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# The United States School Garden Army

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[Advance Sheets from the Biennial Survey of Education  
in the United States, 1916-1918]



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## THE UNITED STATES SCHOOL GARDEN ARMY.

By J. H. FRANCIS, *Director.*

This name was adopted in March, 1918. The work of the organization is an expansion of work undertaken by the Bureau of Education in 1914. The scale upon which it was done was limited by the finances that could be secured for it.

The acute demand for food production growing out of the war conditions made expansion possible.

Mr. P. P. Claxton, Commissioner of Education, addressed the following letter to Hon. Franklin K. Lane, Secretary of the Interior, on February 14, 1918:

MY DEAR MR. SECRETARY: For several years the Bureau of Education has been developing slowly, with a small appropriation, a plan of school-directed home gardening in cities, towns, villages, and suburban communities which has proved so effective, both for education and for food production, that I feel it to be almost imperative that it be put into operation at once in all parts of the country as one means of meeting the food emergency which now exists and will probably continue to exist for two or three years at least.

The plan consists in enlisting boys and girls between the ages of 9 or 10 and 14 or 15 in systematic garden work for food production on such plots of ground as can be had for this purpose near their homes, on back yards, side yards, and vacant lots, and then providing teacher-directors for them at the rate of one teacher-director for each group of from 100 to 150 garden workers. Parents and older brothers and sisters are induced to cooperate with the children whenever this is possible. The work of the children is done after school hours and on Saturdays and vacation days, so that no time is taken from school.

In the schools of cities, towns, villages, and suburban communities of the United States there are approximately 7,000,000 children of the ages given above; of these probably 5,000,000 would be able to find some space for gardening and can be induced to do systematic garden work under this plan. For their instruction and direction 40,000 teacher-directors will be needed, and in all the larger places there should be general superintendents and instructors of these teacher-directors. Under proper supervision this army of boys and girls may easily produce \$250,000,000 worth of food, which will reach the consumer in perfect condition without cost for transportation or handling and without loss through deterioration on the markets. An equal amount of other forms of food may thereby be released for exportation for the use of our armies and our allies overseas. Many millions of dollars may be produced and saved for investment in bonds or war savings stamps, and the children engaged in work will be benefited physically, mentally, and morally. Since the work will be done by children who would otherwise be idle, and on land which would not otherwise be used, there will be no cost except for supervision and direction and for tools, seeds, and fertilizers. Experience shows that the cost of these

does not exceed 10 per cent of the value of the food produced, and is often much less.

The Department of Agriculture has agreed to furnish to the Bureau of Education, for the promotion of this work, its bulletins and leaflets on gardening in such numbers as may be needed, and will ask its county agricultural agents and home-demonstration agents to use a part of their time in supervising and instructing teacher-directors when they have the ability and when this work does not take too much time from their other and more legitimate duties.

The States division of the Council of National Defense has promised to cooperate in raising money in State and local communities to pay the salaries of supervisors in places where this may be necessary. The National War Garden Commission will cooperate by donating in unlimited numbers its practical garden bulletins, and by printing for distribution at cost a daily record book which has been prepared by the Bureau of Education for keeping garden accounts.

But all this can be made effective only through the Bureau of Education, which, to enable it to stimulate and direct this work effectively, must have in the beginning approximately \$35,800, in addition to all funds which it now has, as is shown in the following table of estimates:

*Estimate of cost for promoting school-directed home garden work.*

One director.....	\$4,000
One assistant director.....	3,000
Fifteen stenographers, typewriters, and mailing and filing clerks.....	18,000
One messenger.....	800
Typewriting, multigraphing, and addressographing machinery and other equipment, and supplies and stationery.....	10,000
Total.....	35,800

Because of the very great importance of this matter, and because of the fact that whatever is done must be done very quickly, I have the honor to request that you give it your very careful consideration, and if it commends itself to you, that you ask the President to make available to the Bureau of Education for this use so much of his War Emergency Fund as may be necessary for carrying on the work until other funds are available through congressional appropriation or otherwise.

Respectfully submitted.

P. P. CLAXTON,  
*Commissioner.*

The honorable the SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR.

