Meeting Youth Where They Are:

Conducting In-Person, Online and Hybrid Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) in CalFresh Healthy Living, University of California Programming
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Acknowledgements

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Contra Costa County

UCCE staff members Eli Figueroa, Charles Go, and Marisa Neelon, and the YPAR team at Dozier-Libbey Medical High School.

Imperial County

UCCE staff members Chris Gomez Wong, Yu Meng, and Rigoberto Ponce, and the YPAR teams from Calexico High School’s Eco-Garden Club, the Central Union High School District Imperial Valley Regional Occupational Program, and Southwest High School’s Sports Medicine Career Technical Education Classes.

Madera County

UCCE staff members Jessica Gil-Bautista and Elizabeth Lopez, and the YPAR team from James Madison Elementary School.

Riverside County

UCCE staff members Claudia Carlos and Daisy Valdez, and the Villegas Middle School Career Technical Education YPAR team.

How to Use this Report

This report documents the work of four CalFresh Healthy Living, University of California (CFHL, UC) county programs that facilitated youth participatory action research (YPAR) projects as part of the Youth Engagement Initiative during Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2022. YPAR is a process that engages young people in using the tools of research to critically assess conditions that shape their lives, with the goal of supporting action to improve those conditions. Highlighted here are diverse examples of YPAR in action within the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed). In California, the name for the federal SNAP-Ed program is CalFresh Healthy Living.
This documentation effort captures how youth-led policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) change interventions utilized multiple delivery modes to sustain and expand projects as communities struggled to bridge to a “new normal” during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. After a brief introduction, this report details the SOE/CRC team’s development of a new Youth Career Pathways Toolkit in FFY 2022. This toolkit provides activities, tips, and resources for CFHL, UCCE staff and extenders facilitating YPAR projects, with the aim of helping youth translate what they’re learning to building their own career pathways. This report also explores continued piloting of a scaffolded approach to YPAR training and facilitation that was developed in response to programmatic needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. It concludes with detailed profiles of each YPAR project facilitated during FFY 2022, examining lessons learned from multiple case studies.

Since no two YPAR projects are the same, the information presented here is intended as a reference rather than a step-by-step manual. These case studies and their promising practices offer examples of what is possible as youth and program facilitators craft youth-led PSE change efforts that fit the specific needs and circumstances of their unique communities while confronting ongoing challenges and uncertainty.

The Documentation Process

Information provided here was collected in several ways:
- monthly check-in calls and additional technical assistance conversations with individual counties;
- post-project interviews and site visits with UCCE staff;
- statewide youth engagement conference calls that occurred monthly and were open to all CFHL, UC counties engaged in this work;
- youth-produced final reports, videos, and presentations;
- archived items and program documents from counties; and
- extensive field notes.

The Youth Engagement Initiative

Launched in FFY 2016, CFHL, UC’s Youth Engagement Initiative continues to explore innovative strategies to engage youth in nutrition and physical activity. Projects within this initiative seek to empower young people from vulnerable communities to lead efforts that improve the environments where they live, play, eat, shop, and learn.

The Youth Engagement Initiative embraces core youth development principles, as well as USDA Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program–Education (SNAP-Ed) Guidance that employ PSE change activities—such as multi-level interventions and community and public health approaches—in addition to providing direct nutrition education (for a full definition of PSE, please see the Fiscal Year 2023 SNAP-Ed Plan Guidance, pp. 18-20). CFHL, UC recognizes that youth who are impacted by PSE decisions should be
involved in identifying, planning, implementing and evaluating the change interventions themselves. The goal of this initiative is to build the capacity of youth to contribute to PSE changes that help make the healthy choice the easy and preferred choice, while developing their leadership abilities, sense of self-efficacy, civic engagement, and college and career readiness. Throughout this process, UCCE staff serve as adult allies, a term used in the field and within this report to acknowledge their role as intergenerational collaborators committed to supporting and facilitating youth-centered efforts.

In FFY 2022, the CFHL, UC Youth Engagement Initiative continued to build upon its previous programmatic efforts, including strategies developed to support UCCE county programs implementing or developing YPAR projects during the initial stages of the pandemic. Given the variability of local conditions and needs, resource development, technical assistance, and training were tailored to fit in-person, online, and hybrid program delivery modalities. This report documents the work of UCCE staff members engaged in the CFHL, UC YPAR Community of Practice during FFY 2022.

**Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR)**

YPAR engages young people as research leaders, promoting process-oriented, reflexive research and action driven by youth’s perspectives, strengths, and cultural wealth. YPAR supports youth to study and address social issues that impact them in ways that build their capacities as civic actors. This approach helps achieve SNAP-Ed’s nutrition education and obesity prevention goals by positioning young people to become champions for PSE changes that promote healthy nutrition and physical activity in their communities, while also learning about healthy nutrition and physical activity. It is recognized by SNAP-Ed as a practice-tested PSE strategy that “aims to empower youth and achieve policy, systems, and environmental change efforts related to health, nutrition, and physical activity” by having young people “identify their own issues, problems, and possible solutions.” YPAR projects support youth to “engage in leadership, critical thinking, problem solving, strategizing skills, and service learning to address their target issue related to nutrition and physical activity.”

Despite the ongoing challenges of COVID-19 and multiple variant waves, YPAR projects were conducted successfully with both new and continuing youth cohorts this year. Some of the impacts of this programming can be seen in the following results from CFHL, UC’s FFY 2022 YPAR Retrospective Survey, which detail statewide youth participant outcomes. Following their involvement in a YPAR project, youth reflected on how they would have answered questions before participating in YPAR and how they feel now after participating in YPAR. Youth participants in FFY 2022 noted substantial shifts in their desire and ability to make a difference in creating healthier schools and/or communities.
**Figure 1.**

Reported change during program in wanting to make a difference in school/community health.

![Graph showing change in wanting to make a difference in school/community health](image)

**Figure 2.**

Reported change during program in data collection skills to increase school/community health.

