

# Harvesting veggies, gaining experience

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They're not getting paid, but they are getting school credit and invaluable work experience in the world of agriculture.

Eight Sardis secondary students going into Grade 11 and 12 have given up their summer to work in the school's greenhouse, pruning, harvesting and fertilizing plants, cleaning the grounds, building coops, feeding the chickens, keeping up on pest management and more.

It beats flipping burgers, said student Victoria Steinebach.

"I figure it's better than most jobs because it's more hands on and I'm not having to sit at a cash register or stand over a greasy grill all day," Steinebach said as she pruned the leaves around the tomato nubbins to give them more sunlight.

Last year Sardis secondary expanded its agriculture program to include vegetables with the flowers it had been growing for years. After completely revamping the school's greenhouse, the vegetable component was added. However, because students aren't in school until September, the vegetables didn't get planted until September, and weren't ready for harvesting until November.

Teacher Joe Massie wanted to get the ball rolling early this year.

"We needed to start the vegetables early so that the kids had something to do that was hands on in the fall, which is what our program is all about," he said.

Almost 400 plants were purchased last spring, including four types of tomatoes, long english cucumbers, miniature cucumbers and a rainbow of peppers. Last year's students started the initial stages of the growing process, planting them in the greenhouse and setting up the irrigation. But if there wasn't anyone to maintain them over the summer months, "it would be a jungle in [the greenhouse] when school started again," said Massie. "Just last week we produced 200 gallons of waste. If we don't get rid of that, it stays on the plant.

"Without the students here, we couldn't do it, there's no way."

Each student has committed two days a week to the greenhouse for three hours each day to a total of 90 hours for the whole summer. The work experience is the equivalent of four Grade 12 credits towards graduation.

But not only that, the students are also enhancing their knowledge and skills in the greenhouse.

"They are getting practical experience in how to grow agriculture crops," said Massie. "And even though we're specifically doing greenhouse vegetables, the skills they are learning are applicable across all fields of agriculture, especially horticulture. If you grow raspberry crops or blueberry crops, you still have the same pest management, irrigation, fertilization ... the principles they're learning are the same.

"In my mind, these kids are now extremely valuable to any local employer who might wish to hire them, because they know how to manage a greenhouse."

And for student Ashley Lord, it's not work.

"It's really fun," she said. "It's a relaxing atmosphere. You're helping customers and you're learning about plants. And taking some veggies home is always nice too."

The Sardis Secondary Greenhouse Veggie Sale is open Monday, Wednesday and Saturday from 8 a.m. to 11 a.m.

For more information, check out the 'Sardis Greenhouse Vegetable Sales' Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/group.php?](http://www.facebook.com/group.php?)