Food Project, in collaboration with **SEED Impact**, customized an assessment tool for tracking empowerment growth. **Three abilities** were defined to capture the spirit and breadth of challenges posed to crew members in each domain:

INTRAPERSONAL

Youth can lead groups and take initiative in work

Youth can use and give constructive feedback

Youth can take steps out of their comfort zone

INTERACTIONAL

Youth can identify the systems of oppression and privilege that affect their lives

Youth can name and celebrate the parts of their identity

Youth can work in diverse groups

BEHAVIORAL

Youth can manage food systems projects

Youth can encourage other to make change in the food system

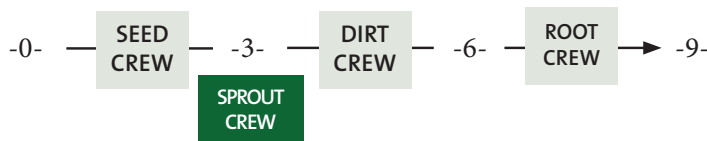
Youth can perform successfully as employees

The Food Project provides increasingly challenging opportunities and expectations for youth as they progress from Seed to Dirt to Root Crew.

FRAMEWORK LOGIC

It is anticipated that Seed Crew members will begin with mastery levels near zero for the nine practices. Some will be more familiar, such as working hard; while others, like catalyzing change, will appear more foreign. As their first summer progresses, they do these practices with increasing confidence and skill (achieving levels 1 to 3).

For 2020-21, due to the pandemic, the Sprout Crew members first needed to master the nine Seed Crew practices. Then, with success and as time and opportunities permitted, they deepened their practices to reach the Dirt Crew levels.



"I have learned so much about food systems and food insecurity, as well. I now am more conscious about my actions in terms of food and try to educate others..."

I AM MORE CONSCIOUS ABOUT MY ACTIONS

-Angelina N., 16, North Shore

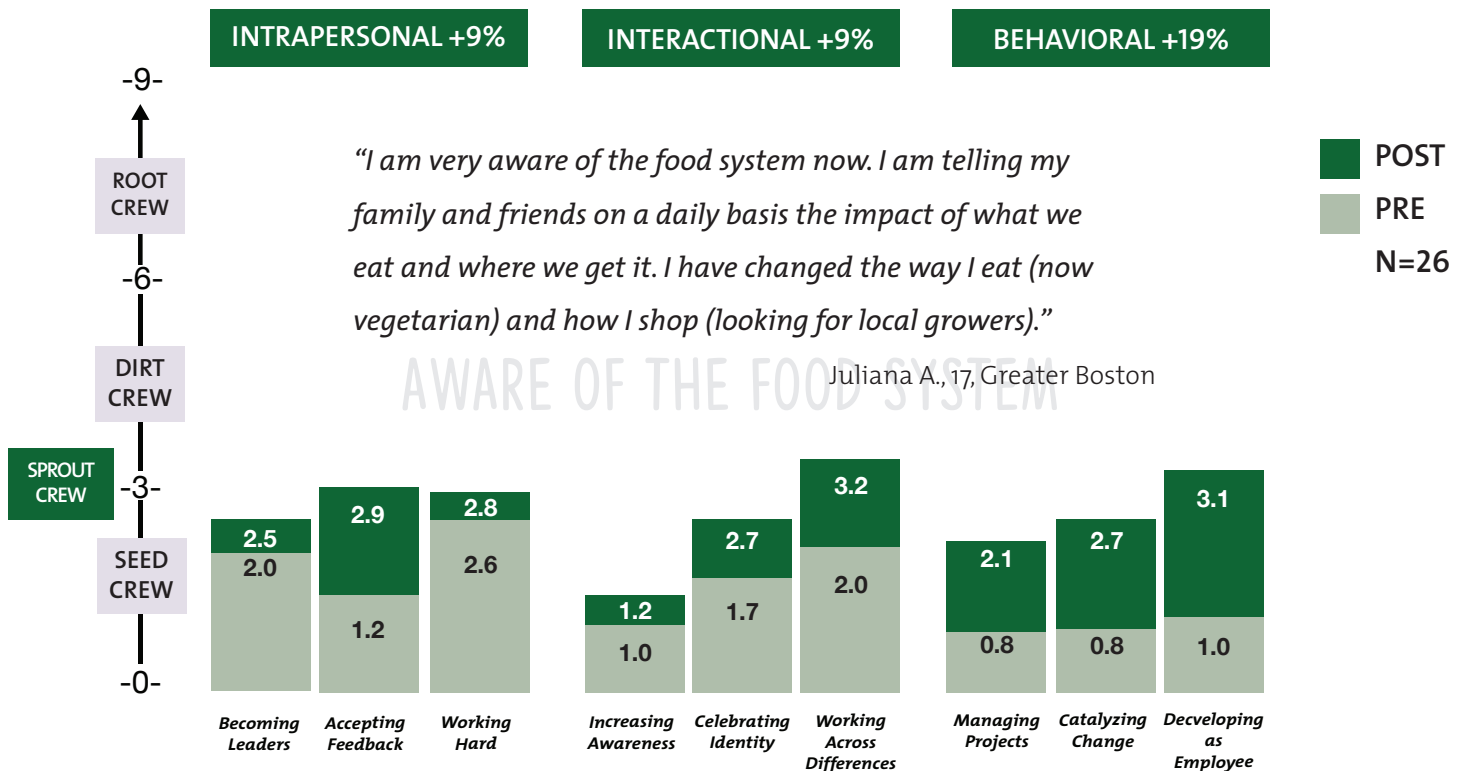
The complete set of progressive mastery levels are provided in the **Appendix**.