![Graph showing change in data collection skills to increase school/community health](image)
Figure 3.
Reported change during program in ability to use research results to make a difference in school/community health

![Figure 3 Graph]

Figure 4.
Reported change during program in ability to share research findings with decision-makers

![Figure 4 Graph]

Young people also report having new knowledge that informs how they think about and act upon health.
**Figure 5.**

Reported change during program in understanding how surroundings affect health

![Bar chart showing changes in Q5](chart1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field</th>
<th>No, definitely not!</th>
<th>No, probably not</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
<th>Yes, probably</th>
<th>Yes, most definitely!</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BEFORE</td>
<td>3% 3</td>
<td>9% 9</td>
<td>19% 18</td>
<td>41% 39</td>
<td>78% 27</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOW</td>
<td>1% 1</td>
<td>1% 1</td>
<td>3% 3</td>
<td>17% 16</td>
<td>78% 75</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 6.**

Reported change during program in feeling confident in knowing what is and is not healthy to eat

![Bar chart showing changes in Q8](chart2)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Field</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BEFORE</td>
<td>2% 2</td>
<td>11% 11</td>
<td>22% 21</td>
<td>35% 34</td>
<td>32% 28</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOW</td>
<td>3% 3</td>
<td>4% 4</td>
<td>1% 1</td>
<td>32% 31</td>
<td>59% 57</td>
<td>96</td>
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</table>
Figure 7.

Reported change during program in feeling confident in knowing what is and is not healthy to drink

![Bar chart showing changes in confidence in knowing what is healthy and not healthy to drink.]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field</th>
<th>No, definitely not</th>
<th>No, probably not</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
<th>Yes, probably</th>
<th>Yes, most definitely</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BEFORE</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOW</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Perhaps most importantly, YPAR participants report an increased sense of efficacy both with respect to making healthy choices themselves, and with respect to acting on behalf of their communities.

Figure 8.

Reported change during program in connectedness to youth community problem-solvers

![Bar chart showing changes in connectedness to youth community problem-solvers.]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field</th>
<th>No, definitely not</th>
<th>No, probably not</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
<th>Yes, probably</th>
<th>Yes, most definitely</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BEFORE</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOW</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Additionally, more youth participants reported planning to pursue some sort of postsecondary education after participating in YPAR compared to before their participation.

Figure 9.

Reported change during program in planning to pursue postsecondary education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q18. I plan to go to college after high school (community, 4-year, technical).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>BEFORE</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, definitely not!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, probably not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, probably</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, most definitely!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Development of a Youth Career Pathways Toolkit

CFHL, UC’s Youth Engagement Initiative engages youth in YPAR to not only learn about healthy nutrition and physical activity but also to inform PSE changes that support healthy nutrition and physical activity. As can be seen in the above retrospective survey results, this programming also builds important skills, knowledge and interests that can facilitate young people’s pursuit of postsecondary education and/or employment in general, and in particular with an emphasis on becoming change agents who help to build healthy communities. These programs therefore also offer an important opportunity to strengthen pathways into related work, training, and education.

To facilitate translation of learning into postgraduation pathways, SOE/CRC launched a new project within the CFHL, UC Youth Engagement Initiative in February 2022. This effort produced a Youth Career Pathways Toolkit to help YPAR participants recognize and articulate capacities they gain in ways that can support their pursuit of employment and/or postsecondary education. This effort included four components: 1) capturing relevant materials already generated by CFHL, UCCE staff and identifying existing resources and needs; 2) synthesizing existing resources and developing new materials to fill gaps; 3) piloting materials via an all-day, in-person youth symposium; and 4) revising and designing materials to create a toolkit.

The SOE/CRC team administered a questionnaire to UCCE staff members and conducted key informant interviews to identify existing resources and needs. Group
reflection and input were also gathered through the CFHL, UC Youth Engagement Workgroup and a CFHL, UC Town Hall presentation facilitated in April 2022. Materials staff had already generated were assessed and synthesized and gaps were identified and filled through the creation of new resources aligned with key phases of YPAR activity.

The SOE/CRC team then worked with Imperial County UCCE staff and their partner sites where YPAR is facilitated through school-based career technical education (CTE) classes to pilot the new activities via an all-day, in-person symposium. This gathering took place at the UC Desert Research and Extension Center and involved twenty-three youth representatives from the YPAR teams in El Centro and Calexico, along with UCCE staff from Imperial and Riverside Counties and a partner teacher. Youth attendees shared their projects, toured the UCCE facility, and piloted the new activities that engaged them in reflecting on their skill development, learning about ways to highlight these capacities on job and college applications, and exploring related areas of work and study. The youth participants also served as evaluators of and contributors to these new activities through numerous evaluations interspersed throughout the gathering. The symposium was informative and impactful in developing these career pathway resources, providing key insights that shaped their further development.

The SOE/CRC team revised activities and associated materials based on feedback gathered during the youth symposium and compiled all of the activities, resources, and tips at the end of FFY 2022. The resulting Youth Career Pathways Toolkit is organized into three main parts: 1) Tips for Facilitators, 2) Activities, and 3) Additional Resources and References. The activities are arranged thematically to help facilitators guide young people to reflect on and practice articulating their YPAR experiences, explore career and learning options, and practice skills needed in applying for jobs, scholarships, and educational programs of their choice. The toolkit is available for use by CFHL, UCCE educators and extenders implementing YPAR projects in FFY 2023 and beyond; and its activities and resources will be incorporated into SOE/CRC’s training and technical support moving forward.

**Continued Piloting of Scaffolded Models for YPAR Training & Facilitation in FFY 2022**

Documentation of CFHL, UC YPAR projects during FFY 2022 continued to focus on the piloting of a scaffolded approach to YPAR training and facilitation that was developed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This program adaptation was born out of lessons learned in FFY 2020 about key supports for YPAR extenders, as well as the pandemic’s novel challenges and impacts on the engagement landscape for K-12 partners and youth. These circumstances highlighted a need to create tiered pathways into facilitating YPAR projects for nutrition educators and extenders who are interested but are most comfortable with direct instruction methods. Recognizing that newcomers to YPAR and youth leadership in
PSE change could benefit from more tightly-framed, asset-based, culturally responsive youth engagement options with variable timeframes and predetermined parameters, the SOE/CRC team developed two additional “on-ramps” to meet these conditions:

- a 12-session series for nutrition educators or extenders interested to implement more structured YPAR projects; and
- a 6-session series of project-based modules that are derived from approved YPAR curricula and introduce PSE changes to build upon SNAP-Ed direct instruction efforts.

