

The Virgin Islands Consortium

From Concept To Reality: Ricardo Richards Elementary Reaps First Harvest From Garden

Education / **Published On June 03, 2016 12:36 PM /**

Ernice Gilbert **June 03, 2016**



ST. CROIX -- The Mapp administration and Department of Education [have been pushing](#) the idea of using produce grown on local farms in the territory's schools. It would save money, they say, and work as a healthy alternative. But Ricardo Richards Elementary School has taken the concept a bit further: students, guided by school faculty and the facility's gardening committee, created their own garden and on Thursday, reaped the first rewards of their diligent work.

The garden, located at the back of the school, is tended to by students everyday bar Friday. They plant, pluck weeds, cut grass and make sure the garden area is neat, says Claudia Eugene, science lab teacher and coordinator of the garden club.

The project commenced in earnest in October, according to Ms. Eugene, who revealed that the idea was pitched by a parent. School leaders immediately favored the vision, prompting Ms. Eugene to apply for grants -- which the school received in the amount of \$6,000 from the Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands . With funds secured, the project was launched.

[View the original embedded media](#)

"In order to really put this together, we had parental support as well as farmers, who came on board and helped in actually building the foundation," Ms. Eugene said. "And after the foundation was built we created a gardening club."

Assistant Principal Juliette Miller highlighted the garden as a community project, with local farmers coming aboard to teach how to successfully grow plants, and businesses like Bates Trucking helping with the cutting of trees that were obstructing the garden.

"I would say that it's been a real community effort," she said. "They came and told us about the soil, what to mix together and where to plant, the trees and how that's going to affect us. And so we were able to take advice from them."

Before being selected to be part of the program, students are assessed so that those with allergies are not affected, Ms. Eugene said. But for the most part, Ms. Miller added, the gardening class is embraced by the children, some of whom have seen the same thing done at home.

"It's almost innate," she said. "Some of the children want to garden because they have gardens at home. And so they're seeing their parents garden and they're seeing their parents produce, and so they're bringing that attitude and desire to garden for themselves into the school. And then there are those who are not gardeners and those who don't have the space to do so, but this is giving them a chance to express and to learn."

Ms. Miller said having Ms. Eugene as both science lab teacher and project coordinator is like having the best of both worlds. "Whatever they're doing in the lab, they are now putting it into practice outside. It's like two molds coming together," she said.

Following the harvest, students carried the produce to the school's cafeteria and presented it to the chef, who will prepare meals that include food grown a few feet away, and by the hands of third, fourth, fifth and sixth graders.

Feature Image: Students, teachers and the chef of the Ricardo Richards Elementary School pose for a picture (Ernice Gilbert, VIC).

Correction: June 4, 2016

A previous version of this article stated that a grant awarded to the Ricardo Richards Elementary School was provided by the St. Croix Foundation, when the donation was actually made by the Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands. The story has been updated to reflect the correct information.

© Viconsortium 2026