2020-2021 DETAILED RESULTS

Sprout Crew members were observed by supervisors throughout their year of engagement. A “pre” assessment was conducted in October 2020, capturing baseline performance data for the 26 participants on nine Seed Crew practices. Then a “post” assessment was conducted in May 2021. The average ratings are shown below from pre to post, with percentage increases for each of the three empowerment domains:



EMPOWERMENT GAINS 2020-21, 26 SPROUT CREW MEMBERS



The 26 youth demonstrated strong results, especially during the coronavirus pandemic.

The baseline started slightly higher for the foundational practices that enable behavioral action, such as “working hard” and “working across differences.” Of note and consistent with the empowerment model, youth achieved greatest gains (19% overall) for the three behavioral practices.

The 26 youth were challenged to achieve Seed Crew level mastery first. Towards the end of the academic year, the more advanced students began to reach Dirt Crew levels. Over time, full Seed level mastery (3.0) was mostly attained. “Increasing Awareness” and “Managing Projects” remained challenging. Mastery levels would likely have been higher had more live opportunities to interact with peers and community members been possible.

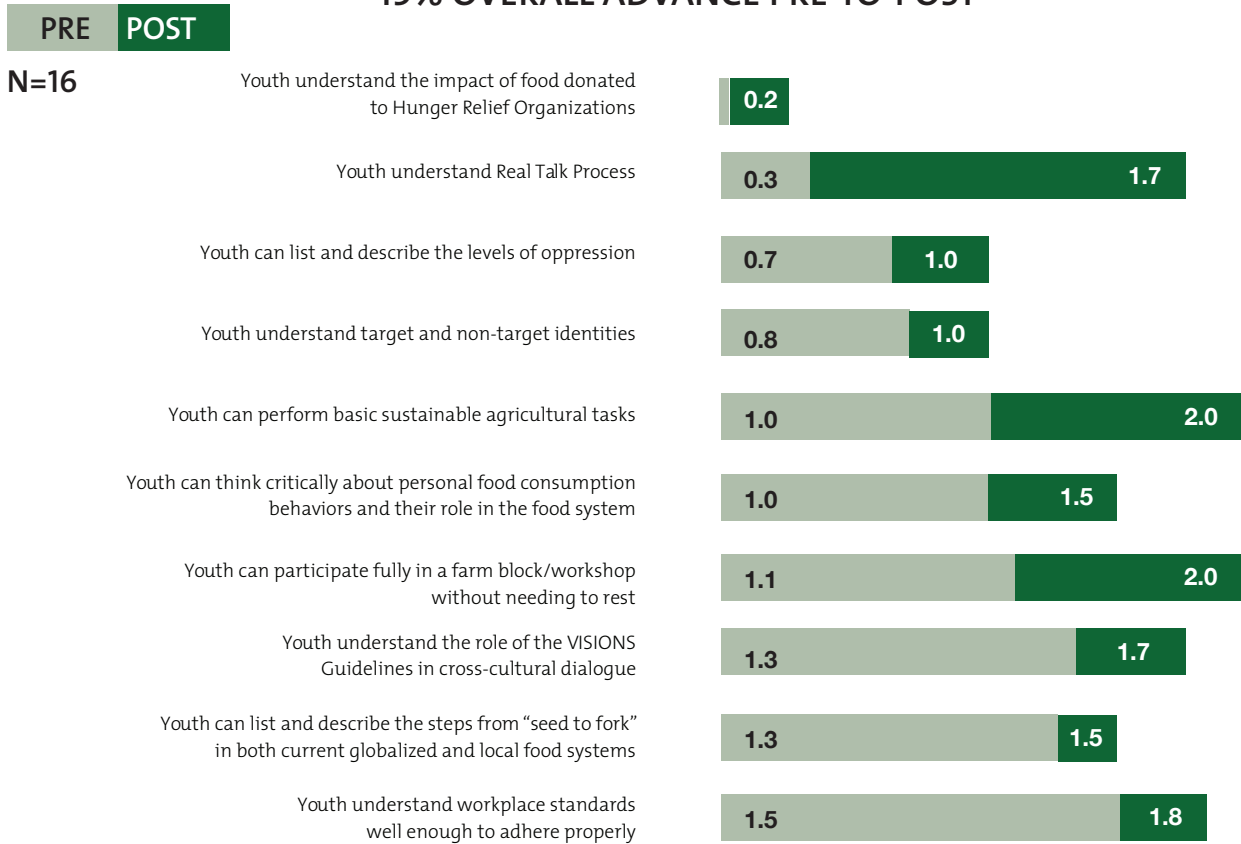
TEN ADDITIONAL PRACTICES

To complement the empowerment assessments, supervisors also observed the mastery of Sprout Crew members on 10 additional practices. A 3-point maximum scale was used:



Sprout Crew members achieved a **19 percent increase in ten complementary skills.**

19% OVERALL ADVANCE PRE-TO-POST



As indicated by the results for the top practice above, youth were not able to gain much exposure to hunger relief organizations during COVID-19. They showed most significant gains in understanding the “real talk process.” Youth reached highest levels of mastery on: (1) ability to perform basic agricultural tasks, and (2) ability to participate fully in a farm block workshop without needing to rest.

