D.C. Students Enjoy Agroecology Day at UDC Farm

The College of Agriculture, Urban Sustainability and Environmental Sciences (CAUSES) of the University of the District of Columbia (UDC) hosted “Agroecology Day” at Muirkirk Research Farm on Thursday, October 16, 2014. The event was offered to high school sophomores, juniors and seniors attending schools in Washington, D.C. A total of 50 students from Woodson High School, McKinley Technology High School and IDEA Public Charter School attended the event, focusing on sustainable food systems. In the tradition of agricultural fairs with an emphasis on experiential learning, students visited education stations on: nutrition, soil and composting, hydroponics and aquaponics, and water quality at four locations around the farm.

“Some of my students were looking for ideas for an environmental engineering project. I thought this event would be good exposure because this is not the kind of thing they normally see,” explained Kenneth Lesley, Director, NAF Academy of Engineering at McKinley. “For them, this is eye opening.”

“I learned about how we can make our own compost without spending money,” explained one student, while another enjoyed learning about aquaponics and the process of cleaning the tanks. Several students voiced their surprise when comparing popular bottled drinks and learning how much sugar some of the “healthy” drinks actually contain.

After visiting all four stations followed by lunch, attendees left with handfuls of carrots they helped to harvest, arguably the highlight of the day. Students and teachers were also given a flash drive containing supplemental information on the day’s activities. Rebecca Green Watson, an environmental science teacher from Woodson, shared that she planned on integrating the supplemental material into her STEM curriculum.

Many students, especially those who were raised in an urban environment, have little connection with agriculture or food production, and do not know much about food beyond the fact that it is purchased from stores. In fact, some students expressed their surprise to see that a fully-grown carrot is grown underground and is a lot larger than the small, mini carrots typically found in grocery stores.

As the home of the landgrant programs for the District of Columbia, CAUSES combines research and community-based education, often using experiential learning to bring the classroom to the community. For information, contact Marshelle Hailstock, Outreach and Enrollment, at mhailstock@udc.edu. For more information on CAUSES, please visit www.udc.edu/causes. Special thanks to Mr. Lesley for sharing his photographs of the event!