These scaffolded pathway options adapt facilitation of the Stepping Stones framework and related tools. Both reflect trade-offs—decreased levels of youth leadership and action, but a more bounded process in which facilitators and youth participants can learn and experiment. These resources aim to support educators who are newcomers to YPAR implementation while simultaneously supporting youth reflection on a significant shared experience related to healthy food access and/or physical activity.

Two UCCE county programs supported continued piloting of these approaches and resources in FFY 2022: 1) Riverside County UCCE staff facilitated their second 12-session structured YPAR project with a 6th grade CTE class at Villegas Middle School, with this year’s effort taking place fully in-person and focusing on their school community’s experience with healthy food and gardening; and 2) Madera County UCCE staff facilitated a 6-session photovoice project with a 6th grade class at James Madison Elementary School focused on drinking water access and appeal. Full details about these efforts and their accomplishments are provided in their individual project profiles later in this report. Provided here are Riverside and Madera County UCCE staff members’ reflections on this ongoing pilot effort.

- **Having distinct project options continues to be beneficial for developing YPAR partnerships.**
  - This feature is particularly useful for UCCE staff and adult and youth partners with relatively short timeframes and/or limited time (e.g., when developing a project in the second half of the school year, or in combination with a time-intensive direct education curriculum).
  - As an example, Madera County UCCE staff started their 6-session photovoice project towards the end of the school year but were still able to complete their activities within a shortened timeframe.

- **Confirming initial observations from FFY 2021, simplifying the process—and providing ready-made planning and facilitation resources—helped lower the bar to entry for newcomers while still exposing them to the YPAR approach, increasing their knowledge, experience, and confidence for future efforts.**
  - UCCE staff in FFY 2022 reiterated that initial exposure to the YPAR approach and the full Stepping Stones toolkit can feel confusing and overwhelming, particularly for someone with limited prior experience facilitating youth engagement. It can be especially challenging to figure out
what makes sense for one’s project and how to make key planning decisions without substantial support and guidance.

- By contrast, these scaffolded models and their respective resources were seen as much easier to understand and apply for first-time YPAR implementers.
- UCCE staff noted the utility of sample meeting agendas, presentation slide templates, planning tools and other resources (e.g., video examples of other YPAR projects) to support planning and facilitation tasks as well as collaboration with partner teachers.
  - Additionally, the organization of these resources into a shared cloud storage space helped UCCE staff orient themselves to the scaffolded models and develop a deeper understanding of YPAR.
- Even with all of these resources and templates, though, it is still critically important to meet young people and partners where they are and adapt approaches to fit their needs and interests.
  - In this respect, technical support and coaching continue to be very helpful for facilitating scaffolded approaches, including engagement with supervisors, technical assistance providers like the SOE/CRC team, and peers with experience facilitating their own YPAR projects.

- **UCCE staff continue to recognize some benefits of pairing facilitation of a scaffolded approach with direct education curricula that expose youth to PSE changes and lay a foundation for further exploration in a YPAR effort.**
  - In Riverside County, UCCE staff combined their 12-session structured YPAR approach with TWIGS: Youth Gardening and Healthy Eating Curriculum and Up4It, which aligned well with their project’s focus on healthy food and gardening.
  - In Madera County, UCCE staff combined their 6-session photovoice project with Up4It, which aligned well with their project’s focus on water access and appeal.
  - While there are clear benefits to this type of complementary programming, UCCE staff in both counties noted that an intensive series of direct education sessions requires substantial time, which for many would make a shorter scaffolded approach a more feasible pairing option than a longer YPAR project.

- **As noted in FFY 2021, there is growing evidence that the exposure to YPAR provided by scaffolded approaches may serve as a gateway to pursuing more in-depth, youth-led PSE change interventions.**
  - As was the case with implementers of scaffolded models in FFY 2021, UCCE staff in both counties went beyond the guidelines and parameters that were initially established for the 6-session and 12-session series, adapting and expanding the framework and activities to fit the unique needs and interests of their communities.
  - Following this year’s efforts, UCCE staff in both counties noted greater confidence in their ability to facilitate a YPAR project and expressed a
strong interest in expanding opportunities to promote youth leadership and decision making in future PSE change interventions.

- Having facilitated at least one project themselves, they report now knowing what to anticipate, what to plan for, how the pieces fit together, and how to adapt their approach, as well as where to find key resources and how to use them effectively.

Reflections on this scaffolded approach to YPAR training and facilitation continue to be promising. We anticipate that further program documentation in FFY 2023 will continue to demonstrate the efficacy of these “on-ramps” in supporting UCCE staff members’ uptake of youth engagement strategies and YPAR as an element of their nutrition education practice. Lessons learned from this year’s documentation work will continue to shape training and support for future YPAR projects as UCCE staff and partners bridge to a “new normal”.

Following are profiles of the CFHL, UC YPAR projects that took place during FFY 2022.
Contra Costa County: Dozier-Libbey Medical High School YPAR Project

Project Overview
UCCE Contra Costa County staff continued their YPAR project at Dozier-Libbey Medical High School. Marisa Neelon (Nutrition, Family, & Consumer Sciences Advisor) and Charles Go (UC 4-H Youth Development Advisor) supported the project as advisors, and Eli Figueroa (UCCE Community Education Specialist) served as the primary adult ally and facilitator who worked with the youth team. The facilitation team continued to meet with the youth remotely throughout this school year with the support of Rosalinda Ruiz, UCCE Community Education Supervisor in the Stanislaus/Merced County Cluster, who reprised her FFY 2021 role as a co-facilitator and second adult ally.

Setting
- Dozier-Libbey Medical High School is located in Antioch, a community with a population of roughly 115,000 people located in Eastern Contra Costa County. Dozier-Libbey is a pathway school designed to prepare students for postsecondary study and careers in health-related fields.

