

The message parents and children take home is that 'real' food is healthy, fresh, eaten together and connected to the wonders of the earth.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF EDUARDO SILVA

The garden of eatin'

A unique program that teaches children where 'real' food comes from

BY ANNIE SPIEGELMAN

Having been raised and hardened on the streets of NYC, the first time I actually saw real vegetable crops was when I was in third grade. PS6 did its annual field trip to the Metropolitan Museum where there was a photography exhibit showing the bountiful fall harvest of the farmlands of Oklahoma, Nebraska, South Dakota. I knew people lived in those places, sort of (I was educated in New York), but I didn't know their land was so full of magic. It made me connect, possibly for the first time, to the true origins of our food before it arrives at our busy metropolitan supermarket.

Wherever we're raising children today—city, country or suburbs—we all share a moral obligation to educate younger generations about where "real" food comes from, and why they would want to eat food that

is nutritious. We also need to shield our children from an unconscionable and self-serving food and advertising industry that spends so much of its advertising dollars manipulating and indoctrinating kids. In the industry it is referred to as "cradle to the grave advertising." In the healthcare community it's referred to as a catastrophic epidemic.

The tragic fallout is that one in five American children is classified as overweight. In 1960, only 4 percent of U.S. kids under the age of 11 were obese. In 2000, 15 percent of U.S. kids under the age of 11 were considered medically obese. And the numbers continue to rise.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, noting the overweight rates of 4 and 5 year olds, states that

prevention must begin in the preschool years. Susan Gilmore, executive director of the North Bay Children's Center, a unique preschool and childcare facility, couldn't agree more. That's why, in mid-2004, she began the Garden of Eatin' program, thanks to a grant from the First 5 Marin Children & Families Commission. "I told a mother her 5-month-old was ready to start solid foods and to bring in what she would like us to feed him," recounts Gilmore. "When she brought in chicken nuggets the next day, I decided, that's the final straw—we have to do something about what these kids are being fed!"

She chose ecologist, grandfather and Master Gardener David Haskell to head up the new on-site garden. He gladly came on board, eager to establish an organic eating garden at a preschool. Haskell, a handsome outspoken New Zealander, has a wealth of horticultural knowledge, which he warmly shares with each of his toddler students. "All kids have a natural interest in foods and growing foods. If you want to see delight, just watch a 3-year-old pick their first strawberry or green bean from a plant they put to seed," says Haskell.

At the Garden of Eatin' the staff, families > 21

