Early in 2020, Faculty at OSU Extension in Josephine County received exciting news: their application for a $120,000 Farm to School Grant from the Oregon Department of Education was approved! Faculty in Family & Community Health and Horticulture launched into strategies on how best to use the funding to educate school-aged youth about farming and nutrition. Then the unimaginable happened, and the COVID pandemic changed the landscape of K-12 learning. While many educators struggled to adapt to remote instruction, Extension Faculty Cheryl Kirk and Sara Runkel pivoted to embrace the challenge.

Cheryl and Sara were dogged in their determination to provide a comprehensive learning experience. They led the charge to create a dedicated Farm to School [website](#) to promote an 8 week Family Food and Garden Club targeting 4th and 5th graders in the Grants Pass School District. This Club’s goal struck at the core of Extension’s mission to provide locally-relevant, research-based education to support the community's health and well-being.

Without the ability to conduct in-person programming, the duo created take-home Garden and Healthy Food activity kits for students. By collaborating with the Grants Pass School District, Cheryl and Sara safely distributed the learning materials to 130 participants. The Club provided weekly online instruction, workshops, and lessons that culminated in access to locally-grown produce through Grants Pass Growers Market gift certificates. The gift certificates promoted continued program engagement and allowed participants to incorporate locally sourced fruits and vegetables into their diet. The mixed modality of online and in-person experiences encouraged learning that engaged the family as a unit.

The Family Food and Garden Club is one example of how the OSU Extension Service bridges education gaps and creates community partnerships that reach underserved populations. Although this Club has concluded, the benefits of the Farm to School Grant continue to reach the Josephine County community through ongoing programs at OSU Extension Service.

By Cheryl Leitch for OSU Extension