Project Details & Partnerships
- This year’s YPAR project was a continuation of the project that was initiated at the school the previous year and involved the same team of youth leaders.
- The YPAR project continued to be funded by CalFresh Healthy Living, UC in partnership with UC ANR’s 4-H Youth Development Program in Contra Costa County, who also provided supplemental funding.
- Although classes at the school were conducted in-person this year, the YPAR team met remotely to align with everyone’s schedules and COVID guidelines.
  - The team found it very useful to continue using online tools and platforms to organize their collective efforts, schedule meetings, facilitate discussions, and capture team notes.
  - While meeting online provided many benefits, it did make it more challenging to solidify team cohesion and identity.
    - They also had to prep the team very intentionally for times when they transitioned out of insular online meetings and worked together on activities in the physical world, such as data collection in collaboration with student leadership at their school.
Youth Recruitment

- UCCE staff worked with the same five youth leaders at Dozier-Libbey Medical High School who participated in the YPAR project in FFY 2021.
  - All youth participants were seniors, so they were mindful of the need to plan for the future and recruit a new cohort of team members.

Issue & Research Focus

- The team decided to conduct a needs assessment to identify the physical activity and/or nutrition issues that were most important to peers at their school.
  - They intended to complete the needs assessment during the first half of the school year and conduct further research in the spring based on their results; however, due to a number of challenges related to communication and coordination with campus administrators they were unable to facilitate a second round of data collection after the initial survey.

Research Method(s), Data Collection & Analysis

- Youth designed a needs assessment survey to identify the most important nutrition and/or physical activity issues at their school.
  - They wanted to test their own hypotheses, while also being open to any other issue areas that might come up.
    - They also wanted to identify peer ideas about possible solutions.
  - The plan to conduct a survey earlier in the school year was also a strategic tactic meant to generate more buy-in from peers and decision makers by getting them involved early and at multiple points in the project.
    - The team hoped their classmates would be more invested in and supportive of the YPAR team’s data collection and action efforts later in the year.
    - The team saw this as a potential recruitment tool for next year’s cohort, too.
  - The youth sent their survey to allied teachers and administrators at the school for their review and feedback; this process took quite a while and delayed their data collection until well after the winter break.
    - They wanted to ensure survey results remained anonymous while also being able to enter participants in a raffle, which was complicated by the online survey platform that was connected to the school’s systems.
    - In the end, they used paper raffle tickets to incentivize participation and eliminate any concerns about collecting personally identifiable information, although this approach required significantly more work by UCCE staff.
  - To administer the survey, the YPAR team focused on the advisory period before lunch, a time generally used for school announcements.
    - They took advantage of student leadership’s access to the entire student body and partnered to present the group’s work and the survey.
• This approach helped them introduce their project to a wider audience across campus.
  o The YPAR team received 217 responses to their needs assessment survey, roughly 30% of the student body.
• By analyzing their survey data, they found that the issues most important to the student body were: (a) the quality of food being served at their cafeteria, and (b) students’ level of knowledge regarding nutrition and making healthy food choices.
  o 47% of respondents identified “school food served during breakfast and lunch” as the most important issue at their school.
    ▪ In particular, respondents were concerned about the nutritional quality of school meals and food waste in their cafeteria.
  o 31% of respondents felt “[DLMHS] students don’t know enough about nutrition to make healthy food choices”.

Recommendations & Final Products

• The YPAR team was interested in using a mixed methods research approach this year, including the needs assessment survey and then complementary data collection based on initial results.
  o Youth wanted to do a short photovoice project in the spring to further explore the issue(s) identified in their survey results and capture strengths and areas for improvement related to school breakfast and lunch food.
    ▪ They intended to share the resulting images and narratives, along with their survey results, through a culminating in-person photo gallery event for school administrators and students.
• Unfortunately, it was very challenging to coordinate the photovoice effort with school administration and get permission to take photographs at the school.
  o The administration was concerned about highlighting negative issues with nutrition services through this work.
  o The YPAR team attempted to meet with the principal to discuss and address any concerns, but they did not receive a response in time to move forward with the photovoice activity this year. Staff turnover and other capacity issues related to the pandemic made coordination with school decision-makers particularly challenging this year.
• In the end, the youth decided to abandon the photovoice effort and move forward with a final presentation based on the survey.
  o They made a video highlighting their project and their recommendations and shared it with the school’s administration to get their feedback.
    ▪ The video included a number of embedded questions meant to solicit feedback and reactions from viewers.
  o They also planned to use the video presentation to support recruitment and launch into next year’s YPAR group.
• The group’s key recommendations included improving communication and coordination with campus administrators to support further data collection next year, along with greater collaboration with food services staff to further explore and address concerns related to the school meals program.
Action & Outcomes

- At the end of the school year, the team focused on reporting back their initial survey findings to the student body and school leadership, along with setting up further recruitment for next year’s YPAR cohort.
  - In their final presentation, they identified possible avenues for further research based on this year’s findings, focusing on the school meals program and the photovoice effort they were not able to facilitate.
  - The principal responded very quickly to the team’s recorded presentation and was very supportive of their work and findings.
- The team also reported their findings and helped spread the word about their project by creating posters and displaying them around their school.
  - They made a poster sharing needs assessment survey results with a QR code so fellow classmates could view a section of their final presentation.
  - They also made a recruitment poster, which helped them identify interested youth for next year’s YPAR effort.
- The team held a year-end celebration to mark their accomplishments.
  - They did not have many opportunities to meet in-person this year, so it was nice to have this final reflection and wrap-up.
  - Although youth had to deal with multiple barriers this year, they learned a lot about not only research but how to strategically engage decision makers and navigate bureaucratic systems.

Looking Ahead to FFY 2023

- UCCE staff plan to continue the YPAR project at Dozier-Libby Medical High School again next year.
  - The school will have a new principal.
  - Because all youth graduated, they will build upon the results and recruitment materials already created to recruit a new YPAR team.
Imperial County: Calexico High School’s Eco-Garden Club YPAR Project

Project Overview

Imperial County UCCE staff continued their work on Calexico High School’s Eco-Garden Club YPAR project, with Chris Gomez Wong (UCCE Community Education Supervisor) serving as the main adult ally and facilitator. He was supported by Yu Meng (Youth, Family, and Community Advisor). This year’s YPAR effort was facilitated both online and in-person.

