



Post Fellowship Reporting - Project Summary

Report Title: School Garden Adventures: From Mexico to Chicago **Name:** Jenny Sarna

Other Team Members:

Program: Chicago Program

Trip Dates: 07/17/2012 - 08/18/2012 **Location Visited:** Yucatan Peninsula, Mexico

Post Fellowship Reporting Template: PFR Template 01

Project Summary: As a biology teacher, I want my students to experience meaningful connections to science in their everyday lives. This summer, I traveled to Mexico with the goal of bringing real science back to my students. I visited incredible agriculture projects - from the traditional Maya Milpa, to an award-winning permaculture project, to a garden on an island. I met talented individuals who invited me to learn in their gardens and shared their love of the Earth with me.

During my time in the Yucatan, I experienced how sacred plant knowledge is to the Maya. It's the source of all basic needs: food, shelter, and medicine. I began my journey in Izamal, where I had the opportunity to take cooking classes, explore several farms, and visit an eco-tourism project, deep in the jungle. I met with a Medicine man and toured his garden and herb workshop. I spent a week in a Maya village where I shared meals with a local family who raised all of their food, including their meat, in their backyard. I explored the jungle with guides who provided the name and medicinal use of nearly every plant in the forest. Finally, I learned to garden on an island, which requires skillful composting techniques to produce quality soil.

In Chicago, I formed a gardening club at my school where students designed, planted, and cared for our own Mexican Heritage Garden. I created a Maya culture display with artifacts from my trip and built a classroom library. During my trip, I kept a blog where students could read about my adventures and keep me updated on the school garden.

Career Impact: I learned an incredible amount about the flora and fauna of the Yucatan peninsula, local conservation efforts, organic gardening techniques and the role of plants in the Maya culture. The project has revitalized my passion for nature and conservation, which will motivate me as I lead a Conservation Club at my school this year. My travels exposed me to authentic scientific research projects, including garden experiments and a herpetology survey, which improved my content knowledge as well as my skills as a scientist. Traveling in Mexico has improved my proficiency in Spanish, particularly terms related to botany and agriculture.

Classroom/Community Impact: This knowledge has enabled me to begin a heritage garden project in my school community which I plan to expand in the future. The stories I have gathered will infuse my lessons with authentic and culturally-relevant examples for nearly all of my biology units - from Evolution to Ecology. My students spent the summer learning about gardening and had the opportunity to visit several gardening projects around the city as well as plant and care for their own garden. This fall, students and staff are enjoying the harvest from our heritage garden, as well as a beautiful green space to relax.

Open Response: This fall, we are implementing a preschool garden visit program with tours led by high school gardeners, so that all members of the school community will learn from the garden. I am strengthening existing partnerships with community gardening organizations (LVEJO and Chicago Botanic Garden) and families, to allow for expansion of the garden next spring. Until then, I will be providing garden-related service learning opportunities for students through Chicago Conservation Club. Next year, I plan to expand the Heritage Garden through a Kitchen Community Grant, so that more students will be able to participate in school gardening.

Quote: The dream to built a garden took me and my students places we never could have imagined. And I have a feeling, it's just beginning.

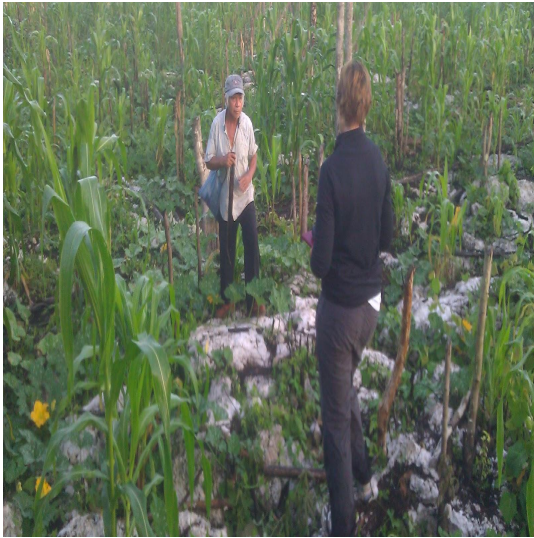
Photos:



Visiting an urban garden with my students



Corn - an incredible part of Mexican Heritage



Interviewing Don Fausto on the land he's farmed for fifty years



Harvesting chiles to make salsa



Checking out a "flying potato"



Learning to cook chiles rellenos in Izamal



Studying medicinal herbs at the Botanic Garden of Quintana Roo



My students harvest chiles from our own Mexican Heritage Garden