

# Profile from the Field

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## Wisconsin Non-profit Brings Beekeeping

**Project Title:** Youth Beekeeping & Entrepreneurship – Building a National Model

**Coordinator:** Jennica Skoug

**Location:** Wisconsin

**SARE Grant:** \$2,000

**Duration:** 2014-2015

To read the full project report, go to <https://projects.sare.org/search-projects/> and search for project numbers YENC12-052 or YENC14-079.



*A Madison area middle school student shows off beekeeping knowledge to visiting teachers at Goodman Youth Farm. Photo by Jennica Skoug.*

Nestled in a modest neighborhood on Madison's far east side, a small non-profit farm is helping young people connect with nature and food. The Goodman Youth Farm is a program of Community GroundWorks, and uses a half-acre urban vegetable farm as an outdoor classroom, engaging students in activities such as growing and harvesting produce, planning and preparing meals, and delivering produce to the local food pantry. The farm is also home to two active beehives.

In 2012, NCR-SARE funded a youth beekeeping pilot program at the Goodman Youth Farm, where students learned about keeping bees with help from a local bee expert. Two years later, in 2014, Goodman wanted to expand their youth beekeeping program, and received a \$2,000 NCR-SARE Youth Educator grant to formalize their lessons and develop a program that could be used as a model for other educators interested in youth beekeeping initiatives.

The beekeeping program was already underway at Goodman when Jennica Skoug began her job as farm manager in 2013. Their 2014 NCR-SARE grant allowed her to work with students with various levels of beekeeping experience, and supported hands-on activities, including crafting value-added products from honey and beeswax. Beginning youth beekeepers learned about the life cycle of honey bees through direct observation, sampled honey, and learned how to extract honey and wax while leaving enough honey as a resource for the bees. Intermediate and advanced youth beekeeping programs included lessons about honeybee anatomy, hive inspection, and pollinator threats, and also gave middle and high school students the chance to experience beekeeping in a hands-on way, including extracting honey from a beehive and making lip balm from bee's wax.

"Originally, our plan was to have the middle school students be designated as 'intermediate,' while high schoolers would be 'advanced' beekeepers learning more complicated techniques and topics," explained Skoug. "In reality, we found that students' abilities to take on more advanced tasks was not a function of age, but rather of a students' past experience and comfort level around the bees."

Skoug reported that more than 50 students participated in their formal beekeeping programs in 2014-2015, and more than 2,200 students visited the hives at Goodman during that time. Tours for educators involved more than 70 adults in beekeeping activities at the farm.

“We learned that although youth (and adults) often have long-held fears about bees that these fears are often overcome with time spent near the hive, and a new appreciation for bees and their role in sustainable agriculture naturally develops,” explained Skoug. “Participating in an activity that most adults are unfamiliar with, and being able to show off their skills, helped develop a sense of confidence and pride in middle and high school students. Younger students seemed to sense this enthusiasm, and show an interest as well.”

Skoug is excited about the growing interest in and support for the beekeeping program at Goodman. In 2016, they started a workshop at the farm for families and educators called “Beekeeping with Youth,” an introduction to working with kids at the hive, and they’ve created a new webpage that includes links to all of the beekeeping lessons they have developed. View these resources online at [www.communitygroundworks.org/content/pollinators-school-garden](http://www.communitygroundworks.org/content/pollinators-school-garden).

“This grant really gave us the boost we needed to take the program to the next level, from funding to train a bee education intern to our first foray into the world of making beeswax lipbalm,” said Skoug. “The increased activity around the hive inspired one dedicated volunteer to donate 12 professional beekeeping jackets so we could involve larger groups in the program.”

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