

Promoting a positive food culture in schools

School-led actions are impactful in shaping healthier environments for children to learn about and eat vegetables and fruit.



Background & Methods

Pick of the Crop is a whole school healthy eating program, aimed at shaping environments for primary school students in Queensland, to learn about and eat vegetables and fruit.

- In 2021, 31 schools were supported to implement locally designed actions around five components (see diagram).
- Data were collected from teachers in 24 schools and 3 program coordinators via mixed method surveys, interviews and focus groups using the Most Significant Change method.

Enablers

- School leadership support.
- Support from program coordinators to co-develop School Action Plans.
- Seed grant funding to support implementation of school-led actions and activities.
- Pick of the Crop branding and sharing of stories of success.
- Flexibility of implementation model allowing schools to select actions based on their needs and priorities.

Barriers

- Limited time and capacity in school staff, crowded curriculum and competing priorities.
- Support required for garden maintenance, student supervision and limited knowledge of what and when to plant.
- Fast food culture embedded within and valued by some families and stakeholders.
- COVID-19 pandemic reduced parent connections and on-site activities, and farms were often closed to school visits.

Key findings

235 school actions

were implemented as part of the *Pick of the Crop* pilot program, with grant funding used across all five components.

“When we opened the classroom for Father’s Day, we even had grandfathers who were amazed at what the kids had experienced and that kids in the classroom with their peers were willing to try vegetables whereas at home kids wouldn’t eat vegetables.”

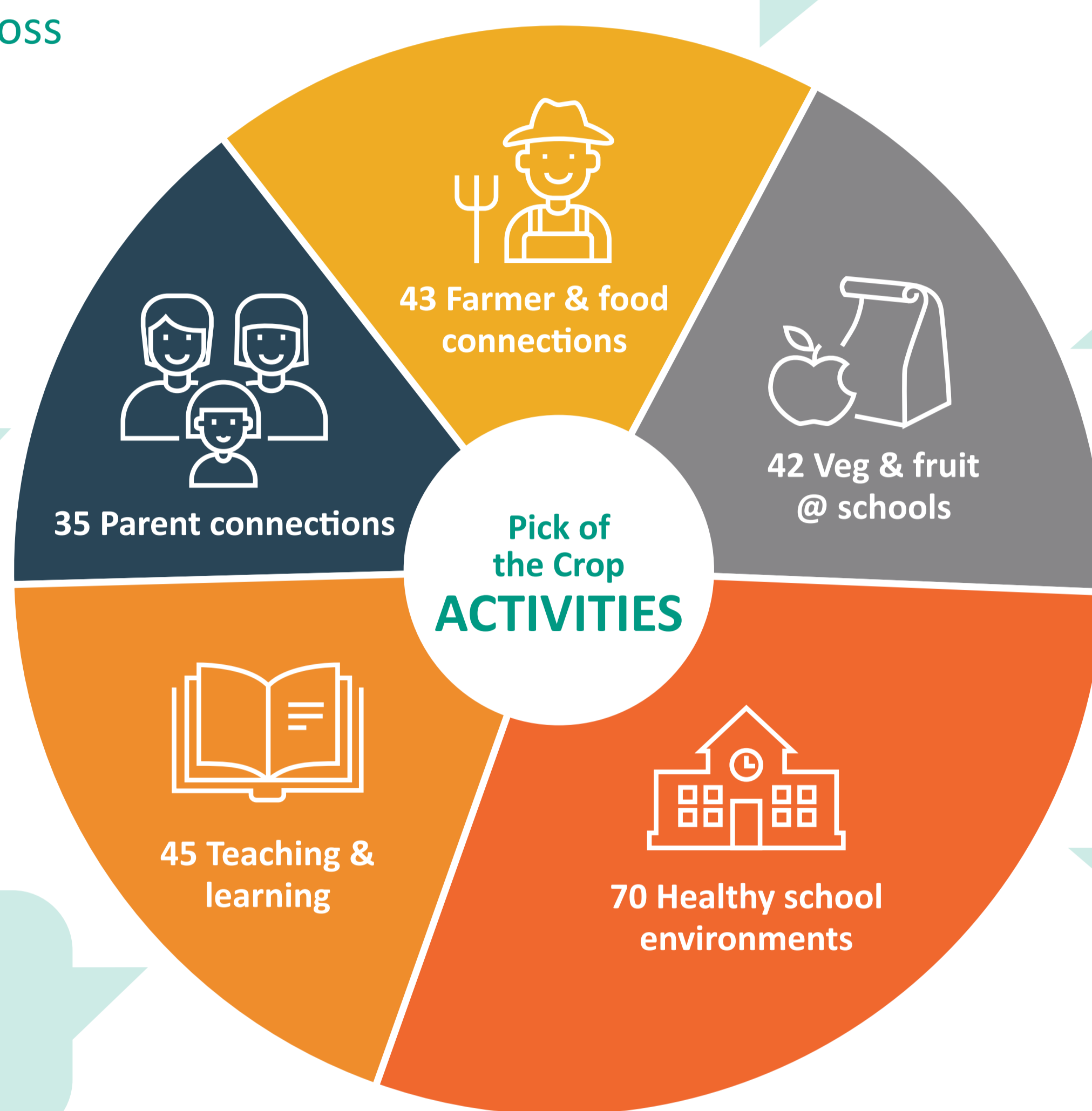
“At our school the *Pick of the Crop* program is delivered through the health and physical education.”

“Kids are more open and willing to have a go at it. For me the most important change is the kids’ willingness to try different vegetables and fruit and to see the kids learning the skills for how to cook. You know that is a life skill and if they have that skill now hopefully that will translate into real life when they grow up.”

“The kids thoroughly enjoyed learning on each farm. Parents have contacted me to say how excited their children were - coming home to share lots of information and, of course, the lettuces and avocados.”

“We implemented ‘munch and crunch’ fruit snack breaks across the school. When I started it was only happening in my room and maybe one or two other classes. With *Pick of the Crop*, our Principal said “ok, this is something that needs to happen in every room”.”

“We had a few raised garden beds around the school, but they weren’t being used. I asked the groundskeeper to put all of the garden beds into one area to create the school garden. The real hero of our *Pick of the Crop* story is the school garden.”



Knowledge and attitudes

64% of schools strongly agreed All schools agreed that *Pick of the Crop* improved knowledge and attitudes towards vegetable and fruits among students

Teaching and learning

62% of schools strongly agreed All schools agreed that *Pick of the Crop* improved the quality and quantity of food and nutrition content taught at their school

“What worked much better in our school were those opportunities that teachers found to weave in fruit and vegetable content to the curriculum and ways to align content with units as opposed to adding on additional content.”

Opportunities to try vegetables and fruit

58% of schools strongly agreed The majority of schools agreed that *Pick of the Crop* improved the availability of vegetables and fruit at school and school events

Shaping primary school environments for children to learn about and eat vegetables and fruit: a whole-of-school program

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