

## Podcast 5

### *Garden as Community and Learning Space*

On Thursday morning, middle-school students gather at the Colby Garden to plant lettuce with the summer interns. The students may never have planted a seed before, and are simply amazed to watch it grow. Even more, their teachers and a few college students are there helping them do it; in a way acting as mentors outside the classroom, connecting with the girls and boys beyond lessons and rote memorization, but through collaboratively spending time together. “Jack was an at-risk student, and it seems like this is helping him take a turn for the better” says a teacher, who has seen him grow in the last few weeks, attributing some of this development to his experiences at Colby’s Garden. Could extracurricular activities, like gardening, especially with role models and teachers that care, help students feel more valued, supported, and in turn be more supported and motivated in school? Possibly. This podcast will explore graduation rates in Maine, and describe the role of school gardens, and how important programs like Colby’s *Sprout Scouts* or events with the community are to development of youth.

In the 2012-13 school year, the US had a total graduation rate of 81 percent, and Maine with an 86% graduation rate (West & Odum, 2016). Waterville public schools, however, fared at only 79% graduation rate in the 2015-16 year (Maine Department of Education). These graduation rates have factors of influence beyond community gardens, however, possibly incorporating gardening as a way for youth to connect with adults, teachers, and mentors in a collaborative setting may be a contributing factor to retention of students in school. Programs like Colby’s community events, the Maine School Garden Network, or the Maine Agriculture in the Classroom program can help to realize these possibilities. The Maine School Garden Network works to promote and support educational gardens for youth and encourage school programs to teach healthy eating and environmental stewardship (Maine School Garden Network). Through the funding of grants and supporting school garden projects, this network helps to impact the lives of many young students. In addition, the Maine Agriculture in the Classroom program provides teachers with resources like lesson plans, curricula, and grants, which may also have an impact on students in the classroom, especially those that live in rural areas (Maine Agriculture in the Classroom).

I’m not sure whatever happened to Jack, the at risk student that benefitted from coming up to the garden on Thursday mornings during the summer. Possibly, he’s back where he started, or maybe he’s adopted a new passion and sustained support from teachers and mentors. Either way, the garden had an impact, however small or large, on his experiences in school, and it is just one example of a student’s experiences. In addition, Colby’s garden works to involve students and community members in community events like campfires, markets, and harvest parties. This series of podcasts show the work of small farms and gardens as social actors to help curb hunger and give purpose and mentorship to youth.

### Works Cited

Maine Agriculture in the Classroom. "About Us." Accessed on November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2017, from:  
<https://www.agclassroom.org/me/about/index.htm>

Maine Department of Education. "Graduation and Dropout Data: 2015/16." Accessed on November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2017 from: <http://www.maine.gov/doe/data/student/gradrates.html>.

Maine School Garden Network. "About Us" Accessed on November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2017, from:  
<http://www.msgn.org/>

West, R., Odum, J., 2016. "State of the States Report 2015: Poverty and Opportunity in the States: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly." *Center for American Progress*. Accessed from: <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/23080039/StateofStates-fullreport2.pdf>