“TFP has helped shape me into a stronger more confident person than I was when I first started. It’s helped me be more comfortable with my identity and with who I am as a person.”

STRONGER MORE CONFIDENT PERSON

-Rahma G., 14, Greater Boston

“We were working in Lincoln on a superhot day, but I completed the task on four beds all on my own. I didn’t socialize too much, but I still held conversations, and even though it was superhot and long, I got it done and I was proud of my effort.”

-Juliana A., 17, Greater Boston.

PROUD OF MY EFFORT



YOUTH SELF-REFLECTION

At the conclusion of the program year in late-May, the Sprout Crew participants were invited to self-reflect on the year and specifically on nine Seed Crew practices tracked by their supervisors. This rating scale was again applied:



N=16

Practice	Rating
I can apply for and maintain a job	2.5
I understand how I can be involved in food systems change	2.4
I can take initiative in my work	2.3
I can share about my identity with my peers	2.3
I can build relationships with people from different backgrounds/identities	2.3
I can describe the value of the work we do	2.3
I understand the systems of oppression	2.2
I can push through discomfort to accomplish the goal of the team	2.2
I can accept and incorporate critical feedback from teammates and supervisors to improve performance	2.1

The average findings were similar across all nine practices. Of interest, these four practices showed the most correlation between youth self-assessments and supervisor observations:

- I can take initiative in my work
- I can accept and incorporate feedback from teammates and supervisors to improve performance
- I can share about my identity with peers
- I understand how I can be involved in food systems change.

“I have worked in rain and really cold weather, and didn’t mind getting dirty!”

