

Fundación El Arenal:

A non-profit after-school program that provides **Education, Nutrition, and Counseling** for low-income 5–17-year-old students.

Fundación El Arenal provides a **snack and a meal** for every student each weekday to address student health and nourishment.



Our Goal:

Expand on Fundación El Arenal's **existing nutrition program** to teach students **healthy nutrition habits**.

How a Garden Helps the Children

Poverty: 40% of Latin American households fall below the poverty line,¹ and families with less resources have **less access to healthy food options**.²

Nutrition and Health: Feeding the brain in a healthy way is of critical importance for learning and developing children.³

Gardening: Effective gardening activities can increase student engagement and improve behavior.⁴

How we Learned

- **Observation** of routine, rooftop garden, and special events
- **Participant Observation** of tutoring, snacks, shopping, and staff meetings to understand the Foundation's capabilities
- **Interviews** with instructors, staff, and volunteers
- **Activities** with students, piloting hands-on garden and nutrition learning

Activities

Plant Identification and Labelling



Growing Plants in Bottles



Food Groups and Healthy Ingredients



Principle Findings

- While El Arenal's resources are limited, they **have the capacity** to incorporate gardening and nutrition learning effectively, including a **rooftop garden**.
- There are **limited times** to incorporate stand-alone gardening activities since students spend the most of their time completing homework and receiving tutoring.
- Staff intentionally **plan and prepare** healthy snacks for students, but there is **no integrated nutrition education** to explain these decisions.

Recommendations



Scheduling

- Implement garden and nutritional learning on **Saturday mornings** and **during Refrigerio**.

Administrative

- Assign the current Assistant as the official **"garden manager."**

Program Incorporation

- Incorporate garden and nutrition focused activities into weekly rotational teaching topics
- Use meal and decoration space for nutritional learning infographics.

References

- ¹ CEPALSTAT. (2020). Bases de Datos y Publicaciones Estadísticas.
² Vilar-Compte, M., Burrola-Méndez, S., Lozano-Marrufo, A., Ferré-Eguiluz, I., Flores, D., Gaitán-Rossi, P., Teruel, G., & Pérez-Escamilla, R. (2021). Urban poverty and nutrition challenges associated with accessibility to a healthy diet: A global systematic literature review. *International Journal for Equity in Health*, 20(1), 40.
³ Augustine, S. (2007). *The Hungry Brain: The Nutrition/Cognition Connection*. SAGE Publications.
⁴ Blair, D. (2009). The Child in the Garden: An Evaluative Review of the Benefits of School Gardening. *The Journal of Environmental Education*, 40(2), 15–38.