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Twenty-million Victory Gardens helped feed the country during World War II. Then, Fruits and vegetables tucked into found spaces in yards and rooftops supplied more than a third of the nation's produce. Today, with nearly 20 percent of California families unable to afford or obtain adequate food, according to Department of Agriculture data, the nonprofit Soil Born Farms in Rancho Cordova is reprising the idea of these edible landscapes as a means of addressing local hunger, reducing food waste and improving health. "Our purpose," says Shannon Hardwicke, youth education manager, "is to connect food, health and the environment. We want to give people the desire to grow their own food in their own space." As with Victory Gardens, that space doesn't need to be large. Fruit trees can replace shade trees, Hardwicke suggests, and vegetables can be grown in containers on a patio.

Soil Born cultivates crops and educates and nourishes consumers at a 55-acre historic ranch site inside the American River Parkway. County Parks owns the farm, and Soil Born Farms Urban Agriculture and Education Project operates it. The parcel includes acreage for organic gardening, bee, butterfly and native-plant gardens, riparian habitat and facilities for instruction and interpretation. Monday through Saturday, staff welcomes visitors to explore the gardens or learn how to prepare fresh food, cultivate herbs for health, and understand the natural environment. Some of Soil Born's programs include:

- **Farmstand.** Every Saturday, from early April through mid-December, and a handful of Saturdays during the winter months, the farm sells garden produce and related wares, as well as products from other local growers, and offers visitors a fun outing with fresh pastries and fair-trade coffee, music, classes and activities for both youngsters and adults. A winter Pop-Up Farmstand, featuring fruit trees and herbal medicines, is planned for Feb. 8
- **CSA (community supported agriculture).** Patrons can partner with Soil Born to receive boxes of organic vegetables weekly or biweekly for most of the year. Each box contains eight to 10 fresh items.

- **Field Trips.** Almost daily during the school year, Soil Born hosts classroom visits for about 1,500 students a year, Hardwicke says. The content and theme of each field trip varies by age and can be coordinated with the students' curriculum.

- **School gardens.** Soil Born has helped 50 schools set up gardens at their sites and works weekly with 10 of them in locales with limited access to nutritious foods. Because no pesticides are used, kids can, and do, simply rinse and eat the vegetables from the ground. "It's a dynamic, hands-on learning experience," Hardwicke says. A survey of teachers last year indicated that gardening improved students' skills not only in course subjects such as math, art, writing and social studies but in group work, leadership and cultural awareness. Plus, Hardwicke adds, they learn to want healthier foods.

For information on these and other Soil Born programs, visit the farm, 2140 Chase Drive, Rancho Cordova, or [www.soilborn.org](http://www.soilborn.org).