DIDN'T MIND GETTING DIRTY
-Zanieb G., 17, Greater Boston



“The bond I created with the crew is one that is still astonishing to me even after the end of our work period. We were a great team together; we encouraged, assisted, and taught each other along the way. Every day of work I went in with the confidence that I would be working with people who’d have my back.”

-Randall M., 15, North Shore

WE WERE A GREAT TEAM TOGETHER

“I have grown a lot. I learned about farming, social Injustice, food systems, power, media and many more important topics people don’t really talk about today. TFP made me know about what is going on in the world, and how I can help be a solution. I was able to work on a farm and learn the basics... to meet different people that I knew nothing of and build strong connections with them. I learned about myself, and what I need to improve about myself. I have had the best time with the best peer leader and supervisor I could have ever asked for.”

-Precious A., 15, North Shore

I CAN HELP BE A SOLUTION



“My peers and I were working outside this apartment complex to help folks plant vegetables in their garden beds. Our job was to sell/giveaway different tomato seedlings to the residents ... and share information about the specific types. I usually am shy, but that day was very encouraging. I enjoyed connecting to the people who were getting veggies and herbs to plant!”

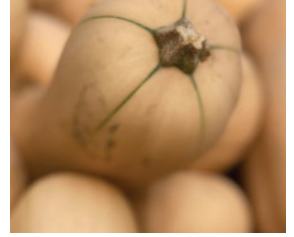
-Irma R., 16, North Shore

I ENJOYED CONNECTING TO THE PEOPLE



APPENDIX

THE FOOD PROJECT EMPOWERMENT FRAMEWORK



COMPONENTS		INTRAPERSONAL: Youth feel confident in themselves and in their ability to make a difference	INTERACTIONAL: Youth have a critical awareness that connects them to the communities they work with	BEHAVIORAL: Youth can effectively educate, motivate and lead others to create food systems change.
ROOT CREW (Levels 7-9)		<p>Becoming Leaders: Youth can manage specialized agricultural tasks, including distribution, with little adult guidance or oversight</p> <p>Accepting Feedback: Youth can set rigorous goals for themselves and their work</p> <p>Working Hard: Youth can support others to push beyond their comfort zone</p>	<p>Increasing Awareness: Youth can describe the alternatives to conventional forms of food production/distribution modeled by TFP</p> <p>Celebrating Identity: Youth can proudly claim their identity and story</p> <p>Working Across Difference: Youth can facilitate community dialogue across difference</p>	<p>Managing Projects: Youth can manage community projects, from planning to implementation</p> <p>Catalyzing Change: Youth can organize for food system change at a local, state, and national level</p> <p>Developing as Employees: Youth are prepared for future opportunities</p>
DIRT CREW (Levels 4-6)		<p>Becoming Leaders: Youth can lead peers and adults in farm tasks</p> <p>Accepting Feedback Youth can use personal goals to produce high quality feedback for themselves, their peers, and their crew</p> <p>Working Hard: Youth can push through emotional discomfort to connect with others</p>	<p>Increasing Awareness: Youth can describe how levels of oppression have impacted food access in the communities where we live and work</p> <p>Celebrating Identity: Youth understand the significance of their social location</p> <p>Working Across Difference: Youth can effectively participate in cross-cultural dialogue and sharing</p>	<p>Managing Projects: Youth can facilitate gardener support</p> <p>Catalyzing Change: Youth can encourage others to get involved in food systems change</p> <p>Developing as Employees: Youth can professionally represent The Food Project</p>
SPROUT CREW	SEED CREW (Levels 0-3)	<p>Becoming Leaders: Youth can take initiative in work</p> <p>Accepting Feedback: Youth can accept and incorporate critical feedback from teammates and supervisors to improve performance</p> <p>Working Hard: Youth can push through discomfort to accomplish the goal of the team</p>	<p>Increasing Awareness: Youth can list and describe the levels of oppression</p> <p>Celebrating Identity: Youth can share about their identity with their peers</p> <p>Working Across Difference: Youth can build relationships with people from different backgrounds/ identities</p>	<p>Managing Projects: Youth can notice the value of the work we do</p> <p>Catalyzing Change: Youth understands how they can be involved in food systems change</p> <p>Developing as Employees: Youth can apply for and maintain a job</p>

