

Forging Bonds with Produce

Can produce help build bonds across West Sacramento and strengthen our community? That's a core aim of Shayne Zurilgen's work at Fiery Ginger Farm, which he co-runs with his partner, Hope Sippola. Perhaps you've seen their two-acre farm as you've driven past Yolo High School, but you may not know all that they're doing to support the West Sacramento community.

Shayne says their aim as an urban farm isn't just to harvest crops; they're also trying to nurture community. As he points out, the food we eat is largely grown out of sight and disconnected from those of us living in relatively dense urban areas like West Sacramento. To help bring the farm experience closer to home, Shayne, a former middle school teacher, offers a range of programs for local children. These include field trips to the farm and in-class science lessons where students can try turnips, radishes, pineapple guava, and other produce they may not normally encounter.

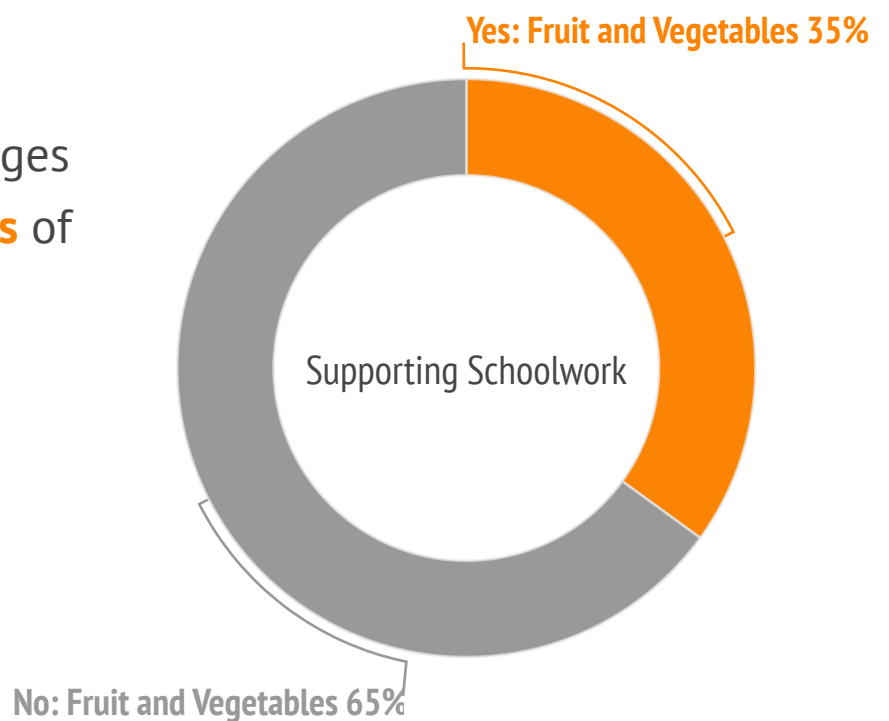


Shayne Zurilgen and Hope Sippola at Fiery Ginger Farm.

By offering a series of farm-to-school initiatives, Shayne wants children in West Sacramento to grow up to be informed citizens. “The hope is that kids will come out to the farm and start to ask questions,” he says. “These will be kids who vote, who make decisions with their dollar, and we just hope this experience of being out here will help them make better choices about eating.”

As a result of the pandemic, the local need, of course, had only grown, so Fiery Ginger Farm began a veggie box delivery service to reach economically challenged individuals in West Sacramento living with diabetes and high-risk pregnancies whose condition could worsen without effective management. This new “Food is Medicine” program addressed a pressing need for CommuniCare Health Centers, who, along with the Health Education Council, provided support to serve 40 of CommuniCare’s patients in West Sacramento.

About one-third of children ages 2-11 **eat five or more servings** of fruit and vegetables daily.



CommuniCare already had been taking quite seriously this notion that food is indeed medicine. They provide prescriptions for healthy foods to their patients, and have pulled down funding for cooking classes, according to Edye Kuyper, the food program manager at CommuniCare. Edye notes that the value of food programs in a health care setting is not only that nutritious eating is essential to healthy living. These programs, she says, also incentivize patients to come to CommuniCare's clinics to access needed health services.



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Shayne Zurilgen

But what do you do when the pandemic forces patients to stay home? CommuniCare and their own funding partner, Sutter Health, realized that their distribution mechanism of providing food through clinics was being disrupted by COVID. So when Shayne approached them with an opportunity to deliver food to high-risk patients, CommuniCare and Sutter were ready to pivot.

It took a range community partners – Sutter Health, CommuniCare, the Health Education Council and Fiery Ginger Farm – to implement this new food delivery service to meet the need of West Sacramento residents, but sometimes the best ideas are born through collaborating during crises.