Setting

- Calexico High School is located in the city of the same name on the United States-Mexico border, with a population of approximately 39,000 people. Many students live in Mexicali, in Baja California, and travel across the border daily to attend school.

Project Details & Partnerships

- This is the fifth year that Imperial County UCCE staff conducted a YPAR project at Calexico High School with the Eco-Garden afterschool club in partnership with Chef Nuñez’s Culinary Arts program.
- In addition to their continued efforts to expand their school garden and establish a farm-to-school program, Eco-Garden Club members also supported joint data collection efforts with the Central Union High School District YPAR teams in El Centro.
- It was difficult to coordinate YPAR team meetings this year even though classes took place in-person, so UCCE staff opted for a hybrid model with some meetings facilitated in-person and some online.
  - School site partners and youth continued to struggle with a number of challenges and limited capacity due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which added to their scheduling difficulties.
  - While it was helpful to have an online meeting option, UCCE staff felt their in-person meetings were more effective.

Youth Recruitment

- This year’s team was composed of seven youth participants, including four returning students from last year.
  - Some of these youth also participated in the afterschool YPAR team that was formed towards the end of the school year and brought together representatives from all of the different YPAR groups in El Centro and Calexico.
Issue & Research Focus

- The main focus for this year’s team was a continuation of the action campaign from previous YPAR efforts centered on their school garden.
  - Their garden was uprooted and relocated in FFY 2020, so the team’s main objective was to reestablish it in its original space by Chef Nuñez’s new culinary arts classroom.
  - They also continued to advocate for key recommendations generated by their YPAR predecessors, including enhancing their school garden with a greenhouse.

Research Method(s), Data Collection & Analysis

- While this year’s Eco-Garden Club YPAR team was mainly focused on continuing the action campaign from previous YPAR efforts, it also supported the data collection efforts of fellow CFHL, UCCE YPAR teams in El Centro’s Central Union High School District.
  - For further details, please see the profiles for the YPAR projects conducted with Central Union High School District’s CTE classes and Southwest High School’s Sports Medicine CTE classes.

Action & Outcomes

- The team successfully championed their case and received permission from the principal to return their garden back to its original site on campus.
  - They salvaged what materials they could from the temporary garden space and reestablished raised beds in the former location.
- Youth also secured permission and funding to build a greenhouse and more raised beds in their garden with help from the Future Farmers of America program at their school.
  - The team relied on recommendations and garden designs generated by a previous Eco-Garden Club YPAR team to accomplish this significant PSE change.
  - The greenhouse will be located in the current site of their raised beds, so next year’s team will need to move them once again to another location.
- One of the Eco-Garden Club YPAR team members also presented their group’s ongoing efforts at their Farm-to-School Conference at the beginning of the summer.
  - As a result of this presentation, staff from Mains Elementary decided to initiate their own garden project and Heber Elementary School District was inspired to apply for their own California Department of Food and Agriculture Farm to School grant with the hope of building raised beds like those at Calexico High School.
Looking Ahead to FFY 2023

- Some members for next year’s Eco-Garden Club and YPAR team have already been recruited.
  - Recruitment usually occurs at the beginning of the school year, so this is a first for them to have some of this completed before the summer break.
  - Graduating team members were worried that the school garden would be neglected during the summer months and wanted to ensure there was a team ready to take over when they left.
    - Four rising seniors are taking over the group and will work to recruit additional members in the fall.
    - Students took some plants home to care for them over the summer.
- The team plans to move their garden’s raised beds at the beginning of the next school year to make space for the new greenhouse.
  - The greenhouse construction process may be an opportunity for further youth leadership and support to keep the project moving forward.
Imperial County: Central Union High School District CTE YPAR Project

Project Overview

Imperial County UCCE staff continued their partnership with Ms. Cortez, a CTE teacher working with five classes across three different high schools in El Centro’s Central Union High School District (CUHSD). Chris Gomez Wong (UCCE Community Education Supervisor) and Rigoberto Ponce (UCCE Community Education Specialist) served as the main adult allies and facilitators for this in-person YPAR effort. They were supported by Yu Meng (Youth, Family, and Community Advisor).

Setting

- This YPAR project engaged students across three different CUHSD high schools situated throughout the city of El Centro. El Centro is located roughly nine miles north of the United States-Mexico border and is the main urban center in the Imperial Valley. It has a population of approximately 44,000 people.

Project Details & Partnerships

- UCCE staff continued their partnership with Ms. Cortez and her five CTE classes and were able to facilitate this year’s YPAR effort in-person with a new cohort of students.
- Although each class was encouraged to pursue its own distinct issue, the five classes all decided to focus on water access and appeal at their respective campuses.
  - This shared focus allowed them to collaborate on research design and data collection.
- To complement this work, UCCE staff also created an afterschool YPAR group in the spring, recruiting representatives from each of their different YPAR teams in Imperial County.
  - This group met regularly online at the end of the school year to help coordinate research efforts, synthesize the results generated by their different classes, and develop a shared presentation.
  - UCCE staff were able to compensate youth who participated in this afterschool group.

Youth Recruitment

- As in the previous year, the YPAR team was composed of all of the students in Ms. Cortez’s five CTE classes across the three high school campuses.
  - This year’s project had 155 youth participants in total, although some students moved in and out of her classes after the first semester.
As a continuation high school, the Desert Oasis student population is also somewhat fluid throughout the school year.

- The separate afterschool YPAR team was recruited in March.
  - All the members of this group were current YPAR participants from their El Centro and Calexico teams seeking an additional leadership and engagement opportunity with a new cohort of peers.
  - A total of 15 youth participated in this group.

