

## **Three Sisters Garden**

### **Situation**

The youth who enroll in the Howe School 4-H program attend a school where there is a high incidence of poverty (87%), low achievement scores (~50% proficiency), and a high concentration of minority students (70%). This group of 4-Hers meet daily to have fun while learning in a safe and stimulating environment. A primary objective for the summer 4-H program is to create an atmosphere of mutual respect, a cross-age spirit of community, and a place where kids and adults learn to work together to achieve common goals.

### **Response**

In the spring of 2004, UW-Extension staff met with Mrs. DeVillers' 5<sup>th</sup> grade class at Howe Elementary School to explain what the Three Sisters were in Native American culture and how their cooperation benefited the entire garden. A garden was later planted in front of the school with corn in the center of the plot, surrounded by pole beans. The squash were then planted along the perimeter of the garden.

### **Results**

A variety of students had the opportunity to learn about and care for the garden. These included the 5<sup>th</sup> grade class at Howe, the students attending the 4-H Summer Program, and the 4<sup>th</sup> grade class in the fall of 2004. The fourth graders were able to harvest the crops as well as spend an afternoon baking "pumpkin" pies using the squash which were harvested. This gave the students an excellent opportunity to make a connection between the good they grew in the garden and a finished product (pies). Each student was allowed two pieces of pie, one for themselves and another for the individual of their choice. This allowed the students to share the results of their efforts with someone who was not involved in the project. The students also were able to see how the various plants helped each other (i.e., the beans using the corn stalks as a trellis), thus strengthening the concept of cooperation.

### **Evidence**

The program was evaluated based upon the enthusiasm of the students (however, those involved in planting and harvesting were far more enthusiastic than those involved in weeding), and the students own written comments. One example was, "Dear Mr. Bill: I really enjoyed pulling the corn. It's more fun than picking other vegetables. The squash pies were really good. It was also fun making them. The Three Sisters Garden is very smart. Thank you for everything. Your friend, Kyle."