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**THE GLOBAL FOOD WEB:
ENVIRONMENT, FOOD SUPPLY, AND
HUMAN NUTRITION—
A PUBLIC POLICY EDUCATION PROGRAM
FOR YOUTH**

*Keith Searce
University of Georgia*

I recently helped develop a curriculum taught to more than 200 high school teachers and 1,100 high school students in Georgia.

The three-year “Global Food Web” project was developed to enhance awareness and understanding by Georgia youth about issues of both national and international relevance, especially in the inter-related areas of environment, food supply and human nutrition. This was done by leading youth leaders to intelligent, decision-making processes; in short, to “think globally, act locally.”

Funding was provided by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and joint sponsors included the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Service, along with the University’s Bureau of Educational Services, the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Fort Valley State College, West Georgia RESA, The University’s Institute of Ecology and Institute of Community and Area Development, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s Department of Intergovernment Affairs, Georgia Department of Education, the University’s Office of International Programs and Zoo Atlanta.

Project Rationale

Georgia, and the issues affecting the state, are becoming more complex. In a short time, today’s youth will be the primary stewards of our resources. The acquisition of knowledge regarding global issues as they relate to their daily lives is increasingly important. Greater understanding of how public policy issues affect the quality of their lives and the lives of their peers will lead them to make better decisions and empower them to improve the quality of life for all.

Project Method and Objectives

In the summers of 1990 and 1991, a youth conference was held at Rock Eagle 4-H Center in Eatonton, Georgia. During the conferences, teams of one adult and four fourteen- to seventeen-year-old youths from throughout Georgia came together to learn about "The Global Food Web." More than 90 of Georgia's 159 counties were represented at the conferences.

The fifteen-hour curriculum was taught by volunteer instructors, most of them teachers. In addition, nationally prominent speakers were invited to the conferences. They included David Brown of the Cousteau Society, Eugene Odum of the University of Georgia Institute of Ecology, Allen Schmieder of the U.S. Department of Education and Henry King Stanford, President Emeritus of the University of Georgia.

It was wonderful to see the youth develop enthusiasm about the global issues that will affect them in their adult lives: Can the earth sustain the growing world population? Can we maintain a healthy environment? What role does agriculture play in the global food web?

When the teams returned home to their counties, using the curriculum learned at the conference, they peer-taught other youth, creating a ripple effect of knowledge and awareness.

"These young people came here as students and left as teachers," according to project coordinator Diane Davies. "We asked each youth to go back to his or her community and peer-teach at least 150 others."

In total, more than 400,000 Georgia youth were exposed to the curriculum materials and other states also are expected to utilize the materials.

As a result of this project, the participants:

1. Increased their knowledge about factors affecting "The Global Food Web."
2. Developed greater understanding of how public policy issues interrelate with factors affecting "The Global Food Web" and how that affects them.
3. Felt a greater sense of empowerment about affecting policy impacting "The Global Food Web."
4. Made at least one personal behavior change relevant to "The Global Food Web" such as developing a home water conservation strategy, writing to an organization to learn more about world hunger, etc.
5. Developed teaching and leadership skills as evidenced through their involvement in the project.

One specific result of this project occurred in the Douglas County where the GFW team, in addition to peer-teaching at Alexander and Douglas County high schools, proposed starting a free newspaper specializing in news about the environment, food supply and hunger.

***Policy for Environment
and Economic Development***