**Issue & Research Focus**

- As young people returned to school campuses, a common challenge they faced was water access, since many water fountains remained locked and inaccessible due to pandemic-related policies and practices.
  - Limited water access prompted the YPAR team at Desert Oasis High School to focus on this issue for their project.
  - Similar conditions at the other high schools in the district inspired the remainder of Ms. Cortez’s CTE classes to follow Desert Oasis’s lead.
- Collectively, youth participants from these different classes wanted to examine water access at their respective schools and gain a greater understanding of this issue across their region.
  - Their shared goal was to improve water access and appeal and promote greater water consumption.

**Research Method(s), Data Collection & Analysis**

- UCCE staff helped the YPAR teams generate a shared survey exploring water access and appeal that could be administered across all three of their high schools and shared with Calexico High School’s Eco-Garden Club YPAR team.
  - Youth from Desert Oasis High School started with a set of survey questions from Project 4-H2O in Contra Costa County and adapted it to fit their needs.
  - Then the other classes worked off the same survey instrument.
- By utilizing a common data collection tool, the teams were able to collect data and aggregate findings from four different high schools in the region.
  - They received over 1,000 responses from high school students in El Centro and Calexico, with the afterschool YPAR team leading the data analysis effort.
- Their findings identified a number of shared student concerns related to water accessibility, quality and appeal.
  - Only 22% of respondents drank water from campus water fountains and water bottle refilling stations, while 67% of respondents relied solely on water brought from home to stay hydrated during the school day.
    - 10% of respondents said they did not drink any water during school hours.
Among students who did not drink water from campus water fountains and water bottle refilling stations, their leading reasons were that the water had an unpleasant taste and felt unsafe.

- A majority of respondents noted having to purchase bottled water at their schools, although this practice was identified as cost prohibitive by two thirds of respondents.
- 98% of respondents wanted to see “free fresh water” provided as an option during lunch.

Recommendations & Final Products

- Youth from the afterschool YPAR team developed a presentation highlighting the combined work and findings of this year’s YPAR teams.
  - Recommendations identified by the youth included: (a) install water stations in Desert Oasis High School classrooms, (b) regularly change the filters for preexisting water bottle filling stations and (c) regularly test the water quality at all campuses.

Action & Outcomes

- While the afterschool YPAR team aggregated data from across the different campuses and developed a comprehensive presentation for all of UCCE Imperial County’s YPAR efforts in FFY 2022, presenting this work to key decision makers and supporting identified PSE changes will be pursued in the next school year.
- Youth from the afterschool YPAR team—along with some of the other YPAR members—served as evaluators of and contributors to the new CFHL, UC Youth Career Pathways Toolkit developed by the UC Davis Center for Regional Change and School of Education by helping to pilot and assess new activities and resources via a one-day, in-person youth symposium in El Centro.
  - Twenty-three youth participated in the symposium with representation from all of the YPAR teams in El Centro and Calexico.
    - The gathering also included UCCE staff from Imperial and Riverside Counties, as well as Ms. Cortez from the Central Union High School District.
  - Feedback from the youth participants was used to inform the toolkit’s content, which is designed to help youth recognize, articulate, and make use of skills developed through their YPAR projects in ways that support post-high-school work and/or education planning.
  - The symposium also enabled an in-person celebration with the youth at the end of the school year.

Looking Ahead to FFY 2023

- In the coming year, UCCE staff plan to continue working with Ms. Cortez and the new student cohorts in her five CTE classes.
They hope to recruit and launch the afterschool YPAR team and bring together a collective group across the region earlier in the school year.

- Youth have conducted a number of YPAR projects in the region and developed many key findings and recommendations at this point, so next year’s teams may consider how to add to this body of knowledge (e.g., by administering the water survey at elementary schools) or how to use existing data about water access, food waste and community gardening to launch an action campaign.
Imperial County: Southwest High School Sports Medicine CTE YPAR Project

Project Overview

For the second year in a row, Imperial County UCCE staff facilitated a YPAR project in partnership with Ms. Solorzano at Southwest High School. This year’s effort took place in-person and involved students from two different sports medicine CTE classes. Rigoberto Ponce (UCCE Community Education Specialist) was the project’s main adult ally and facilitator. He was supported by Yu Meng (Youth, Family, and Community Advisor).

Setting

- Southwest High School is located in the city of El Centro near the United States-Mexico border. El Centro is the main urban center in the Imperial Valley and has a population of approximately 44,000 people.

Project Details & Partnerships

- This project was a partnership with Ms. Solorzano and her sports medicine CTE classes at Southwest High School.
- The classes chose to focus on water access and appeal at their school and collaborated with their peers in the other local YPAR teams.
- Although classes returned to full in-person instruction this year, youth and adult allies continued to deal with numerous pandemic-related restrictions and challenges that affected their meeting schedule and engagement.
  - Transition back to in-person engagement required youth and adults to relearn some social norms and cues; using group agreements as much as possible supported this collective process.
  - The pandemic omicron wave made it difficult to establish a consistent meeting schedule during the second half of the school year.

Youth Recruitment

- The YPAR team was composed of all of the students in Ms. Solorzano’s two sports medicine CTE classes at Southwest High School.
  - There were seventeen students in one of her classes and thirty-five students in the other.
  - Some of these youth also participated in the afterschool YPAR team that was formed towards the end of the school year and brought together representatives from all of the different YPAR groups in El Centro and Calexico.
Additional information about this team can be found above in the project profile for the Central Union High School District CTE YPAR Project.

Issue & Research Focus

- Students in Ms. Solorzano’s CTE classes decided to focus on water access and appeal as well this year, since they encountered similar challenges as their Central Union High School District colleagues in Ms. Cortez’s CTE classes.
  - Youth could not use the school’s water fountains due to the pandemic and the water bottle refilling station could not serve all students.
  - Without a water bottle with them from home, students might not consume any water during the school day.
    - Some students did not drink water until returning home from school at the end of the day.
  - They were concerned about water quality at their school, too.