Following this letter, and upon the request of Secretary Lane, President Wilson appropriated \$50,000 from the National Security and Defense Fund to promote school and school-supervised home gardening among the school children of America residing in cities, towns, and villages. Up to this time the field had been practically untouched by any governmental agency. In a few cities throughout the country, garden work had been undertaken by the schools and by civic organizations, but these instances were few in number.

Early in April, 1918, the following suggestions on plans of organization were sent to school superintendents and garden teachers and supervisors:

## ORGANIZATION OF THE ARMY.

**Number of members in a company:** Ten to one hundred and fifty.

**Age limit:** Any school child, but preferably the more important companies should be enlisted from the pupils above the third grade.

**Requirements for enlistment:** The signing of an obligation card in which the pupil agrees to raise one or more food crops and to keep records of his work and the results, reporting them to the teacher or garden supervisor. These cards will be furnished by this bureau.

**Officers:** Each company to have a captain and one or two lieutenants, the latter depending upon the number of soldiers enlisted.

**Insignia:**

For the privates, a service bar with U. S. S. G. in red letters on a white background with a border of blue.

For the second lieutenant, the same bar with one white star in the border.

For the first lieutenant, the same bar with two white stars in the border.

For the captain, the same bar with three white stars in the border.

For the garden teacher-supervisor, similar insignia without stars, with blue letters and a red border.

**Enlistment of existing organizations:** Any organization of school children now doing garden work will be eligible to enlistment. Such organizations may keep their existing form, if they so desire and have the additional impetus of belonging to a national army, fostered by President Wilson, the Secretary of Interior, and the Commissioner of Education. The aim of this army is to nationalize and unify the great work now being carried on among school children of America.

Five regional and one general director were chosen to organize and carry forward the work. The regional directors were selected because of their expert and practical knowledge of gardening and their extensive experience as garden and agriculture teachers. Their duties were to include the writing of garden leaflets in language and form suited to the boys and girls of school age, and adaptable to class organization. Each region was to be furnished separate leaflets. They were to meet climatic and soil conditions of the district to which they were to be sent. As an illustration, the southeastern region has five zonal districts, and separate leaflets were written for each. These garden lesson leaflets were highly appreciated by teachers who were able through their help to conduct companies successfully through the garden season.

A partial report made July 10, 1918, showed the following results:

1. One million five hundred thousand boys and girls responded to the call of the President and enlisted in the United States School Garden Army.

2. Twenty thousand acres of unproductive home and vacant lots were converted into productive land. This released an equal acreage used in truck gardening for the production of other foodstuffs more important for war purposes. It relieved transportation congestion through home consumption of home-produced foodstuffs.

3. Fifty thousand teachers received valuable instruction in gardening through the garden leaflets written by experts in this office and distributed from here. One million five hundred thousand leaflets were sent out.

4. Boards of education and other civic organizations were influenced to give financial and moral support to the school and home garden movement and to pay extra salaries for supervision and teaching.

5. Hundreds of thousands of parents became interested in the garden movement and worked with their children in home gardens. In Salt Lake City alone 5,200 mothers, representing 62 parental associations, actively supported food production in the schools.

6. Thousands of civic, commercial, and patriotic organizations became interested in the movement and gave it hearty support.

7. One and one-half million children were given something to do last summer; something that helped to carry the burden of their country in the struggle for freedom, something that helped them to build character, and something that appealed to and developed their patriotism.

8. Home and vacant lot gardening in cities, towns, and villages was dignified and made popular to a degree that practically insured it a prominent place in the school system of our country. It would be difficult to estimate the educational and material value of such results. No other movement in history promises so much in aiding the "back-to-the-soil" movement as this.

President Wilson made a second appropriation of \$200,000 to continue the work until July, 1919, and some changes were made in the organization.

A slight readjustment of territory assigned to the regional directors was necessary. The southeastern region was enlarged by adding West Virginia, Alabama, and Mississippi from the southern region. The southern region in turn was given Missouri and Kansas from the central section and Colorado and New Mexico from the western section. The five regional directors remain the same as before the new adjustment.

Twenty-five assistant regional directors were appointed. The duties of the assistant regional directors are similar to those of the regional directors, but are on a more intensive scale and in a more limited territory. They work under the direction of the regional director in a part of his territory assigned to them and make weekly reports to him.

Under this organization the United States School Garden Army is working for the season 1918-19.