Research Method(s), Data Collection & Analysis

- Youth from Ms. Solorzano’s classes combined forces with youth from Ms. Cortez’s classes to develop and administer a shared survey focused on water access and appeal.
  - The survey was also administered at Calexico High School by youth with the Eco-Garden Club YPAR team.
- Youth from Ms. Solorzano’s CTE classes helped adapt and administer the water access survey that was initially developed by YPAR participants at Desert Oasis High School.
  - Collectively, the UCCE Imperial County YPAR teams received over 1,000 responses from high school students in El Centro and Calexico, with the afterschool YPAR team leading the data analysis effort.
- Their findings identified several shared student concerns related to water accessibility, quality and appeal.
  - Please see the above profile for the Central Union High School District CTE YPAR project for further details about the findings of this collective data collection effort.

Recommendations & Final Products

- Youth from the afterschool YPAR team developed a presentation highlighting the combined work and findings of this year’s YPAR teams.
  - Recommendations identified included: (a) regularly change the filters for preexisting water bottle filling stations at Southwest High School, and (b) regularly test the campus’s water quality.
Action & Outcomes

- While the afterschool YPAR team aggregated data from across the different campuses and developed a comprehensive presentation for all of UCCE Imperial County’s YPAR efforts in FFY 2022, presenting it to key decision makers and supporting identified PSE changes will be pursued in the upcoming school year.

Looking Ahead to FFY 2023

- In the coming year, UCCE staff plan to continue working with Ms. Solorzano and the new student cohorts in her sports medicine CTE classes.
  - They hope to recruit and launch the afterschool YPAR team and bring together a collective group across the region earlier in the school year.
- Youth have conducted a number of YPAR projects in the region and developed many key findings and recommendations at this point, so next year’s teams may consider how to add to this body of knowledge (e.g., by administering the water survey at elementary schools) or how to use existing data about water access, food waste and community gardening to launch an action campaign.
Madera County: James Madison Elementary School Photovoice Project

Project Overview
Madera County UCCE staff facilitated a 6-session photovoice project at James Madison Elementary School focused on water access and appeal. This partnership with Ms. Schallberger’s 6th grade class was facilitated in-person during the latter portion of the school year. The main adult allies and facilitators for this project were Jessica Gil-Bautista (UCCE Nutrition Program Educator) and Elizabeth Lopez (UCCE Nutrition Program Supervisor).

Setting
- James Madison Elementary School is located in the city of Madera in California’s Central Valley, which has a population of approximately 66,000.

Project Details & Partnerships
- This project was inspired in FFY 2021, when Ms. Schallberger and some of her student council leaders attended an online event hosted by CFHL, UC—“The Future of Food: Exploring Food System Career Pathways for Young People”—and learned about YPAR projects taking place across California.
  - After the event, they reflected on what they had learned and identified potential topics relevant to their own school.
  - Ms. Schallberger and her students were particularly inspired by Project 4-H2O’s water access and appeal efforts in Contra Costa County and wanted to replace their school’s old water fountains.
  - UCCE staff suggested ways that youth could play a key role in this work and help research options for acquiring new water stations.
    - As a part of this process, the Madera UCCE team also met with UCCE staff from Contra Costa County to learn more about their effort and apply lessons learned to their own project.
  - With student support, Ms. Schallberger identified a potential funding source—the Drinking Water for Schools Grant Program from Self-Help Enterprises—and submitted a successful grant proposal for approximately $100,000 to purchase new water bottle filling stations for their school and provide each student with a reusable water bottle.
- In FFY 2022, after securing the grant funding but before the water stations were delivered or installed, UCCE staff partnered with Ms. Schallberger to provide Up4It lessons to her 6th grade students, which taught them about building healthy habits related to water consumption, nutrition, physical activity, and sleep.
  - UCCE staff and the teacher looked to combine their direct education partnership with a scaffolded YPAR model during the second half of the school year.
- Up4It lessons already highlighted drinking water and creating a campaign focused on water consumption, so there was clear alignment with the content they were covering together.
- UCCE staff connected with youth and built rapport and momentum before launching a more youth-driven initiative.
- UCCE staff decided to facilitate a 6-session photovoice project to align their effort with available time and capacity at the end of the school year.

Youth Recruitment

- UCCE staff recruited the youth team directly from Ms. Schallberger’s 6th grade class at the elementary school.
- There were 25 youth participants in the class and none of them had participated in a YPAR or photovoice project previously.

Issue & Research Focus

- This 6-session project complemented the successful water bottle filling station grant and was focused on water access and appeal at the school.
- This project aimed to document students’ current experiences and challenges with water access and consumption on campus as well as their hopes for the future once new water bottle filling stations were installed.
  - This would provide context and support for installing new water stations.
  - It would also provide a student vision of next steps once new water stations are installed.
    - This could, for example, help fuel a future education campaign promoting water consumption and maintaining the new stations.

Research Method(s), Data Collection & Analysis

- Data collection involved taking photographs to capture current conditions related to water access and water consumption across their campus.
  - Students photographed old water fountains at their school before they were removed and replaced with new water bottle filling stations.
  - After taking numerous photos, youth prioritized and selected particularly powerful and evocative images and crafted accompanying narratives.
- Youth really enjoyed taking photos and captured various positive and negative aspects of current conditions and behaviors related to school water fountains.
  - Results from their data collection highlighted the importance of cleanliness for student water consumption, as current water fountains were perceived to be dirty, old, and uncared for, and students expressed concern about the quality of the water being dispensed.
  - Youth also felt they and their peers did not drink enough water during the day because they lacked access to clean, appealing water fountains.
Recommendations & Final Products

- Based on the results of their photovoice project, youth highlighted the need to educate their peers about the importance of drinking water.
  - They also emphasized the importance of taking care of the new water bottle refilling stations once they were installed.
  - Youth envisioned these points forming the basis of an educational awareness campaign at the school the following school year.

- Together with UCCE staff and Ms. Schallberger, youth created a slide presentation as their final product.
  - The presentation provided an overview of their project and showcased their photos and narratives.
  - They hope this will inspire next year’s youth cohort to take on this project and continue their work.

Action & Outcomes

- Ms. Schallberger and three of her students presented their project and findings at a District Wellness Committee meeting at the end of the school year and promoted the installation of water bottle filling stations at additional school sites.
  - Youth displayed a great deal of confidence and ownership over the project and were able to voice their opinions and share information about low water consumption at their school.
  - A district trustee was in attendance, along with school principals, PE teachers, representatives from the Madera County Department of Public Health, and other local leaders, and they were all very impressed by the team’s presentation.
    - The principal of the middle school the three students will attend in the fall hopes they will get involved on that campus as well.
  - Afterward, there was interest in having more regular student participation in all of the School Site Wellness Committees.
    - This would represent a significant shift in the district’s culture and a big potential systems change, so UCCE staff hope to continue advocating for this moving forward.

- The new water bottle filling stations were delivered to the school site at the end of the school year and will be installed during the coming school year.
- Ms. Schallberger also shared the team’s photos and slide presentation with Self-Help Enterprises, the grant funder who supported the purchase of the new water bottle filling stations.

Looking Ahead to FFY 2023

- Unfortunately, this was Ms. Schallberger’s last year at James Madison Elementary and UCCE staff are not able to work with the new school site where she will be located.
However, she had such a positive experience with this year’s project that she already started a similar initiative at her new school for the 2022-2023 school year.

Over the summer, she wrote another grant proposal and was awarded funds to purchase water bottle filling stations there, too.

- UCCE staff hope to continue this project with a new cohort of young people at James Madison Elementary next year to build upon the photovoice project and develop an educational campaign focused on the new water bottle filling stations.
  - They may have identified a new teacher partner to support the next project cycle.
  - Opportunities for a new project include developing an educational and awareness campaign about water consumption, monitoring use of the new water bottle filling stations, and researching any barriers to water station usage and maintenance.
Riverside County: Villegas Middle School YPAR Project

Project Overview

Riverside County UCCE staff built upon their YPAR experience at Villegas Middle School from FFY 2021 and conducted a 12-session, structured YPAR project with a new teacher there in FFY 2022. Unlike the previous year’s effort, this partnership with Ms. Weiss’s 6th grade CTE class was facilitated completely in-person. The main adult allies and facilitators for this project were Daisy Valdez (UCCE Community Education Specialist) and Claudia Carlos (UCCE Community Education Supervisor).

Setting

- Villegas Middle School is located in the city of Riverside, an urban center east of Los Angeles in Southern California which has a population of approximately 315,000.

Project Details & Partnerships

- The previous YPAR partner, Mrs. Leach, left Villegas Middle School, so this year Riverside County UCCE staff partnered with Ms. Weiss’s 6th grade CTE elective class focused on gardening and nutrition.
  - Similar to last year’s structure, the class ran on a 12-week trimester cycle with three different cohorts of students rotating through the class during the school year.
- UCCE staff started the year teaching TWIGS and Up4It curricula with Ms. Weiss, which focused on gardening, nutrition, water consumption, physical activity, and sleep; they then facilitated a 12-session, structured YPAR project with the students in her third trimester.
  - Although it was Ms. Weiss’s first year as a fulltime teacher, she was excited about this project.
    - She worked with UCCE staff to adapt the project to address gaps in her students’ social and cognitive abilities due to the pandemic and distance learning
- UCCE staff were able to facilitate the YPAR project in-person this year, which was a significant change from last year’s fully-online effort.
  - It felt good to be in the classroom with the students and it was easier to assess the energy of the room and support youth to comprehend key concepts during sessions.
  - Ms. Weiss was present during all of the YPAR meetings, providing examples for her students and elaborating on discussion topics.
Youth Recruitment

- UCCE staff recruited the youth team directly from the third cohort of Mrs. Weiss’s 6th grade CTE class.
  - Working with the third cohort of students towards the end of the year gave both the teacher and the students time beforehand to readjust to in-person instruction and rebuild relationships with one another after such a long period of distance learning.
- There were 20 youth participants in the class and none of them had participated in a YPAR project previously.

Issue & Research Focus

- For their project’s focus, Ms. Weiss’s students chose to explore and capture their school community’s experience with healthy food and gardening.
  - They started by examining food access in their community and exploring who the decision makers were on their campus.
  - Then they followed the activities for the 12-session YPAR model focused on investigating individual and family histories with gardening and cooking healthy food.

Research Method(s), Data Collection & Analysis

- For their research, the youth team chose to conduct interviews with campus staff members, teachers, parents/guardians, and fellow students.
  - The youth worked with Ms. Weiss and UCCE staff to develop a set of questions exploring people’s experiences with healthy food, cooking, and gardening.
    - They also assessed people’s level of awareness related to food access and supportive services to follow-up on last year’s YPAR project and its educational efforts.
  - This was an important opportunity for youth to practice interview skills, interact with adults, and engage in-person.
    - Students were especially nervous about speaking with teachers and staff members and struggled when it came to talking to people in-person after so much distance learning.
    - Ms. Weiss sent the interview questions ahead of time to help prepare staff members and teachers for the conversations with her students and to put youth more at ease.
- Data from the interviews were captured in Google Forms so they could be anonymized, aggregated, and then analyzed by the youth researchers.
Recommendations & Final Products

- After analyzing their data, the youth team identified a need for more diverse school lunch options that could reflect the rich diversity of cultures in their school community and the variety of healthy foods that people enjoy eating.
- They also identified shared interests in cooking healthy food and gardening and promoted cooking and gardening lessons to support growing, cooking, and eating healthy food.

Action & Outcomes

- Youth presented their research and findings to representatives from the CFHL, UC State Office and the UC Davis Center for Regional Change and shared their final presentation and resources with their families and the school community.
- Ms. Weiss plans to continue facilitating Up4It and TWIGS lessons with her new cohorts of students in the coming year and may expand upon this YPAR initiative.

Looking Ahead to FFY 2023

- Daisy joined the new CFHL, UCCE office in Los Angeles County after the conclusion of the school year, so nutrition educator Jackie Barahona will take her place at the Moreno Valley UCCE Riverside office for FFY 2023.
- Riverside UCCE staff intend to build upon their experience with the 12-session model and conduct a year-long YPAR project with high school students in the coming year.
  - They’d like to facilitate a more long-term, sustainable YPAR partnership that can generate PSE changes.
Endnotes


